

**Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement** Eric Hobsbawm  
**State and Revolution in Marx's Thought** Jonathan White  
**The Ecological Marxism of Marx** John Bellamy Foster  
**Is there a Theory of Art in Marx?** Hans Hess  
**Marx's *Capital* and Capitalism Today** Rob Griffiths  
**Soul Food** Mike Quille





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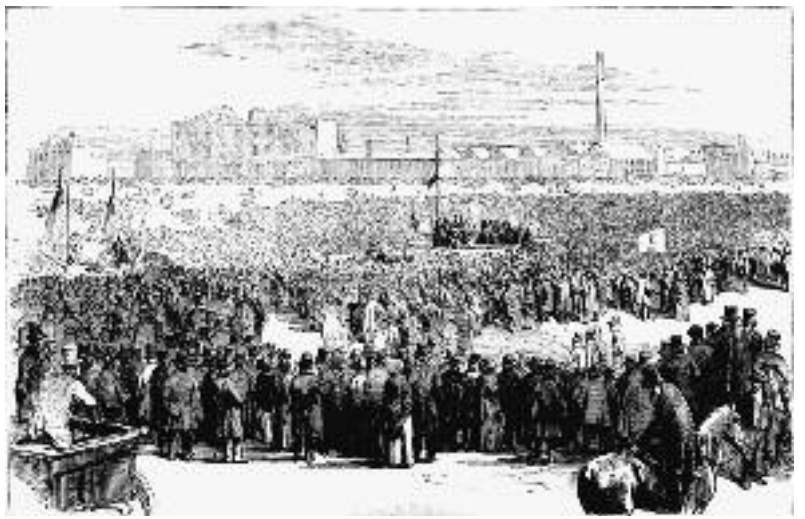
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Cover image: **Still from *The Young Marx*. Engels  
(Stefan Konarske) and Marx (August Diehl) in  
Paris, 1844**

Above right: **British Republican flag in the red, white  
and green colours flown at the 1848 Chartist  
Kennington rally**



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**K**ARL MARX was born in Trier, Germany, 200 years ago on 5 1818. His life's work was phenomenal – philosophy, politics, economics, revolutionary organising, internationalism and much more. His crowning achievement was certainly *Das Kapital*. But we are so used to images of the full-bearded, sagacious Marx that there is a tendency to overlook the dynamic young revolutionary who became that sage.

When Marx and Engels wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* 170 years ago in 1848, they were both not yet 30 years old. Raoul Peck's film, *The Young Karl Marx*, a still from which features on our front cover, is a graphic imagining of the intertwining lives of Marx, Engels, and their respective partners Jenny von Westphalen and Mary Burns, from late 1842 until the publication of the *Manifesto*. I say "imagining", because it is clearly impossible to encapsulate, in a movie of just under two hours, the full extent of Marx's and Engels' political activity and theoretical development during that period. But Peck's portrayal, by truncating, interpolating and concentrating on key episodes, certainly displays the spirit.

In the first place Marx and Engels themselves are presented as warm, rounded, courageous individuals – Marx often with the fire of determination in his eyes – who enjoy drinking, good food, argument, smoking cigars (Marx particularly), chess, and romance with their respective partners. August Diehl (Marx) and Stefan Konarske (Engels) certainly look the part; and the frequent shifts in dialogue between German and French (both with subtitles) and English also adds to the credibility of the portrayals. We see Karl and Jenny's growing family life, but also the poverty they faced in exile in Paris, and when they are deported from there at 24 hours notice (in real life it was a bit longer). But Jenny and Mary are not just there for domestic interest, rather being shown as participants in the debates and discussions about the revolutionary struggle and the communist project.

At the outset the film points to the expanding capitalist development in Britain, and the crisis in the absolute monarchies of continental Europe. We see the cruel situation facing the wood-gatherers in the Rhine province (leading to Marx's articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung*), the harsh working conditions in the Engels family factory in Manchester, and the terrible living conditions around the factory. The opening captions say that

"Workers' organisations are founded, based on a 'communist' utopia in which all men are brothers. Two young Germans will disrupt this notion, thereby transforming the struggle ... and the world's future."

And so they did, by demonstrating that the key issues were class struggle, and the sweeping away of the bourgeois order. Of course they were not alone, for they were part of the ferment of ideas at the time, learning from them, refining their own conceptions and winning supporters for their own position. This ferment is represented in the film by real personages such as the 'Young Hegelian' Ruge, the anarchists Proudhon and Bakunin, the 'true socialist' Grün, the 'utopian socialist' Weitling, and Joseph Moll, one of the London leaders of the German League of the Just.

It is to Peck's credit that he has been able to render into simple terms the arguments and attitudes of these protagonists, and the responses of Marx and Engels. *The Holy Family*, against the Young Hegelians, and Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*, against Proudhon, are presented as key stages in these debates. We also see Marx explaining to Paris workers the basis of exploitation – although at that stage he had not drawn a clear distinction between labour and labour power.

There are some 'naïf' moments – Marx and Engels meeting in Paris in 1844 when they over-praise each other's writings (in fact Engels' *Condition of the Working Class in England* was not published till the following year); Jenny telling Engels that he and Marx with 100,000 others would lead the revolution; Engels advising Marx to study the English economists (!); the pure theatre of the transformation of the League of the Just into the Communist League; and the archive film footages at the end which include not just Khrushchev, Che and Mandela, but Kennedy, Reagan and Thatcher.

There are a number of other instances where the film does not stick to historical facts. We also get no specific mention of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the *German Ideology* and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844. But this is a drama, not a documentary, so such factitious aspects and omissions must be allowed, given the overall thrust. In fact there are little glimpses here and there – eg Engels complimenting Marx for inverting Hegel's dialectics, and Marx later saying, "The

philosophers have interpreted the world, the point is to change it" – which indicate that Peck knows his stuff, and is hinting that viewers should read Marx, a message reinforced when he has Weitling, challenged by Marx, shouting "We have had enough of theory." Britain's labour movement please take note.

The final scenes of the film, with key passages from the *Communist Manifesto* read against the background of industrial machinery in motion, emphasise the continued significance of this seminal work of Marx and Engels in today's society of globalised monopoly capitalism. This film is thoroughly recommended: it is unfortunately not yet on general release in Britain, but is available (perhaps pirated?) on YouTube.



All articles in this issue of *CR* celebrate the Marx bicentenary. Rob Griffiths concludes his series on Marx's *Capital and Capitalism Today*, by looking at the transition to socialism, while Soul Food publishes new poetry inspired by the *Communist Manifesto*. Jonathan White examines two other key works of Marx – *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* – emphasising that "Both the state and the understanding of its potential and limits are historical products placed at the disposal of the working class, provided it is capable of picking them up."

We carry an interview with US Marxist John Bellamy Foster, explaining how he and co-author Paul Burkett "are building the bridge from Marx's diagnosis of a rift in the metabolism between society and nature" as a basis "for the class struggle over our relationship to nature" today. Finally we republish two archive articles from *Marxism Today*: from Hans Hess, in 1975, demonstrating that there is indeed a theory of art in Marx (although, it has to be said, Marx did not seem to examine the working class culture of his time); and from Eric Hobsbawm, on the 150th anniversary of Marx's birth, looking at Marx and the British labour movement.

Hobsbawm's closing comments remain pertinent: Britain's Marxists need to learn Marx's method, make their own analysis of concrete conditions, and "work out the best ways to organise, their perspectives and programmes, and their role in the wider labour movement." That is what Britain's communists seek to do.

# Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement

E J Hobsbawm



This article, originally published in *Marxism Today*, June 1968, pp 166-172, in connection with the 150th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, was the text of the Annual Marx Memorial Lecture given by Hobsbawm in the Conway Hall on 15 March 1968. The meeting was organised by the Marx Memorial Library.

**T**HE MARX Memorial Lecture, which I have the honour to give this year, commemorates the death of Karl Marx. This is why it is held on March 15. However, we are this year celebrating not only the 85th anniversary of Marx's death, but the 150th of his birth, and we are still within a few months of the centenary of the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, his most important theoretical work, and of the 50th anniversary of the Great October Revolution, the most far-reaching practical result of his labours. There is thus no shortage of anniversaries in tidy round figures, all connected with Karl Marx, which we can celebrate simultaneously on this occasion. And yet there is perhaps an even more suitable reason why tonight is a good night to remind ourselves of the life and work of the great man – the man whose name is now so familiar to all that he no longer has to be described, even on the commemorative plaque which the Greater London Council has at last put up on the house in Soho where he lived in poverty and where now the customers of a well-known restaurant dine in affluence.

## Irony of history

It is a reason which Marx, with his sense of the irony of history, would have appreciated. As we gather here tonight, banks and stock exchanges are closed, financiers are gathering in Washington to register the breakdown of the system of international trade and payments in the capitalist world; to stave off, if they can, the fall of the almighty dollar. It is not impossible that this date will go down in the history books like the date October 24th, 1929, which marks the end of the period of capitalist stabilisation in the 1920s. It is certain that the events of the past week prove, more vividly than any argument, the essential instability of capitalism; its failure so far to overcome the internal contradictions of this system on a world scale. The man who devoted his life to demonstrating the internal contradictions of capitalism would appreciate the irony of the accident that the crisis of the dollar should come to a head precisely on the anniversary of his death.

My subject for tonight, which was fixed long before this, is Marx and British Labour; that is to say, what Marx thought about the British labour movement and what that movement owes to Marx. He did not, at least in his later years, think much of British labour, and his influence on the movement, though significant, has been less than he or later Marxists would have wished. Hence the subject does not lend itself to the usual rhetoric of commemorations, but I do not think a Marx Memorial Lecture is an occasion for such rhetoric, nor

The great  
Chartist rally at  
Kennington  
Common 1848



‘Marx’s main recipe for revolutionising the British situation was through Ireland; *ie* by the indirect means of supporting colonial revolution and in doing so destroying the major bond which linked the British workers to the British bourgeoisie.’

that a historian is specially qualified to practise it. It is an occasion for realistic analysis, and I shall try to be realistic.

What was Marx's opinion of the British working class and its labour movement?

### Two phases of British labour

Between the time that he became a communist and his death, British labour passed through two phases: the revolutionary phase of the Chartist period and the phase of modest reformism which succeeded it in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s. In the first phase the British labour movement led the world in mass organisation, in political class consciousness, in the development of anti-capitalist ideologies such as the early forms of socialism, and in militancy. In the second phase it still led the world in a special form of organisation, namely trade unionism and probably also in the narrower form of class consciousness which simply consists in recognising the working class as a separate class, whose members have different (but not necessarily opposed) interests to other classes. However, it had abandoned the effort and perhaps even the hope of overthrowing capitalism, and accepted not only the existence of this system, seeking merely to improve the condition of its members within it, but also, and increasingly, it accepted – with certain specific exceptions – the bourgeois-liberal theories about how such improvements could be achieved. It was no longer revolutionary, and socialism virtually disappeared from it.

No doubt this retreat took longer than we sometimes think: Chartism did not die in 1848 but remained active and important for several years thereafter. No doubt, looking at the mid-Victorian decades with the wisdom of hindsight, we can observe that the retreat concealed elements of a new advance. Thanks to the experience of those decades the revived labour movement of the 1890s and of our own century would be much more firmly and permanently organised, and would consist of a real ‘movement’ rather than a succession of waves of militancy. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that it was a retreat; and in any case Marx did not survive long enough to see the subsequent revival.

Marx and Engels had high hopes of the British labour movement in the 1840s. More than this, their hopes of European revolution depended to a great extent on changes in the most advanced capitalist country, and the only one with a conscious movement of the proletariat on a mass scale. This did not occur. Britain remained relatively unaffected by the revolution of 1848. However, for some time after this Marx

and Engels continued to hope for a revival of both the British and the continental movements. By the early 1850s it became clear that a new era of capitalist expansion had opened, which made this much less likely, and when even the next of the great world slumps – that of 1857 – did not in fact lead to a revival of Chartism, it became clear that they could no longer expect very much from the British labour movement. Nor in fact did they expect very much from it, for the remainder of Marx’s lifetime, and their references to it express a growing disappointment. Marx and Engels were not, of course, the only ones to express this disappointment. If they deplored the “lack [of] mettle of the old Chartists”<sup>1</sup> in the movement of the 1860s, so did non-Marxist survivors of the heroic period, like Thomas Cooper.

### “Bourgeois infection”

Two observations are perhaps worth making in passing at this point. The first is that this “apparent bourgeois infection of the British workers”<sup>2</sup>; this “embourgeoisement of the English proletariat”<sup>3</sup> will remind many of us of what has been happening to the British labour movement in an even more headlong period of capitalist expansion and prosperity through which we have been living. Marx and Engels were, of course, careful to avoid the superficiality of the academic sociologists of the present, who think that “embourgeoisement” means that workers are turning into modest copies of the middle class, a sort of mini-bourgeoisie. They were not, and he knew they were not. Nor did Marx believe for a moment that the expansion and prosperity from which many workers undoubtedly benefited, had created an ‘affluent society’ from which poverty had been banished, or was likely to be.

Indeed, some of the most eloquent passages in *Capital* Vol I<sup>4</sup> deal precisely with the poverty of those years of capitalist triumph in Britain, as illustrated by the parliamentary inquiries of that time. Nevertheless, he recognised the adaptation of the labour movement to the bourgeois system; but he regarded it as a historical phase, and indeed, as we know, it was a temporary phase. A socialist labour movement in Britain had disappeared; but it was to reappear.

The second observation, which also has its relevance for the present, is that the mid-Victorian decades did not lead Marx to turn himself into a Fabian or a Bernsteinian revisionist (which is the same thing as a Fabian in Marxist costume). They led him to alter his strategic and tactical perspectives. They may have led him to become pessimistic about the short-term prospects of the working-class movement in Western

Europe, especially after 1871. But they neither led him to abandon the belief that the emancipation of the human race was possible nor that it would be based on the movement of the proletariat. He was and continued to be a revolutionary socialist. Not because he overlooked the contrary tendencies or underestimated their force. He had no illusions whatever about the British labour movement of the 1860s and 1870s – but because he did not regard them as historically decisive.

### Why the change?

How did Marx explain this change in the character of the British labour movement? In general, by the new lease of life which the economic expansion after 1851 gave to capitalism – that is to say by the full development of the capitalist world market in those decades – but more specifically by the world domination or world monopoly of British capitalism. This thesis first appears in the correspondence of Marx and Engels around 1858 – after the failure of the hopes they had placed in the 1857 slump – and is repeated at intervals thereafter; mostly, it should be noted, in letters by Engels. Consequently, Engels also expected the end of this world monopoly to bring about a radicalisation of the British labour movement, and in the 1880s Engels did indeed repeatedly observe that both these things were happening, or could be expected to happen.

The best-known passage is probably that in the introduction to the first English translation of *Capital* Vol I (written in 1886), but his correspondence in those years returns to this argument time and again, sometimes in order to explain why the revived socialist movement in Britain was not yet making enough progress, more often in a spirit of optimism; for Engels was perhaps more sanguine in his political expectations than Marx, and perhaps also a shade more inclined to see economic changes as inevitably bringing about political results than his comrade. He was, of course, right in principle. The so-called Great Depression of 1873-1896 did mark the end of the British world monopoly and also the rebirth of a socialist labour movement. On the other hand he evidently underestimated both the capacity of capitalism as a whole to continue its expansion, and the capacity of British capitalism to safeguard itself against the social and political consequences of its relative decline by imperialism abroad and a new type of domestic policy.

Marx himself spent less time – at least after the 1850s – in discussing these broad economic perspectives and more time in considering the political implications of the increasing feebleness of British labour. His basic view was that

“England, as the metropolis of world capital, as the country which has hitherto ruled the world market, is for the time being the most important country for working-class revolution; moreover, it is the only country in which the material conditions for this revolution have developed to a certain degree of maturity. Hence the most important task of the International is to accelerate the social revolution in England.”<sup>5</sup>

### Requisites for revolution

But if the British working class had the material requisites for revolution,<sup>6</sup> it lacked the willingness to make a revolution, that is to say to use its political power to take over power, as it might have done at any time after the parliamentary reform of 1867. Perhaps we should add in passing that this peaceful road to socialism, on the possibility of which for Britain Marx and Engels insisted at various times after 1870,<sup>7</sup> was not an

alternative to revolution, but simply a means of “removing legally such laws and institutions as stand in the way of working class development” in bourgeois-democratic countries; a possibility which evidently did not exist in non-democratic constitutions. It would not remove the obstacles which stood in the way of the working class but which did not happen to take the form of laws and institutions, eg the economic power of the bourgeoisie; and it might easily turn into violent revolution in consequence of the insurrection of those with a vested interest in the old status quo; the point was that if this happened the bourgeoisie would be rebels against a legal government, as (to quote Marx’s own examples) the South was against the North in the American Civil War, the counter-revolutionaries were in the French Revolution and – we might add – in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9. Marx’s argument was not concerned with any ideal choice between violence and non-violence, or gradualism and revolution, but with the realistic use of such possibilities as were open to the labour movement in any given situation. Of these, in a bourgeois democracy, Parliament was clearly a central one.

Yet the British working class was plainly not ready to make use of any of these possibilities, even the formation of an independent Labour Party or independent political behaviour by such individual workers who happened to get elected to Parliament. Without waiting for the long-term tendencies of historical development to change the situation, there were several things to do: and one of the great merits of Marx’s writings is to show that communists can and must avoid both the error of waiting for history to happen, and the error of opting for unhistorical methods such as Bakuninite anarchism and pointless acts of terrorism.

In the first place, it was essential to educate the working class to political consciousness “by a continuous agitation against the hostile attitude shown towards the workers in politics by the ruling classes”;<sup>8</sup> ie by producing situations which demonstrated this hostility. This might, of course, imply organising confrontations with the ruling class, which would lead it to drop its appearance of sympathy. Thus Marx welcomed the police brutality during the Reform demonstrations of 1866: ruling class violence could provide “a revolutionary education”<sup>9</sup>. So long, of course, as it isolated the police, and not those who fought them. Marx and Engels were scathing about the Fenian terrorist actions in Clerkenwell, which had the opposite effect.

In the second place, it was essential to ally with all sections of non-reformist workers. That is why, as he wrote to Bolte (23.11.1871), he worked with the followers of Bronterre O’Brien, relics of the old socialism of Chartist days, on the Council of the International:

“In spite of their crack-brained ideas, they constitute a counterweight to the trade unionists. They are more revolutionary ... less nationalist and quite immune to any form of bourgeois corruption. But for that, we should have thrown them out a long time ago.”<sup>10</sup>

### Ireland and the British workers’ struggle

However, Marx’s main recipe for revolutionising the British situation was through Ireland; ie by the indirect means of supporting colonial revolution and in doing so destroying the major bond which linked the British workers to the British bourgeoisie. Originally, as Marx admitted, he had expected Ireland to be liberated through the victory of the British proletariat.<sup>11</sup> From the late 1860s he took the opposite view –

namely that the revolutions in the backward and colonial countries would be primary and would themselves revolutionise the metropolitan ones. (It is interesting that at much the same time he began to have these hopes for a revolution in Russia, which sustained him in his later years.<sup>12</sup>) Ireland acted as a fetter in two ways: by splitting the English working class along racial lines, and thus by giving the British worker an apparent joint interest with his rulers in exploiting someone else. This was the sense of Marx's famous statement that "a nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free".<sup>13</sup> Ireland was thus at one moment the key to England – more than this, to the advance of progress in the world in general:

"If we are to accelerate the social development of Europe, we must accelerate the catastrophe of official (*ie* ruling class) England. This requires a blow in Ireland, which is the weakest point of Britain. If Ireland is lost, the British 'Empire' goes, and the class struggle in England, which has up to now been sleepy and slow, will take more acute forms. But England is the metropolis of capitalism and landlordism in the entire world."<sup>14</sup>

### **Marx's influence on British labour**

I have spent some time on the details of Karl Marx's attitude to the British labour movement – mainly in the 1860s and early 1870s when he was closely involved with it through the International. He wrote about it in those days, not so much as a general historical analyst, but rather as a political strategist and tactician, considering concrete political situations. The situation of the 1860s has passed away for good, and nobody would claim, least of all Marx himself, that what he had to say about it in detail applies to any other period. On the other hand it is always instructive to see a Marxist master-strategist and -tactician at work – and we must remember that, as Engels liked to recall, Marx was a master-tactician in the rare periods when he had the chance to be.

As it happened, he failed to "re-electrify"<sup>15</sup> the British labour movement, and this failure, as he realised, condemned the international movement to wait for very much longer. And when the movement revived, Britain and the British working class no longer played the potentially central role in it that they might have done, while Britain was still "the metropolis of capitalism and landlordism in the entire world."<sup>16</sup> As soon as he realised that the strategy of the 1860s had failed, Marx ceased to concern himself very much with the British labour movement. However, at this point we may logically turn to the other half of the question about Marx and British labour, namely the effect which Marx and his teaching had upon the labour movement in this country.

Let us first be clear on the limits – on what were probably the historically inevitable limits of this influence. It was not likely to produce a revolutionary labour movement in a country which lacked the experience and tradition of revolution, and any situations – then or later – which could be even faintly described as revolutionary or pre-revolutionary. It was not likely to produce a mass labour movement inspired and organised by Marxism because, when Marxism appeared on the scene, a powerful, well-organised, politically influential labour movement already existed on a national scale in the form of trade unionism, consumers' co-operation and Liberal-Labour leaders. Marxism did not precede the British labour movement. It was not even coeval with it. It appeared a third of the way through its lifetime to date. It is no use looking abroad and observing that Marxism played or plays a much

larger part in the labour movements of some countries than in ours because, since history does not develop uniformly, we cannot expect the same developments everywhere. The peculiarity of Britain is that it was the oldest, for a long time the most successful and dominant, and almost certainly the stablest capitalist society, and that its bourgeoisie had to come to terms with a proletarian majority of the population long before any other. The influence of Marxism has been inevitably circumscribed by this situation.

On the other hand we could expect Marxism to play an important part in the formation of that new – or renewed – stage of the British workers' class consciousness, which led them to abandon confidence in the permanence and viability of capitalism, and to place their hopes in a new society – socialism. We could expect it to play an important part in forming the new ideology, the strategy and tactics, of a socialist labour movement. We could expect it to create nuclei of leadership, political vanguards if you like – I am using the term in a general sense here and not only in the specific Leninist sense. How large or important these were, how significant the part they played within the larger movement, might be uncertain and unpredictable. In other words, we could have expected Marxism to have a significant, but almost certainly not a decisive influence in shaping the British labour movement of the 20th Century. This is a pity, but that is another question. We may perhaps be reconciled to this relatively modest role of Marxism if we look at some continental movements in which the influence of Marxism was initially far greater, so much so that the entire labour movement took the form of Marxist social-democratic mass parties, but nevertheless these movements were basically as moderate and reformist as the British, if not more so; for instance in Scandinavia.

### **Theories of capitalism and socialism**

Now in the two respects which I have singled out, the influence of Marx was unquestionably great – much greater than is commonly realised. Ideologists of right-wing Labour have searched desperately for alternative founding fathers of British socialism, from John Wesley to the Fabians, but their search has been in vain. Methodism in particular, and nonconformist protestantism in general, have undoubtedly coloured a lot of the British labour movement, and in a few special cases such as the farm labourers and some of the miners, provided both a framework of organisation and a cadre of leaders; but their contribution to what the movement thought and tried to achieve – to its socialism – has been minimal. The contribution of Marx has been capital, if only because Marx's analysis is the only socialist analysis which has stood the test of time. The archaic British forms of socialism – Owenism, O'Brienism etc – did not revive, though an essentially 'agrarian' analysis of capitalism long remained influential. Fabianism, in so far as it had a specific analysis of capitalism (eg the specific economic theory of the Fabian Essays) never got off the ground. It survived and became influential merely as a more 'modern' formulation of what moderate labour leaders had always done, namely pursuing piecemeal reforms within the framework of capitalism.

In so far as the British labour movement developed a theory about how capitalism worked – about the nature of capitalist exploitation, the internal contradictions of capitalism, the fluctuations of the capitalist economy such as slumps, the causes of unemployment, the long-term tendencies of capitalist development such as mechanisation, economic concentration

and imperialism, these were based on the teachings of Marx, or were accepted in so far as they coincided with them or converged with them.

In so far as the British labour movement developed a programme for socialism – based on the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and, rather later, on planning, it was once again on the basis of a simplified Marxism. I am not claiming that the entire ideology of the movement was so based. It is clear, for instance, that some very important parts of it, eg the attitude to international questions and peace or war, were based substantially on an older and powerful liberal-radical tradition. Nor am I claiming that the ideology of all parts of the movement was so based. Its right-wing leaders, especially when they got anywhere near government office, always looked for some alternative source of economic inspiration drawn from bourgeois liberalism – whether in the form of the free-trade orthodoxy of the Lib-Labs and Philip Snowden, the LSE-type marginalism of the early Fabians, or the Keynesian analysis of the Labour Party ideologists since 1945. But if we go down to the grass roots – to the men and women who canvassed for elections, who collected dues and led industrial movements at shop and factory level, and so on: their theory, and very often their practice, was much the same as that of the members of officially Marxist organisations; and the other way round. I do not say that they got this theory from reading *Capital* or even *Value, Price and Profit*, any more than the sort of sub-Freudianism which is the basis of American conversations about personal problems is necessarily based on a reading of Freud. Their theory derived from Marx in so far as they were socialists, because the basic theory of socialism, at least in the respects I singled out above, was the one formulated in a Marxist manner; generally, it must be admitted, a very simplified manner. In one way or another this had become part of their political lives.

### **Marxism and the pioneers**

This was natural, because Marxism – or at all events some sort of simplified version of Marxism – was the first kind of socialism to reach Britain during the revival of the 1830s, the one most persistently propagated by devoted pioneers at a thousand street corners, and the one most persistently and ubiquitously taught at a thousand classes run by socialist organisations, Labour colleges or freelance lecturers; and because it had no real rival as an analysis of what was wrong with capitalism. It was also natural, because the Marxist organisations formed and still form by far the most important school for the militants and activists of the labour movement, and this in spite of the sectarianism which has often plagued them. This is perhaps most obvious at the real grass roots of the British movement, in the unions. From the days of the young John Burns and Tom Mann, to those of the militants of today, Marxist organisations of one kind or another have provided the education of the union activists. It has been one of the great historic weaknesses of the old ILP, and of its successor, the parliamentary Labour Left, that it has had and has such feeble roots in the industrial movements. Conversely, taking account of their relatively modest size, the Marxist organisations – whether SDF, Socialist Labour Party, the Communist Party etc – have had a disproportionately large influence among the union activists. It is true that many of these changed their political opinions as their careers advanced; but, if we are talking about Marx's influence, we cannot leave even them out of account.

### **Cadres**

It would be easy to illustrate the disproportionate influence of Marx, and of the relatively tiny organisations of Marxists, on the wider labour movement. The Marxist organisations themselves have often underrated it, because they have measured it not against reality, but against their ideal of a Marxist mass labour movement; whereas in fact their historical importance has been as groups of cadres or potential cadres, of leaders and brains rather than of followers. Their importance has so far lain not so much in converting vast masses of workers into members of a mass Marxist movement or the acquisition of voters, but in their role within a great, politically and ideologically heterogeneous, but powerful class movement bound together by class consciousness and solidarity, and increasingly also by the anti-capitalism which the Marxists were the first to find words for when socialism revived in the 1830s. Because this movement has so often fallen short of their expectations, they have often been disappointed in it. But that disappointment was also often due to unrealistic expectations. The General Strike was a magnificent demonstration of the movement's strength; but it was not, and was not even faintly within sight of being, a revolutionary or even a pre-revolutionary situation.

### **SDF and BSP**

However, just because the expectations of Marxists have so often been unrealistic, they have sometimes obscured the realistic ones. Because the lack of success of Marxists has so often been due to factors beyond their or anyone else's control, they have sometimes overlooked the failures which might have been avoidable. Marx's own failure in the 1840s was inevitable. Historians may well conclude that no conceivable wisdom, tactical brilliance or organisational effort was likely to bring about the realisation of Marx strategic hopes at that point; though this doesn't mean that they were not worth pursuing. On the other hand many of the errors of the British Social Democrats were avoidable, though perhaps historically likely. That peculiar combination of sectarianism and opportunism which Lenin recognised in the SDF, and which is the occupational risk of so many Marxist organisations operating under conditions of capitalist stability, is not inevitable.

The SDF ought to have played a much larger part in the trade union revival of the 1830s, if it had not dismissed trade unions as 'mere palliatives'; its own militants were wiser. The British Marxists – with the exception of the SLP – failed to grasp, let alone to lead, the great labour unrest of 1911-1914, though this was the first occasion since the Chartists when masses of rank-and-file British workers not only organised on a large scale, but also demonstrated strong anti-capitalist sentiments, and even some evidence of that revolutionary spirit which Marx had called for. They left the leadership mainly to syndicalists and other members of what we would today call the 'new left', though of course many of these – Tom Mann is the best example – had gone through the school of Marxism and were to return to Marxist organisations. The reason for this failure was the opposite to 'impossibilist' sectarianism. It was due to the failure to discern a new phase in the political consciousness of the workers behind the emotional phrases, the unorthodox and often rather unimpressive theorising, the irrationalism and what a later generation was to call the 'mindless militancy' of the new movement. As it happens the war and the Russian Revolution once again saved the BSP from some of the results of its errors.



Indeed, in a curious way history has time and again compensated, at least in part, for the errors of British Marxists, both by proving Marx right and by demonstrating the inadequacy of the alternatives – whether reformist or revolutionary – which were suggested. It did so by demonstrating, time and again, the fragility of that capitalist system whose stability and strength provided the main argument for both reformists and ultra-revolutionaries. For the reformist argues, with Bernstein and the Fabians, that there was no point in talking about revolution when capitalism looked like lasting for as long as anyone could predict; the only sensible course was to get used to its stability and concentrate on improvements within it. On the other hand the ultra-revolutionaries argued, like so many pre-1914 syndicalists, that there was no point in hoping that history would raise the consciousness of the workers to a new level, because historical development seemed to produce capitalist permanence. It made more sense to raise it by the propaganda of action, by inspiring ‘myths’, by the sheer effort of the revolutionary will.

### Lessons of history

Both were wrong in their prescriptions, though not entirely wrong in their critique of the ‘sit-back-and-wait-for-history-to-do-the-job-for-us’ determinism of orthodox social democracy. Both were wrong because, in one way or another, the instability and the growing contradictions of capitalism have reasserted themselves periodically: eg in war, in some form or other of economic disruption, in the growing contradiction between the advanced and the under-developed countries. The very fact that the ultra-left existed and became a significant force was a symptom of the acuteness of these contradictions before 1914, and it is so today. And whenever history once again proved that Marx’s analysis of capitalism was a better guide to reality than Rostow’s or Galbraith’s, or whoever was in fashion at the time, men tended to turn again to the Marxists, in so far as they were neither too sectarian nor too opportunist; that is to say in so far as they avoided the double temptation of revolutionaries who operate for long periods under conditions of stable capitalism.

### Learning from Marx’s method

So we may conclude that Marx’s influence on British labour could not be expected to be as great as his enthusiastic followers would like it to be. Nevertheless it was, is, and is likely to be, rather greater than both they and the anti-Marxists have often supposed. At the same time it was and is smaller (within the limits of historical realism) than it might have been but for the errors of British Marxists at crucial stages of the development of the modern labour and socialist movement; errors both of the ‘right’ and of the ‘left’; errors which are not confined to any Marxist organisation, great or small. However, we cannot make Marx himself responsible for them. What both he and Engels had expected of the British labour movement after the Chartist era was modest enough. They had simply expected that it would once again establish itself as an independent political as well as trade unionist class movement, that it should found its own political party, and rediscover both the confidence in British workers as a class and the decisive weight of the working class in the politics of Britain. They were too realistic to expect more in their lifetime, and indeed the labour movement did not quite achieve even these modest objectives before Engels’ death.

The British Marxists would have done well to listen to Engels’ advice while he was alive, for it was very sound.

Nevertheless, even if they had, within a few years of his death the British labour movement had got to a point where Engels’ opinions about it, and even less those of Marx who had said so little on the subject after the early 1870s, were no longer of much specific relevance to the situation. If Marx’s theory was to be a guide to action for British Marxists, they would henceforth have to do the work themselves. They would have to learn the method of Marx, and not only his text, or that of any of his successors. They would have to make their own analysis of what was happening in British capitalism and of the concrete political situations in which the movement found itself. They would have to work out the best ways to organise, their perspectives and programmes, and their role in the wider labour movement. These are still the tasks of those who wish to follow Marx in Britain, or in any other country.

### Notes and references

[Citations given by Hobsbawm have been referenced by the Editor to the Marx-Engels Collected Works (*MECW*). Notes 1, 9, 11, 13, 14 and 15 have been added.]

- 1 *Letter*, Marx to Engels, 2 April 1866, in *MECW*, Vol 42, p 253.
- 2 *Letter*, Marx to Engels, 9 April 1863, in *MECW*, Vol 41, p 468; Hobsbawm wrongly gave the date of 16 April, and in fact Marx used the term “English”, not “British” –*Ed.*
- 3 *Letter*, Engels to Marx, 7 October 1858, in *MECW*, Vol 40, p 344; the translation given in the *MECW* is “the fact that the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois” –*Ed.*
- 4 Hobsbawm cited Marx, *Capital*, Vol I, Ch 23, Sect 5, but the passages concerned appear more likely to be those in Ch 15, ‘Machinery and Modern Industry’ (*MECW*, Vol 35, pp 374–508) – *Ed.*
- 5 *Letter*, Marx to Sigrid Meyer and August Vogt, 9 October 1870, in *MECW*, Vol 43, p 475.
- 6 Marx, *Confidential Communication to the Committee of the German Social-Democratic Workers’ Party*, 28 March, 1870, in *MECW*, Vol 21, p 118.
- 7 Marx, *On The Hague Congress, 1872*, in *MECW*, Vol 23, p 255; Marx, *Parliamentary Debate on the Anti-Socialist Law*, in *MECW*, Vol 24, p 248; Engels, *Preface to English Edition of Capital Volume I*, in *MECW*, Vol 35, p 36.
- 8 *Letter*, Marx to Friedrich Bolte, 23 November 1871, in *MECW*, Vol 44, p 258.
- 9 *Letter*, Marx to Engels, 27 July 1866, Vol 42, p 300.
- 10 Marx to Bolte, *op cit*, p 252.
- 11 *Letter*, Marx to Engels, 10 December 1869, in *MECW*, Vol 43, p 398.
- 12 *Letter*, Marx to Laura and Paul Lafargue, 5 March 1870, in *MECW*, Vol 43, p 450.
- 13 Engels, *Speech on Poland*, 29 November 1847, in *MECW*, Vol 6, p 389: “A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations.” Also Marx, *Confidential Communication*, *op cit*, p 120; the actual text of the translation is “forges its own chains” –*Ed.*
- 14 Marx to Laura and Paul Lafargue, *op cit*, p 449.
- 15 *Letter*, Marx to Engels, 1 May 1865, in *MECW*, Vol 42, p 150.

# State and Revolution in Marx's Thought

## *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*

Jonathan White

THE YEAR 2017 saw the anniversary of the great Bolshevik led revolution and of Lenin's *State and Revolution*. In this short book, Lenin distilled his own thinking and that of Marx and Engels before him to argue that Marxists must do more than simply form governments or work within existing institutions of bourgeois politics, but must seize control of and transform the whole apparatus of the state. In this essay I will examine two works by Marx that underpin Lenin's thinking on the state and which I think, must continue to underpin the thought of those who consider themselves serious about the need to build a better world.

The *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* was published in 1852 and was compiled out of a series of articles written when Marx was in exile in London. The articles were a response to the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte to become the Emperor Napoleon III. Louis's coup was the miserable, farcical but hugely significant culmination of the 1848 uprisings in Paris. The bulk of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* is an amazing account of the class dynamics at work beneath the fast-moving events of the three-year period until Louis's coup. But it is also, as I want to show, an examination of the creation of the bourgeois state and its operation in the period during which the working class enters the political stage.

The *Critique of the Gotha Programme* was not published till 1891 but was composed as a series of marginal notes on the programme of the newly unified Social Democratic Party in Germany in 1875. In the intervening years, Marx had worked on his analysis of the operation of capitalist society, played a critical role in the formation of the First International, and witnessed the Paris Commune. In the *Critique* Marx was writing in angry response to the draft programme around which it was proposed to create a unified German Social Democratic party. The marginal notes on the programme were a brief but devastating attack on what Marx saw as the ideological degeneration of German socialism since the days of the International as well as sketching out Marx's understanding of the role that the revolutionary working class must play if it is to complete its historic task.

The *Eighteenth Brumaire* and the *Critique* provide vital enduring lessons for the working class on the nature of the state and of the necessary proletarian revolution. In the first part of this article I will look at the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as a discourse on the nature of the bourgeois state and bourgeois politics. In the second, I will move on to look at the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* as a sketch of the phase Marx calls the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat". At the end,

I suggest three ways in which these seminal Marxist writings remain of ongoing importance to the revolutionary working class movement.

### **The character of the state and its historical role**

In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx provides a neat summary of his view of the bourgeois state as a particular political form that has emerged at a specific point in human history and which shares certain basic common features.

"The different states of the different civilised countries, in spite of their motley diversity of form, all have this in common" he says, "that they are based on modern bourgeois society, only one more or less capitalistically developed. They have, therefore, also certain essential characteristics in common."<sup>1</sup>

What are the key, historically unique characteristics of the bourgeois state? One is the concentration of military and administrative power in the executive. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx explains how the historical emergence of the bourgeoisie and the dissolution of feudalism in France results in the forging of a giant, centralised state apparatus:

"This frightful parasitic body, which surrounds the body of French society like a caul and stops up all its pores, arose at the time of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system, which it helped to accelerate. The seigniorial privileges of the landowners and the towns were transformed into attributes of the state power, the feudal dignities became paid officials and the medieval pattern of conflicting plenary authorities became the regulated plan of a state authority characterised by a centralisation and a division of labour reminiscent of a factory."<sup>2</sup>

By the time that Marx was writing, the bourgeoisie now had a firm material interest in the continued expansion of this state. As he recognises, it is the state that provides the bourgeoisie's surplus population with jobs and "makes up through state salaries for what it cannot pocket in the form of profits, interest, rents and fees".<sup>3</sup>

The bourgeois state has a second aspect – again forged in the process of the battle with feudalism and absolutism. This is the appearance that not only is it a concentration of force and authority, but that it floats above society, representing no

‘Calls for “fairness” and “equality” obscure the vast scientific leap in understanding that comes through uncovering the reality of class exploitation at the heart of capitalism.’

particular, private interest, but only the public interest, that which is general and common to us all. This is not simply a façade either. It is a real and necessary aspect of the state which acts to obscure its real partiality. The assertion that there is a public, general interest that the state should serve was the battle cry of the bourgeoisie in its historic struggles with feudalism and absolutism. This was how it wrested power and authority away from feudal landowners and towns. It is the bourgeoisie’s assertion that its interests are universal.

So, alongside the emergence of a specialised instrument of universal expression of power in the form of the executive, comes the emergence of a specialised sphere in which material social interests are expressed in the form of claims to act in the universal public interest: in short, bourgeois politics.

As the bourgeoisie won state power and as capitalist societies developed, so different bourgeois class fractions emerged whose interests needed to be articulated within the state: the bourgeoisified landed aristocracy, the industrial bourgeoisie, the financiers, the petty bourgeoisie. On this basis arose the demands for parliamentary representation, for elected representative government and for the creation of specialised instruments for expressing these interests in the bourgeois state: political parties comprised of representatives of these fractions. Within a parliamentary republic, each of these political parties articulates the interests of its fraction. But they do so within a specialist political sphere whose limit is the general interest of the bourgeoisie - their common interest in defending private property and the freedom of capitalists to exploit workers outside the state, in civil society.

The centralised state apparatus, and the various forms of parliamentary political expression of bourgeois rule, are then connected and necessary historical developments. But as the *Eighteenth Brumaire* shows, the emergence of the working class and its entrance onto the social and political stage introduces a new dynamic into society that produces new developments in the state.

Marx argues that the insurrection of the workers in June 1848, while foolish and based on utopian leadership, confronted the bourgeoisie in general with the threat that the working class might at some point lay its own hands on the mighty apparatus of the state and assert its own interest. And it could easily do so by making use of the bourgeoisie’s own instruments for asserting its interests to be universal. It could use bourgeois political weapons. As Marx writes: once the workers emerged onto the scene,

“The bourgeoisie had a true insight into the fact that all the weapons it had forged against feudalism turned their points against itself, that all the means of education it had produced rebelled against its own civilisation, that all the gods it had created had fallen away from it. It understood that all the so-called bourgeois liberties and organs of progress attacked and menaced its class rule at its social foundation and its political summit simultaneously, and had therefore become ‘socialistic’.... What the bourgeoisie did not grasp, however, was the logical conclusion that its own parliamentary regime, its political rule in general, was now also bound to meet with the general verdict of condemnation as being socialistic. As long as the rule of the bourgeois class had not been completely organised, as long as it had not acquired its pure political expression, the antagonism of the other classes likewise could not appear in its pure form, and where it did appear could not take the dangerous turn that transforms every struggle against the state power into a struggle against capital. If in every stirring of life in society it saw ‘tranquillity’ imperilled, how could it want to maintain at the head of society a regime of unrest, its own regime, the parliamentary regime, this regime that, according to the expression of one of its spokesmen, lives in struggle and by struggle? The parliamentary regime lives by discussion, how shall it forbid discussion? Every interest, every social institution, is here transformed into general ideas, debated as ideas; how shall any interest, any institution, sustain itself above thought and impose itself as an article of faith? The struggle of the orators on the platform evokes the struggle of the scribblers of the press; the debating club in parliament is necessarily supplemented by debating clubs in the salons and the bistros; the representatives, who constantly appeal to public opinion, give public opinion the right to speak its real mind in petitions. The parliamentary regime leaves everything to the decision of majorities; how shall the great majorities outside parliament not want to decide? ...

“Thus by now stigmatising as ‘socialistic’ what it had previously extolled as ‘liberal’, the bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the danger of its own rule; that to restore tranquillity in the country its bourgeois parliament must, first of all, be given its quietus; that to preserve its social power intact its political power must be broken; that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to

enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion, and order only on condition that their class be condemned along with the other classes to like political nullity; that in order to save its purse it must forfeit the crown, and the sword that is to safeguard it must at the same time be hung over its own head as a sword of Damocles.”<sup>4</sup>

It was the inability of any of the bourgeoisie’s own specialist political instruments, the party representatives of its own various fractions, to settle political rule in such a way that presented the general interest of the bourgeoisie as those of society that led the bourgeoisie outside parliament to abandon its political expressions, liquidating the parliamentary form of its own political rule in favour of dictatorship. Each fraction of the bourgeoisie outside parliament arrives at the same conclusion – that its parties are not up to the job and power must be actively invested instead in some entity who will make the state once more float above society. Hence the bourgeoisie outside parliament gravitates toward the adventurer Louis Bonaparte who shows himself prepared to mobilise the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat to create a political base that can appear to be the embodiment of ‘the people’, but which in doing so, brings ‘order’ and ‘tranquillity’ through the political overthrow of the bourgeois parties and restores the conditions for the social and economic contentment of the extraparliamentary bourgeoisie.

What is vital to grasp about this is that Marx understands this to be a necessary and unavoidable historical process that in fact makes the task of the proletarian revolution clearer. Throughout the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, every political upheaval in French history is based on the dynamics of emerging class relations in capitalist France, and is shown to be perfecting, purifying and clarifying the institutions of the state and its root in bourgeois class society. The *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, though a farcical episode that brings to power a man constantly described as a comical, drunken roué, is making the historical task of the proletariat clearer and more manifest. In a vital passage near the end of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx explains:

“But the revolution is thorough. It still on its journey through purgatory. It goes about its business methodically. On 2 December it had completed one half of its preparatory work; it is now completing the other half. First of all it perfected the parliamentary power in order to overthrow it. Now having attained this, it is perfecting the executive power, reducing it to its purest expression, isolating it and setting it up against itself as the sole object of attack, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it.”<sup>5</sup>

History, understood as a scientifically intelligible set of processes rooted in the unfolding of human productive powers, is presenting the working class with a clarified, purified object of attack. It is to the nature of that attack that we now turn.

### **The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat**

The *Critique of the Gotha Programme* is a harsh attack on the programmatic formulations of the newly forming German Social Democratic Party. The draft programme that fell victim to Marx’s pen called for the establishment of state subsidised co-operatives and the fair distribution of the proceeds of labour to workers. Marx argued that such formulations, as well as being incoherent, massively underestimate and misunderstand the task confronting the working class. The *Critique* also

offered up tantalising intimations of the broad features of the period in which a self-conscious working class set about revolutionising the basis of society and forging the transition to socialism.

The first necessity for the working class, Marx argues, is to understand the enormity of the task at hand. It will face the task of reckoning with a society that has been wrought out of hundreds of years of historical development, scarred with deep social divisions that have arisen from capitalist relations of production. Its industry, while socialised, will be chaotic and unbalanced as a consequence of the anarchic and competitive nature of capitalist development. Its working class will be stratified by the division of labour. Other social classes and strata will continue to exist, though the bourgeoisie is dispossessed. People will carry with them ideas that have grown up out of and reflect their class positions within capitalist society. As Marx puts it:

“What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, it will confront a state apparatus and political sphere which is a specifically bourgeois social form, a concentration of power peculiarly adapted to perpetuating bourgeois economic exploitation. Applying the lessons of the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the working class must understand the necessary dual character of the state – its centralised state apparatus which governs in the generalised interest of the bourgeoisie as a whole, and its appearance of floating freely above society, acting in the interests of everyone, either in the form of the parliamentary republic or, when the latter becomes too unstable, the dictator who embodies the power of the executive but cultivates the appearance of the man of the people. This analysis explains Marx’s extreme irritation with the Gotha Programme’s formulation of the need for a “free state”, above the interests of the capitalist class:

“The German Workers’ party – at least if it adopts the programme – shows that its socialist ideas are not even skin-deep; in that, instead of treating existing society (and this holds good for any future one) as the basis of the existing state (or of the future state in the case of future society), it treats the state rather as an independent entity that possesses its own intellectual, ethical, and libertarian bases.”<sup>7</sup>

The historic task of the working class is to take control of this machinery and ultimately to subordinate it to society:

“Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it.”<sup>7</sup>

How does the working class subordinate the state to society? It can’t simply will the state away. Instead, Marx argues, a period of transition will require the working class to subject the state apparatus to its own specific form of political rule. As Marx puts it:

“Between capitalist and communist society there lies the

period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>8</sup>

During the intervening years, Marx been able to digest and analyse the extraordinary experience of the Paris Commune. In *The Civil War in France*, he argued that the Commune had been the real movement of working people that had revealed to the world the outlines of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat had a distinctive political form: the military force of the army devolved to an armed population, the centralised administration subjected to direct municipal election, a cap to salaries. This was, as Lenin understood in *State and Revolution*, a state beginning the process of dissolving itself back into society. But, just as importantly, the Commune had begun to attack private property and build institutions of public, collective consumption.

Just as the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat works to subject its own power to mass pressure and begin the process of dissolving itself back into society, so it must abolish the material basis of political rule itself together with the forms of the bourgeois state and dissolve them back into society. The primary social objective of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat therefore must be the abolition of the fundamental root of the state’s existence, the structuring relationship at the heart of the capitalist system which is the basis of exploitation and which impedes the development of human productive forces and faculties. To understand its historic task properly, Marx argues, the political party of the working class must apply a materialist and historical analysis to capitalist society. The key to understanding the unfolding of human history is to look at the development of the forces and relations of production; and correspondingly the key to understanding any given society is to look at the dominant mode of production within it and understand how it structures that society. Relations of distribution flow from and arise on the basis of the way in which production is organised:

“Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself. The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of non-workers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labour power. If the elements of production are so distributed, then the present-day distribution of the means of consumption results automatically.”<sup>9</sup>

This is why Marx launches a sustained attack on the Gotha Programme’s fixation with workers receiving the “full proceeds of their labour”, a “fair” distribution throughout society. The concept of fairness, he argues, is an idealistic and legalistic form that arises with capitalist notions of formal equality. In *Wages, Prices and Profit*, Marx had castigated the English trade union movement for its reliance on slogans calling for a “fair wage”.<sup>10</sup> Here he takes the German socialist movement to task, head-on, for importing the same illusions into the political arm of the working class. Calls for ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ obscure the vast scientific leap in understanding that comes through uncovering the reality of class exploitation at

the heart of capitalism.

As Marx says, under capitalism:

“the wage worker has permission to work for his own subsistence – that is, to live, only insofar as he works for a certain time gratis for the capitalist (and hence also for the latter’s co-consumers of surplus value); that the whole capitalist system of production turns on the increase of this gratis labour by extending the working day, or by developing the productivity– that is, increasing the intensity or labour power etc; that, consequently, the system of wage labour is a system of slavery, and indeed of a slavery which becomes more severe in proportion as the social productive forces of labour develop, whether the worker receives better or worse payment.”<sup>11</sup>

The working class becomes self-conscious when it grasps that it must revolutionise the production relations that structure society by seizing the means of production, destroying the bourgeoisie and unlocking the potential to develop productive forces and human faculties contained within this system of enslavement. The proletariat is revolutionary relative to the bourgeoisie because, says Marx, “having itself grown up on the basis of large-scale industry, it strives to strip off from production the capitalist character that the bourgeoisie seeks to perpetuate.” With the abolition of class distinctions, “all social and political inequality arising from them would disappear of itself.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet this disappearance is clearly an epochal process of building on the ruins of the vast inheritance of history. Inequality will not vanish quickly, neither will social division, the division of labour or other legacies of capitalism. Marx sketches out in the *Critique* a vision of a phase of socialist construction in which capitalist exploitation has been abolished but society is still marked by capitalist social structures and assumptions. In this society, individual labour will no longer go to market to be exchanged like any other commodity. Rather, it will contribute toward a total social product which will extend beyond commodities to include the production of a growing extent and volume of public, collective consumption goods like education, welfare, healthcare and so on. What workers receive back to secure the means of consumption, still in the form of a wage, will be measured against what labour time they put in, after deductions to fund the growing volume of public collective consumption goods.

“[T]he individual producer receives back from society – after the deductions have been made – exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labour. For example, the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labour cost. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another.”<sup>13</sup>

As Marx points out, this is still a society that is based on a bourgeois idea of right – the notion that you get back in consumer goods what you input in labour time and it still bears

the wage form. Inequality will still exist because the equal right established by using labour time as a measure necessarily ignores different capacities and abilities, as well as different needs, all of them hugely important legacies of capitalist development and the division of labour. But, Marx says,

“these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby.”<sup>14</sup>

The key thing is that the bourgeois right to recompense in proportion to labour time has been liberated from the enslaving exploitative relationship at the heart of capitalist accumulation and is being made to serve socialist construction. And as socialism develops more productive forces and more collective consumption, so these inequalities are lessened over time and the bourgeois idea of rights measured by labour time retreats.

Eventually, says Marx:

“In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!”<sup>14</sup>

## Looking forward

Why are these texts still important? Why are they of more than historical interest? I want to draw out three things that I think are important crystallisations of the historical experience which Marx drew on and theorised, and which remain of lasting import. The first relates to the political forms of bourgeois rule and their relationship to the state.

The *Eighteenth Brumaire* contains a vital discussion of what happens within the politics of bourgeois states when the working class emerges as a serious potential contender for power. Bourgeois political rule contains within it a contradiction that emerges from the contradictions of its economic power and its control of the state. The bourgeoisie is comprised of competing interests, mirroring the plurality of capitals operating within any concrete social formation. These interests are the material basis of representative forms of government as they pull apart any attempt to impose a single united political power over society. Yet in the era when the working class emerges as a political force, representative democratic politics is inherently unstable and open to socialistic transformation. With the emergence of reformist social democracy, with its material basis in labour aristocracies, it becomes possible to contain the working class challenge to a degree. Yet still the potential for revolutionary outbreaks is ever present. Faced with the real prospect that bourgeois political parties will lose control of democratic institutions, the general interest of the bourgeoisie will always lead it to consider abdicating political rule to a power that seeks to restore the appearance of ‘floating above’ society and ruling in the interests of all, but which in reality makes society safe once more for the exercise of economic power through

capitalist accumulation. Faced with an inability to control democratic political forms, the bourgeoisie will readily contemplate vesting power once more in a terrorist dictatorship. Once established, these terrorist dictatorships will temporarily smash workers’ institutions but will be pulled apart by their inability to govern over the competing interests of different fractions of the capitalist class and other classes, leaving them vulnerable to the construction of alliances around the restoration of democracy, even discounting the effects of their propensity to drive their states into war.

This dynamic is written into the history of the twentieth century. The establishment of fascist dictatorships in the wake of the Russian revolution and the resort to military dictatorships in former colonies are only the most obvious examples. Now, arguably, we’re seeing the same dynamic working its way through the state machinery and the political institutions of the contemporary capitalist world. After 30 years in which bourgeois political parties have enabled the erosion of national democratic institutions and the capture of state machineries by a narrow fraction of finance capital, the state is again at risk of being seen as the partial instrument of class rule. The 2008 financial crisis, and the recession and austerity that followed, have only further illuminated this growing political crisis, leading to the re-emergence of political forces who claim the mantle of the unifying general power, floating above society. Figures like Modi in India, Trump in the US and Le Pen in France all represent germinal forms of the same political forces that underpinned fascism in twentieth century Europe. Working class organisations must accordingly re-learn the politics of class alliances and the necessity of defending democratic institutions.

The second major legacy of these texts that I want to emphasise is the need to study and theorise the dictatorship of the proletariat. Partly because of the connotations of fascism that inevitably attached themselves to this concept as a consequence of the experience of the twentieth century, the idea of a revolutionary dictatorship was more or less consciously sidelined in the political lexicon of many communist parties. Yet the concept expresses something precise and of lasting value. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat articulates the idea of a qualitatively distinct stage in a revolutionary process when the proletariat, through its alliances, has gained not only a leading position in society (Gramsci’s hegemony), but the position of dominating the state apparatus and commanding the ability to dictate to the whole of a given social formation the direction of its development. It has combined the exercise of leadership through consent into the ability to coerce where necessary. This is vitally important because it helps us to understand the difference between, say, transitional governments such as that in Venezuela today and what happened in Russia in 1917 and China in 1949. The working class movement now has a wealth of historical experience in attempting to establish and then to sustain itself in the position of being able to dictate to society. Squeamishness about the currency of this term within everyday political discourse should not stand in the way of Marxists retaining an understanding of its real theoretical value. The ability to see beneath the forms of governmental power and grasp the essential power relations in society, to establish which class is in a position to dictate – to impose its will through consent and coercion on the development of society, is too important to lose. It is vital too for the movement to be able to study and learn from the history of its successes and failures in establishing revolutionary dictatorships.

The final legacy of these texts is one that is shared by all the writings of Marx and Engels, but which nevertheless forms a vital context within which to understand them. The *Eighteenth Brumaire* and the *Critique* are both relatively immediate political texts that illuminate the nature of states and revolutionary processes. But they are also suffused with Marx's and Engels' historical materialist method.

Running through both these texts, and all Marx's and Engels' work, is the understanding of history as a unified coherent and intelligible whole, a dialectic of will and necessity mediated through productive forces, relations of production, classes and parties which is bestowing on the working class a historic role and delivering it the means to perform that role. As the *Eighteenth Brumaire* showed, the state was the culmination of a long historical process that accompanied the bourgeois revolution. The emergence of the working class as a political force helps to clarify and perfect both the state as an instrument and the understanding of its class nature. Both the state and the understanding of its potential and limits are historical products placed at the disposal of the working class, provided it is capable of picking them up. Beginning the work of a genuine socialist revolution is also beginning the work of dissolving the state back into society. Applying the same historical materialist approach today, we must study and understand the unfolding of the relationship between the state and the capitalist economy in the era of monopoly and finance capital. What instruments are being placed in the hands of the working class by the development of forms of state monopoly capitalism? What are their potentials and what are their limits? Another world is not just possible, it's coming into being all the time and we need to understand it and take control of it – or face misery, death and destruction on a historically unprecedented scale.

■ This article is based on the text of a lecture delivered at the Marx Memorial Library in 2017 as part of a series celebrating the centenary of Lenin's *State and Revolution*.

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“An Irreparable Rift in the Metabolism  
between Nature and Society”



‘Under capitalism, there is not just a social contradiction between capital and labour, but also a contradiction between capital and nature.’

**I**N 2016 the American Marxist John Bellamy Foster (JBF) was interviewed by Christian Stache (CS) from the Berlin newspaper *junge Welt*, over the destruction of nature under capitalism, the ecological Marxism of Marx and environmental problems as class questions.

**CS: You and your colleague Paul Burkett have recently published a new book, *Marx and the Earth: An Anti-Critique*. To what critiques are you responding?**

**JBF:** To reply to this question, we need to delve a bit into history. In the 1980s an ecosocialist movement arose, first in the USA and Canada, then in Europe and finally all over the world.

The first generation of ecosocialists combined Marxist ideas with green theories. As a result, a hybrid analysis arose. Intellectual pioneers such as Ted Benton, André Gorz and James O’Connor accused Marx and Engels of having had blind-spots in their conceptions. They even accused them of having taken anti-environmental positions.

This first generation of ecosocialists made significant steps forward, but under the hegemony of green theoretical development. A few of them even claimed that ecosocialism had superseded classical socialism as a paradigm. In those cases ecosocialism became the negation of traditional Marxism.

However, the second generation of ecosocialists made a U-turn back to classical historical materialism, in order to investigate the role of environmental analysis in the deep structure of Marx’s and Engels’ critique of political economy. Paul Burkett’s book, *Marx and Nature* (1999) and my *Marx’s Ecology* (2000) mark the start of this development. Numerous other researchers such as Rebecca Clausen, Brett Clark, Peter Dickens, Hannah Holleman, Stefano Longo, Kohei Saito, Del Weston und Richard York joined in this project. Elma Altvater is a German representative of this line.

Over the past 15 years, an intensive debate over Marx’s ecology has developed between the two ecosocialist generations. The representatives of the first have had to give way on almost every contentious point. *Marx and the Earth* is in many ways the culmination of this discussion. It is a reply to some central accusations against Marx and Engels and a criticism of misinterpretations of their works, particularly in the field of environmental economics.

Some environmental economists, such as Joan Martinez-

Alier and James O’Connor, have argued that Marx and Engels did not take thermodynamics into account in their analysis. Indeed, Engels is accused of having contested the validity of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Paul Burkett and I show that these accusations are equally as unfounded as others. For example, Joel Kovel has insinuated that Marx and Engels denied an intrinsic value to nature; Daniel Tanuro maintains that they ignored the qualitatively different forms of energy; and John Clark is of the opinion that they had refused to acknowledge the organic relations between nature and society.

**CS: Then what exactly is an anti-critique?**

**JBF:** In Marxist theory anti-critiques have a long history. Rosa Luxemburg’s reply to the criticism of her *The Accumulation of Capital* is probably the best-known, but Engels’ famous *Anti-Dühring* is also an anti-critique. In a historical materialist anti-critique, you deal with criticisms of your own theses and positions, develop responses to these and thereby fathom out the theoretical and historical core of the opposing standpoints.

The aim of the debate is to gain clarity about your own conceptions, exercising a certain measure of self-criticism and thereby dialectically achieving progress in theory. In that way, in the debate with new historical challenges, Marxism is continually renewed, terminologically and theoretically. Indeed in our book we aren’t responding primarily to criticisms of our own ideas but rather to the attacks of the first generation of ecosocialists on Marx’s and Engels’ environmental analyses.

**CS: Why is it necessary to defend Marx, Engels and Marxism precisely in the field of the environment?**

**JBF:** You could just as easily ask me why we have to defend Darwin against criticisms of the theory of evolution. The answer is obvious: it’s a question of science. Although Darwin’s theory has been further developed since the middle of the 19th century, today we still return to his findings, in order to develop new insights. This is one of the ways of achieving progress in science. It’s therefore not just a matter of defending Marx, Engels or Marxism. By renewed readings of their writings, we can discover new aspects and thereby advance our own progressive research projects.

**CS: In three of the five chapters of your book you deal with accusations against the “dual founders of historical materialism”<sup>1</sup> in the field of thermodynamics, particularly in connection with the work of the Ukrainian socialist Sergei Podolinsky in the 19th century. Can you explain briefly the reproaches against Marx and Engels, and why you repudiate the accusations?**

**JBF:** Podolinsky was a Ukrainian Marxist and a follower of Marx and Engels. Because of his article *Human Labour and the Unity of Physical Forces*, he is known as one of the founders of ecological economics. In 1880, Podolinsky sent Marx an early draft of the manuscript of his work. Marx made detailed notes on it and replied to him. Podolinsky thereupon wrote a new, comprehensive draft, which he published a short time later, first in French. An Italian version, and in 1883, shortly after Marx's death, a German version, followed. A Russian edition also appeared.

Regrettably, Marx's letters to Podolinsky have not been preserved, so that we do not know his opinion of this manuscript. However, on Marx's request Engels wrote two letters to him about Podolinsky's work. Engels pointed to significant findings of the Ukrainian socialist, but also criticised him for his crude calculations on energy use in agriculture. He particularly highlighted Podolinsky's mistake of only including human metabolism: in fact, fertilisers and fossil fuels, especially coal, should also have been taken into consideration. Engels next rejected some extreme examples of Podolinsky's analyses, for example the idea that man was a perfect thermodynamic machine which could restart its own propulsion. Podolinsky considered that the accumulation of energy on the Earth and a possible global temperature rise would be signs of human progress.

In this context it is significant that Martinez-Alier, James O'Connor and others have asserted that Marx and Engels ignored Podolinsky and thereby rejected ecological economics and an environmental standpoint. We show in our book not only that this is untrue, but what Marx and Engels did discuss about energetics.

**CS: You write about “a complex materialist ecology at the root of classical Marxism”<sup>1</sup>. What are Marx's and Engels' essential findings about the destruction of nature under capitalism?**

**JBF:** It is almost impossible to answer this question briefly. The essential points are Marx's theory of the rift in the metabolism between nature and society, his ecological theory of value and Marx's and Engels' dialectics of ecology. Marx's exceptionally radical definition of sustainability is decisive. He says that

“Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneous societies taken together ... [are] ... not owners of the Globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias* [good fathers of the family], they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.”<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, in Volume III of *Capital* Marx says that under socialism “the associated producers” would rationally regulate “their interchange with nature”,<sup>3</sup> and would develop human potentials. Marx adapted the concept metabolism [social

interchange] from the natural science of his time and thereby developed an ecological system analysis which basically anticipated present-day ecosystem research. He considered the dialectics between the historical form of social labour and the process of nature as a totality from an environmental standpoint. Capitalist production produces an “irreparable rift” in the “interdependent process of social interchange prescribed by the natural laws of life.”<sup>4</sup>

The crucial argument of the Marxian analysis of value is that the production of value undermines the natural-material use-values of wealth. Under capitalism, there is not just a social contradiction between capital and labour, but also a contradiction between capital and nature. Marx's ecological theory of value develops the forms of this contradiction, which are based on the point that nature is dealt with as a “free gift of nature to capital”<sup>5</sup> in the capitalist mode of production.

**CS: You have already mentioned the different ecosocialist generations. Before these, what was the relationship between Marxism and ecology?**

**JBF:** The history of the relationship between socialism and ecology is scarcely known at present. The main reason for that is that ecology is a result of natural sciences rather than of social sciences or indeed cultural studies. Regrettably, Marxism, as it was revived in the West in the 1960s, so demarcated itself from traditional Marxism that it excluded the natural sciences, and nature with them, from the Marxist tradition.

If we concentrate exclusively on the time between World War 2 and today, and on ecological Marxists, we gain at least quite a clear picture for the English-speaking world. There was a precursor phase, in which individuals formulated important findings – among them K William Kapp, Barry Commoner, Virginia Brodine, Paul Sweezy, Charles Anderson and Alan Schnaiberg. At this period people generally started out from the point that Marxism and ecology were two sides of the same coin. The first and second generations of ecosocialists followed after this phase.

Mind you, the history of the ecological question in Marxism gets a little more complicated if you consider the period between the end of the 19th century and the Second World War. At that time there were several generations of socialist-ecological theoreticians, especially in Great Britain, who were influenced by Marx and Darwin. In that period before the origin of the modern environmental movement, socialism had the greatest influence on ecology. The discoveries of the time related above all to environmental links.

**CS: And in the Soviet Union?**

**JBF:** In the 1920s, the scientific ecology of the USSR was the world-leader. It was however almost completely destroyed in the political purges under Stalin. It was partially restored on the basis of natural science after Stalin's death. Certainly this did not stop the Soviet Union maintaining destructive relations towards nature; but Soviet scientists were the first to point to accelerated climate change.

It is for political reasons that the significant developments of Soviet ecology have not been brought to attention until today. Obviously, you don't have to play down the mistakes of the Soviet Union, in order to recognise the value of critical intellectuals and their scientific achievements.

**CS: Why then do ecological scholars still make big efforts to ignore, underplay or distance themselves from Marx's and Engels' findings?**

**JBF:** These positions should not surprise us. Ecosocialism arose in a period of the decline of the left in the 1980s and 1990s. Because of the break-up of the Soviet Union, Marxism has been completely discredited in the eyes of many. At the same time, postmodernism flowered, and the ideologies of the Cold War persisted in a modified form. In no way did anti-Marxism decrease. Despite ecology's left-wing history, elements of this ideological mix also infiltrated it.

Besides, Marxism is a revolutionary philosophy which is tied to the belief, expectation or hope that the working class is capable of winning its own emancipation. This proposition causes fear among some left-wing academics. Others maintain that the working class is naturally opposed to ecology. Finally there are many moderate environmental activists who do not question capitalism.

**CS: A classic fallacy of environmental activists and scientists is that of grasping environmental problems as problems of humanity instead of as class questions, as if there are no winners and losers from ecocide. How do you explain such ideologies?**

**JBF:** The idea that we're all sitting in the same boat is common amongst neoliberal environmentalists. Malthusian overpopulation theories, or Al Gore's claim that we are all residents of spaceship Earth, are variants of this ideology.

Ian Angus has given the best answer to your question in a chapter of his book *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*. In the chapter 'We are all sitting in the same boat', Angus shows the inequality which arises through exploitation in class society, and through racism and other exclusions, and which marks out the deepening crisis of the Anthropocene.<sup>6</sup>

Destruction of nature and natural catastrophes are questions of economic and environmental justice. They are generated by a society in which the accumulation of capital is more important than people or nature.

**CS: At first sight your more recent book appears to be directed towards scientists. What use value does it have for socially and environmentally engaged people?**

**JBF:** *Marx and the Earth* is directed towards a theoretically interested readership, but because of that it is not insignificant for debates in the movement. Historically, the development of theory in Marxism has always been taken very seriously. Without it, a revolutionary practice would be impossible. In order to determine the ecosocialist critique of capitalism, it is indispensable to drive the theory as far forward as possible. Our practice, the clarity of our ideas, our progress, depend on it. But the actual strength of our theory will only prove itself in practice.

Our anti-critique has a concrete basis. We are building the bridge from Marx's diagnosis of a rift in the metabolism between society and nature to his demand of restoring the metabolism and furnishing a sustainable society. This connection is the basis for the class struggle over our relationship to nature in our time. The restoration of the process of metabolism can only be won against capital and by a movement for socialism.

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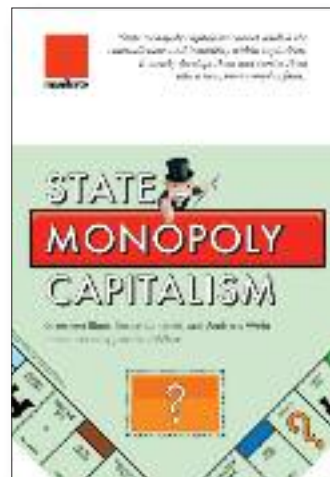
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- 6 The current age, the period when human activity has had a dominant influence on climate and the environment

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Marx Bicentenary *from the archives*

# Is there a theory of art in Marx?

Hans Hess



‘As the work of art speaks a symbolic language of signs and significations, it has to be read differently at the time of its creation and in successive societies.’

The Goddess of Fame (Fama) Fuente de la Fama (Madrid) Pedro de Ribera (1732)

This article, originally published in *Marxism Today*, October 1973, pp 306-314, was based on a lecture given in the University of Sussex on 29 January, 1973, in the series “Problems in Marxist Theory”.

## SECTION I

On the first page of the first section of the first chapter of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx writes:

“A commodity is ... a thing whose qualities enable it – in one way or another – to satisfy human needs. The nature of these needs ... for instance if they arise in the stomach or in the imagination, does not alter the matter.”<sup>1</sup> [emphasis HH]

Marx recognises that material needs as well as imaginary needs are equally historical.

Engels, in his funeral oration, made the simple statement that Marx found that men must eat, drink and live “before they can make politics, science, art, religion, etc”, that, in other words, the forms of the state, the concepts of law, art and religion, must be explained “on the basis of the material conditions, and not as hitherto, the other way round.”<sup>2</sup>

“Our conception of history ... does not explain practice from the idea, but explains the formation of ideas from material practice.”<sup>3</sup>

Thought then arises in man’s history from his material experience, the modes of thought, as well as their formalisations, that is art, poetry, writing, religion, as well as legal, political concepts and constructs which Marx summarises under the term “superstructure”, built over and above actual social material relations of production.

In the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* he says:

“the economic structure of society; the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness”<sup>4</sup>.

And in the *18th Brumaire*:

“Upon the different forms of property, upon the social condition of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life. The entire class creates and

forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations.”<sup>5</sup>

## Superstructure and ideology

A question which must be understood, and I think is not always correctly understood, is the full content of Marx’s concept of superstructure and ideology: religion, art, law, politics etc. When Marx refers to the ideas in religion, art, politics, civil life which arise in a society, they are to him not just the ideas, but the forms in which they operate – in other words the instruments of art, politics, religion etc. They are not only the “celestialised forms” of “the relations of social life”;<sup>6</sup> not only the imagery of religion, but the building of churches. Not just the ideas of ‘law’, but the law courts, are ideological structures; and here the work of art as an instrument fits perfectly in the ideological structure as the modus operandi of the idea.

The word ‘ideology’ thus does not indicate only a ‘body of ideas’, but it indicates the structures in which such ideas operate and become active. The material instruments and organisations themselves are ideological structures which form the superstructure.

There are in the writings of Marx many more references to art as part of the ideological superstructure than to specific works of art or artists. It is thus from his numerous internally connected statements, that the views of Marx on art and its function can be deduced.

## The work of art

The work of art – considered as an object – operates within the structure of ideology, without having to deny its material existence, and in its material existence incorporates properties which – though necessary for its ideological function at the time – do not have to lose their attractiveness for later periods. The error is to consider the work of art as eternal in its message – though long-lasting as a product. As the work of art speaks a symbolic language of signs and significations, it has to be read differently at the time of its creation and in successive societies.

The visual arts are no different from other symbolisations such as language or writing. Mental constructs or ideas cannot be transmitted except in symbolic forms or structures. The need to learn to produce them and the need to learn to read them, is a necessity of the communication of ideas. There is no mental intercourse without signs and signals, without a symbolic language.

Marx says in *The German Ideology*:

“Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men, and for that reason is really beginning to exist for me personally as well. For language like consciousness arises from the need – the necessity of intercourse with other men.”<sup>7</sup>

And further:

“The production of ideas, of conceptions of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. ... The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions .... Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence – and the existence of men is their actual life-process.”<sup>8</sup>

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* he says:

“Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my own existence is social activity.”<sup>9</sup>

And in the *Grundrisse* of 1857-58:

“Ideas do not exist separate from language.”<sup>10</sup>

### Social forms of expression

If we consider the visual arts as a language of signs, then we have to see that the symbols of that visual language – its very writing, not just the text but also the signs – are in themselves social forms of expression.

What we call a work of art, and that makes its understanding so difficult, was from the outset a product of labour, even of specialised labour, which was intended as the symbolisation of an idea. The work of art is a material artefact which operates in reality as the embodiment of an idea. The work of art mediates between the world of production and the world of thought and mental constructs.

The work of art has a function which has never attached it solely to the world of production, that is, the world of food and furniture, and it has never wholly belonged to the world of self-enfranchised philosophers, poets and thinkers.

In *The German Ideology* Marx formulates the division of labour:

“Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it is really conceiving something without conceiving something *real*; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of ‘pure’ theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.”<sup>11</sup>

Where art is concerned Marx was proved right late in history, because the consciousness of the artist separated itself from existing practice very late – not before the Renaissance – thus the state of ‘pure’ art was reached much later than ‘pure’ philosophy. The division of manual from mental labour was the central argument of Leonardo da Vinci in his proto-Marxist trattato *Paragone*, where he claimed that the painter, like the

poet, worked mainly with his intellect, and that his manual labour was insignificant compared to his mental effort.

This new artist – and for the first time the word artist is justified – now joins the ranks of the thinkers. He joins the liberal arts and justifies his existence by his powers of invention and imagination.

### Art and ruling class

Having included the artist, as we must, amongst the producers of ideas, or at least as the executants of the ideological vision, we can again, directly from Marx and Engels, adduce an approach to the role of the artist in the service of the ruling class.

From *The German Ideology*:

“The class which has the means of *material* production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are ... subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. ... The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things, consciousness ... therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch ... they do this in its whole range, hence, among other things, rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.”<sup>12</sup>

Stressing the division of labour within the ruling class, Marx says in *The German Ideology* that:

“... inside this class one part appears as the thinkers ... (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood).”<sup>13</sup>

This is where the artist belongs – but there is also his public. These are the other members of the class, whose:

“attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of the class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves!”<sup>13</sup>

According to Marx the actual rulers have less time for illusions, because they have the real work to do.

Philosophers, however, have no real responsibility for production and all the time in the world to build their systems in the air. Marx said that:

“In direct contrast to German philosophy, ... we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive .... We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process, we demonstrate the development of ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. ... Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness thus no longer retain the semblance of independence.”<sup>14</sup>

### Semblance of independence

It is exactly this semblance of independence, which lies at the root of all misconceptions of ‘Art’.

Marx has an answer to the question:

“*Why the ideologists turn everything upside down. Clergymen, jurists, politicians ... (statesmen in general), moralists. ...*

“*The occupation assumes an independent existence owing to the division of labour. ... Illusions regarding the connection of their craft with reality are the more likely to be cherished by them because of the very nature of their craft.*”<sup>15</sup>

Because each man thinks with his own head, the illusion that such thoughts are his own can easily arise, but the fact, that each man has to talk with his own voice, does not have to give rise to the illusion that the language he uses is his own.

The artist as producer – the artist as a worker – has not interested Marx very much, but the fact that he is a specialist as an outcome of the division of labour is important, which in turn determines the resulting consciousness. What Marx said about every individual in *The German Ideology* (1845/6),

“My relation to my surroundings is my consciousness”,<sup>16</sup>

applies to the artist as well, and I requote:

“The material of my activity is given to me as a social product.”<sup>9</sup>

So it is given to the artist, who transforms the material by his social activity.

The work of art contains in itself the work and the idea; labour and thought are mutually dependent. The work of art arises in the world of social ideas and mediates a social idea through work by manual labour.

### Theory of reality

The next problem is an exceedingly difficult problem, because it raises the question of Marx’s theory of knowledge.

In his second thesis on *Feuerbach* (1845), Marx says:

“The question whether human thought corresponds to objective truth, is not a question of theory but a question of *praxis*. In *praxis* man has to prove the truth ... the reality and power ... of his thought. The argument about the reality or unreality of thought – isolated from *praxis* – is a purely *scholastic* question.”<sup>17</sup>

The question is an old one: “Can we know reality”? I would not have raised that question here if it did not concern – by implication – the subject of art.

One of the most important statements made by Marx has remained relatively unknown – it can be found in the 1857 *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (not to be confused with the *Preface* of 1859.) There Marx develops a theory of reality in which the relation of thought and objects is reconciled, in a very modern way – as different forms of the same reality:

“The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of many determinations, thus a unity of the diverse. In thinking, it therefore appears as process of summing-up, as a result, not as the starting point, although it is the real starting point and thus also the starting point of perception and conception. ... Hence to the kind of consciousness ...

which regards the comprehending mind as the real man, and only the comprehended world as such as the real world ... this is ... true in so far as the concrete totality regarded as a conceptual reality, as a mental concretion, is, IN FACT, a product of thinking, of comprehension; yet it is by no means a product of the self-evolving concept whose thinking proceeds outside and above perception and conception, but of the assimilation and transformation of perceptions and images into concepts.”<sup>18</sup>

This exactly distinguishes Marx’s thought from idealism.

“The totality as a conceptual totality seen by the mind is a product of the thinking mind, which assimilates the world in the only way open to it, a way which differs from the artistic-, religious- and practical-intellectual assimilation of this world.”<sup>18</sup>

Marx implies that the reality man appropriates is the sum of its comprehensions – including the artistic – but though each one is differently constructed and apprehended, they together form a totality. Marx here accepts the whole range of an artistic appropriation of reality next to the many other possible forms of comprehending reality, which, however, never loses its materiality but is comprehended in different aspects.

In *Capital* he said that

“it is easier to find an earthly source for misty creations – than the correspondingly celestialised forms of these relations”,<sup>6</sup>

insisting (in *The German Ideology*) that

“the phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life process.”<sup>8</sup>

There is no accounting for the shape of the “forms” of these phantoms, except to say that forms are a necessity of symbolisation. But how exactly such forms arise in society, and how they are connected with the modes of production, he had not found the time to elucidate. In the preface to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, Marx promised that:

“I shall issue ... the critique of law, ethics, politics etc, in a series of distinct independent pamphlets.”<sup>19</sup>

Whenever Marx in this context says “etc”, he means art and religion as well. The separate pamphlets were never written.

### The power of ideas

But Marx was very aware of the need for such a critique:

“It will be found that the interconnection between political economy and the state, law, ethics, civil life etc, is touched on in the present work only to the extent to which political economy itself ... touches on these subjects.”<sup>19</sup>

Ten years after the death of Marx, Engels in 1893 wrote a very important letter to Franz Mehring, where he says, that neither he nor Marx ever found the time to complete the edifice:

“One important point is missing ... we are all equally guilty ... we all have put ... the main emphasis ... on the *derivation* of political, legal and other ideological concepts

... on the economic facts *and we had to do that*. But we have neglected to deal with the way in which such concepts etc arise.”

He tries to make up for this omission in a brief paragraph:

“Ideology is a process which is, it is true, carried out consciously by what we call a thinker, but with a consciousness that is spurious. The actual motives by which he is impelled remain hidden from him, for otherwise it would not be an ideological process. Hence the motives which he supposes himself to have are either spurious or illusory. Because it is a mental process, he sees both its substance and its form as deriving solely from thought – either his own or that of his predecessors. He works solely with conceptual material which he automatically assumes to have been engendered by thought without enquiring whether it might not have some more remote origin unconnected therewith; indeed, he takes this for granted since, to him, all action is *induced* by thought, and therefore appears in the final analysis to be *motivated* by thought. ...

“What has above all deluded the majority of people is this semblance of an independent history .... We have all, I believe, neglected this aspect of the matter... to a greater extent than it deserves. ... [B]ecause we deny independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a role in history, [it is claimed that] we also deny them any *historical efficacy*.”<sup>20</sup>

In brief, Engels, on behalf of Marx, denies that they ever underrated the effectiveness of mere ideas. What they denied, was their origin in vacuo. Ideas are according to Marx so effective, that, to quote him:

“A theory becomes material force when it takes hold of the masses.”<sup>21</sup>

No idealist has ever given such power to mere ideas.

## SECTION II

### A statement on art

The best known statement by Marx on art has given rise to a vast body of commentary.

In the *Introduction to the Critique* of 1857, Marx in a very sketchy way – really in notes for himself – gives as a heading: “The unequal relation of the development of material production, eg artistic production.”<sup>22</sup> This is one of the questions he had regretted not having been able to elucidate:

“It is well known that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connection with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organisation. Witness the example of the Greeks as compared with the modern nations. ... As regards certain forms of art, as, eg, epic poetry, it is admitted that they can never be produced in the world-epoch-making form as soon as art as such comes into existence; in other words, that in the domain of art certain important forms of it are possible only at a low stage of its development. If that be true of the mutual relations of different forms of art *within the domain of art itself*, ... it is far less surprising that the same is true of the relation of art as a whole to the general development of society. ...

“It is a well known fact that Greek mythology was not only the arsenal of Greek art, but also the very ground from which it had sprung. Is the view of nature and social relations which shaped Greek imagination and Greek [art] possible in the age of automatic machinery, and railways, and locomotives, and electric telegraphs? Where does Vulcan come in as against Roberts & Co; Jupiter, as against the lightning rod; and Hermes, as against the Credit Mobilier? All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination; hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature. What becomes of the Goddess Fama side by side with Printing House Square? ...

“But the difficulty is not in grasping the idea that Greek art and epic poetry are bound up with certain forms of social development. It rather lies in understanding why they still constitute with us a source of aesthetic enjoyment and in certain respects prevail as the standard and model beyond attainment. ...

“Why should the social childhood of mankind, where it had obtained its most beautiful development, not exert eternal charm as an age that will never return? ...

“The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the primitive character of the social order from which it had sprung.”<sup>23</sup>

The question receives no real answer: the “eternal charm of an age that will never return” is an endearing thought, but it isn’t Marxism – simply because the word “eternal” is not in the Marxist vocabulary.

### Dual character of the concept of ideology

Marx, as we know, was himself the gifted and highly educated son of a bourgeois family. He was steeped in the classics, he wrote his doctoral thesis on Democritus and Epicurus, he shared the common property of classical Greece with the German *Bildungsbürgertum* – an untranslatable word describing that section of the German bourgeoisie which sought in education and knowledge its mode of social advancement against an entrenched aristocracy. The cultural heritage took the place of ancient lineage – in the ideological function of the ‘knowledge of art’ as an ‘educated’ possession. The ghost of art appears to Marx not as ghostlike but real.

The work of art has two distinct histories: the first is the history of the making of the work of art – the second is the history of the surviving object and its reception, when it has shed its function and enters the world as art.

Marx failed to see that what he calls “charm” is really prestige, and that the prestige of Greek antiquity, be it in art, philosophy, drama, civilisation, had been deliberately maintained – that he himself was, for once, the victim of a cultural assumption.

What had puzzled him when he asked the question of Greek art, was really the question of the ‘reception’ of art – its reception and thus survival through many generations and different modes of production. But Marx did not see that it was not the same thing which had survived, it had lost its content, only the form remained – beautiful as it was. What it had lost was its living function and its place in the class struggle.

The work of art thus deceives us; by its attractive presence it obscures its mostly less attractive function.

From its inception the work of art developed aesthetic qualities as the carrier of its message. The appeal to all the senses was an essential part of getting across the message,



which the work contained, to the victim, lost in admiration. Admiration, you might observe, places the admirer in a position of inferiority – it is he who looks up – this exactly is the idea, the spectator or believer is meant to be overawed, the work of art is a piece of establishment furniture, which makes it clear where power resides. Marx actually knew that art forms, especially when reused, are ideological disguises. In the *18th Brumaire* he writes that the:

“gladiators (of the bourgeoisie) found in the tradition of the Roman Republic the ideals and art forms, the self-deceptions, which they needed.”<sup>24</sup>

In a letter to Lassalle of July 22nd 1861, speaking about the dramatists under Louis XIV, he says:

“It is equally certain that they understood the Greeks exactly in the way which conformed to their own artistic needs and got stuck for a long time with so-called ‘classical’ drama.”<sup>25</sup>

Here Marx sees the re-use of Greek drama as an ideological necessity of a contemporary situation. He goes on:

“The misinterpreted form is just the general form which at a certain stage of historical development can be put to general use.”

This is very precise. The distinction between the original form and content, and the misinterpreted form for a new content, demonstrates the dual character of the concept of ideology.

In the first instance, the work of art honestly proclaims its ideological message. In its survival state, the original becomes a fake and a prop of what Marx calls “false consciousness”.

It is possible to throw more light on that much quoted passage by Marx on Greek art and his own innocent enjoyment of it, because he refers to the question again in a different context. In his studies on precapitalist economic formations, he contrasts capitalism with other, and better, forms of society in the past. I need not stress that Marx was not a backward-looking utopian, reaching for the golden age. But compared to capitalism, many earlier stages of social organisation seemed preferable. Marx has quite often a good word to say for patriarchal relations. Here he says:

“Thus the ancient conception in which man always appears ... as the aim of production, seems very much more exalted than the modern world, in which production is the aim of man, and wealth the aim of production.”<sup>26</sup>

Again he refers to Greece:

“Hence in one way the childlike world of the ancients appears to be superior, ... in so far as we seek for closed shape, form and established limitation.”<sup>27</sup>

It is a Marxian *cri de coeur* for social harmony.

Greek art is perfect, because it is in harmony not just in itself, but with the society. Here Marx refers to Greek art, not with an aesthetic but with a revolutionary bias:

“The Ancients provide a narrow satisfaction, whereas the modern world leaves us unsatisfied, or where it appears to be satisfied with itself, vulgar and mean.”<sup>27</sup>

## SECTION III

### Production and consumption of art

There are some interesting comments on the dialectics of the production and consumption of art. In the modern world the production of art creates, like any other commodity, its own market:

“Production does not only furnish the material for a need, it also furnishes the need for the material. ... The work of art – exactly as any other product – creates a public with a sense of art capable of enjoying beauty. ... Production does not only create an object for a subject – but also the subject for the object.”<sup>28</sup>

In short, the object once created becomes a need of the consumer:

“consumption produces the *predisposition* of the producer ...”<sup>28</sup>

The concept that human gifts (predispositions – *Ed*) are the product of social labour is central to Marx. The craftsman might still appear to display social skills, but the individual artist – the new artist whom Leonardo proclaimed – appears to be unique and a self-willed creator.

In *The German Ideology* there is one interesting passage in Marx’s polemic against Stirner, who imagines that Raphael has created his works independently, so to say as a genius. Marx argues:

“Raphael, as much as any other artist, was conditioned by the technical progress of art, by the organisation of society, and the division of labour in ... his locality. ... Whether an individual like Raphael can develop his talent, depends on the demand, which again depends on the division of labour and the resulting state of culture.

“Stirner stands well below the viewpoint even of the bourgeoisie, by proclaiming the uniqueness of scientific and artistic work.”<sup>29</sup>

It is in this context, that he states:

“The exclusive concentration of artistic talent in the unique individual, and with that the corollary of the suppression of talent in the masses, is a consequence of the division of labour. Even if in certain historic conditions, everyone could be an excellent painter, this need not exclude also being an original painter.”<sup>30</sup>

Marx considers the artist as a man of talent – not genius – whose talent, if needed, will develop, and even originality will become a social and not a personal gift. Marx is equally aware that creative activity is hard work, but he puts it the other way round:

“Work is a positive, creative activity.”<sup>31</sup>

“Really free labour – the composing of music, for example – is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort.”<sup>32</sup>

He says this in an argument against Adam Smith, who had stated that “work is always a burden”.

In capitalism the artist as producer plays a dual role, because he can now be hired for the production not only of “ideas” but of “surplus value”. In his *Theories of Surplus Value* (1862-63) Marx says:

“A writer is a productive worker not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches ... the publisher, in so far as he is working for a wage.”<sup>33</sup>

Marx defines labour not by its content or result, but by the social form in which it appears:

“Production cannot be separated from the act of production, as with all performing artists, orators, actors, teachers, doctors, clergymen. ... To the audience the actor appears as an artist, to his employer as a *productive* worker.”<sup>34</sup>

He really argues against Monsieur Henri Storch (*Cours d'économie politique* etc, 1823), who had separated material production from mental production.

Having shown the dual character of the artist in the production of surplus value and the production of his art, Marx says:

“All the manifestations of capitalist production in these fields (art, theatre) are so insignificant compared to the totality of production, that they can be totally ignored.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Ideological role of the artist**

But whilst the economic importance of the artist in capitalist society is insignificant, his ideological role is not. The last refuge of bourgeois arguments for the perpetuation of class difference is the argument that:

“one class is needed to do the work, so that another class can look after the mental needs of society”,

as Engels put it in *The Housing Question* (1872-73).<sup>35</sup>

And here the artist, or rather the image of the artist, is still being used as one of the main props of that assumption; and he plays, whether he likes it or not, his part in the class struggle.

Engels says in his *Preface to the 18th Brumaire* (1885):

“the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles of social classes.”<sup>36</sup>

This is the basic assumption on which all thoughts of Marx and Engels have to be understood.

## **SECTION IV**

### **In communist society**

There is one more question – what will happen when the class struggle is over? What will happen to the artist and art in a future society?

Engels hopes that one day the monopoly of the ruling class in the arts, science, manners and education will become “the common property of society as a whole.”<sup>35</sup> This, I think, is the accepted view of socialists, and the line taken in socialist

countries today.

That “the exclusive concentration of artistic talent in a few individuals and its consequent suppression in the large masses is the result of the division of labour,”<sup>30</sup> Marx and Engels had jointly said in *The German Ideology*.

“In communist society where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity ... each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society ... makes it possible for me ... to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and criticise after dinner ... , without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.”<sup>37</sup>

“In a communist organisation of society there will be no more painters but only men who ... also paint.”<sup>30</sup>

But in the *Grundrisse* Marx really goes much further than that! When

“the surplus labour of the masses has ceased to be a condition for the development of wealth ... in the same way that the non-labour of the few has ceased to be a condition for the development of the general powers of the human mind ... all members of society can develop their education in the arts, sciences etc, thanks to the free time and means available to all.”<sup>38</sup>

“Free time ... naturally transforms anyone who enjoys it into a different person, and it is a different person who then enters the direct process of production.”<sup>39</sup>

In this direct process of production the distinction between the producer and the consumer of art will abolish itself.

### **Communist men and women**

It is this new man in communism with whom Marx is concerned:

“what is wealth if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc, of individuals ... if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions ... the evolution of all human powers as such unmeasured by any previously established yardstick.”<sup>40</sup>

Marx summarises the past and the future history of man becoming man in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844:

“... it is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man's essential powers, ... that all objects become for him the *objectification of himself*, become objects which confirm and realise his individuality. ...”

I quote this extract from a long, and possibly the most difficult passage in all Marx – on alienation and the human essence, because it leads him to the aesthetic question, aesthetic in the full sense – the appropriation of the world by the senses and man's relation to the object:

“... the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as *my* senses go ... for this reason the senses of the social man are other senses than those of the non-social man.”<sup>41</sup>

Man has been made by his own labour which is also his own history.

“... The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire

history of the world down to the present.”<sup>42</sup>

In this formation of the senses and the sensitivities, the work of art, a product of man’s labour, becomes an instrument of his self-definition:

“through the actual concrete material unfolding richness of the *human* essence, will the wealth of subjective human sensibilities, with a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, senses, capable of enjoyment, senses, which act as human powers, be developed and created.”<sup>41</sup>

Man thus defines and creates himself by his developing powers of appropriating the world sensuously and aesthetically.

Marx’s faith in the historic perfectability of the human species knows no bounds:

“... All history is the preparation for ‘*man*’ to become the object of sensuous consciousness and for the needs of ‘man as man’ to become (natural, sensuous) needs.”<sup>43</sup>

### Art and life become one

The experience of all the senses will become the human condition: “... when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away ....”<sup>26</sup> Only then will man fully possess his own essence and his world. We cannot even begin to understand that new man, because:

“Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided, that an object only becomes one when we *own* it.”<sup>44</sup>

Thus the idea of “possessing” art, in the form of knowledge or ownership, is the only one we have, because:

“... in place of *all* physical and mental senses through the alienation of *all* these senses, the sense of *ownership* has taken their place.”<sup>44</sup>

Only when private property has been abolished, when man has overcome the alienation from his true essence, will he be in full possession of his humanity. In that state of perfection Art as such will be superseded, as Art and Life will have become one.

### Notes and references

[Hans Hess worked largely from German texts, and frequently used his own translations. Here his citations to the German texts have been replaced by those to the modern-day English language published versions; however, Hans’s translations have been retained in the text, except (as indicated) for those cases where the published translation gives greater clarity. Duplication in endnotes has also been removed –Ed.]

- 1 Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 35, p 45.
- 2 Engels, *Karl Marx’s Funeral*, in *MECW*, Vol 24, pp 267-8. [HH quotes the phrase “celestialised reflexes of social life” –Ed.]
- 3 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, ‘I: Feuerbach’, in *MECW*, Vol 5, pp 53-4.
- 4 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: ‘Preface’, in *MECW*, Vol 29, p263; also in K Marx and F Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes (MESW)*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 5th edn, 1962, p 363.
- 5 Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *MECW*, Vol 11, p 128; also in *MESW*, p 272.
- 6 *Capital*, Vol 1, *op cit*, p 375.
- 7 *German Ideology*, ‘I: Feuerbach’, *op cit*, p 44.

- 8 *Ibid*, p 36.
- 9 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (EPM)*, in *MECW*, Vol 3, p 298; also Progress Publishers edn, Moscow, 1961, p 104.
- 10 Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy (OCPE)* [1st Instalment], ‘Chapter on Money’, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 99.
- 11 *German Ideology*, ‘I: Feuerbach’, *op cit*, pp 44-5.
- 12 *Ibid*, p 59; a small amount of additional text inserted here for clarity –Ed.
- 13 *Ibid*, p 60.
- 14 *Ibid*, pp 36-7.
- 15 *Ibid*, p 92 [For clarity, HH’s translation has been replaced by that in the *MECW* –Ed].
- 16 As note 7 – “words crossed out in MS”.
- 17 Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *MECW*, Vol 5, pp 3, 6.
- 18 *OCPE* [1st Instalment], *op cit*, ‘Introduction’, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 38.
- 19 *EPM*, *op cit*, in *MECW*, Vol 3, p 231; also Progress edn, p 15.
- 20 Engels, *Letter to Franz Mehring*, 14.07.1893, in *MECW*, Vol 50, pp 164-5 [For clarity, the second and third paragraphs of HH’s translation have been replaced by the text in the *MECW* –Ed].
- 21 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction*, in *MECW*, Vol 3, p 182.
- 22 *OCPE* [1st Instalment], *op cit*, ‘Introduction’, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 46.
- 23 *Ibid*, pp 46-8 [minor alterations made to translation, for clarity –Ed].
- 24 *18th Brumaire*, *op cit*, in *MECW*, Vol 11, p 104.
- 25 Marx, *Letter to Ferdinand Lassalle*, 22 July 1861, in *MECW*, Vol 41, p 318.
- 26 *OCPE* [1st Instalment], *op cit*: ‘Chapter on Capital’, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 411; also in K Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1964, p 84.
- 27 *Ibid (MECW)*, p 412.
- 28 *OCPE* [1st Instalment], *op cit*: ‘Introduction’, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 30 [HH’s translation had “gifts” instead of “predisposition” –Ed].
- 29 *German Ideology*, ‘I: The Leipzig Council; 3. Saint Max’, in *MECW*, Vol 5, pp 393-4 [the *MECW* translation uses “determined” instead of “conditioned” –Ed].
- 30 *Ibid*, p 394.
- 31 *OCPE* [1st Instalment], ‘*Capital*’, *op cit*, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 432; also in K Marx, *Grundrisse*, D MacLellan, ed, Macmillan, London, 1971, p 126.
- 32 *Ibid*, p 530 (*MECW*, Vol 28), p 124 (*Grundrisse*).
- 33 Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, in *MECW*, Vol 31, p 14, and in Progress Publishers edn of that title, Moscow, 1978, Vol 1, p 158.
- 34 Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, in *MECW*, Vol 34, p 144; also in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Progress, *op cit*, p 144.
- 35 Engels, *The Housing Question*, Part I, in *MECW*, Vol 23, p 325; also Progress Publishers edn of that title, 1970, pp 24-5.
- 36 Engels, *Preface to the 3rd German Edition of the ‘18th Brumaire’*, in *MECW*, Vol 45, p 303; also in *MESW*, Vol 1, p 246.
- 37 *German Ideology*, ‘I: Feuerbach’, *op cit*, p 47.
- 38 Marx, *OCPE* [2nd Instalment]: Chapter on ‘Capital’, in *MECW*, Vol 29, p 91; also in *Grundrisse*, *op cit*, p 142.
- 39 *Ibid*, p 97 (*MECW*, Vol 29), p 148 (*Grundrisse*).
- 40 *OCPE* [1st Instalment], ‘Capital’, *op cit*, in *MECW*, Vol 28, pp 411-2; also in *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, *op cit*, p 84.
- 41 *EPM*, *op cit*, in *MECW*, Vol 3, p 301; also Progress edn, p 107 [HH had “the sense of an object” in the first line –Ed].
- 42 *Ibid*, p 302 (*MECW*, Vol 28), p 108 (Progress).
- 43 *Ibid*, p 303 (*MECW*, Vol 28), p 111 (Progress).
- 44 *Ibid*, p 300 (*MECW*, Vol 28).

150th anniversary of the publication of Marx's *Das Kapital*

# Marx's *Capital* and Capitalism Today

## Part 3: The Communist Mode of Production

Rob Griffiths



The first part of this article (CR84, Summer 2017, pp 22-31) introduced the main findings of Volume I of Marx's *Capital*, showing that the concentration and centralisation described by Marx had led over the course of time to monopoly and domination by finance capital. Part 2 (CR86, Winter 2017/2018, pp 22-30) dealt with a number of other topics from both Volumes I and III, in particular the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and “fictitious capital”, while also examining Keynesianism, neoliberalism, globalisation and financialisation. Part 3 looks at: (i) what Marx's *Capital* has to say about communism; (ii) attempts to build socialism in practice, particularly in the Soviet Union and China; and (iii) the role for cooperatives in building socialism.

### Marx and the future

There is no single, comprehensive outline in the three volumes of *Capital* of the kind of society that could or should replace capitalism. Instead, there are fragmentary glimpses.

In Volume I, Marx imagined “a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour power of the community”. Their total product would be divided between the portion that comprises fresh means of production, which remain social, and that which comprises the means of subsistence, which are consumed individually. On what basis would the latter be distributed? Marx indicated (although it was for the sake of drawing a parallel) that the share of each individual producer would be determined by their labour time.<sup>80</sup>

This prefigures the standpoint in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), namely, that in the period immediately

‘Only in the higher phase of communist society, Marx insisted, when labour has been transformed, when the individual has developed comprehensively and the productive forces have increased so that “all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly”, only then can communist society proclaim: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”

following communist society’s emergence from capitalism, when it is “economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society”, each worker will be paid in proportion to the labour they have performed. Only in the higher phase of communist society, Marx insisted, when labour has been transformed, when the individual has developed comprehensively and the productive forces have increased so that “all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly”, only then can communist society proclaim: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”<sup>81</sup>

In this imagined communist society, Marx proposes in Volume I of *Capital*, there would be none of the “useless labour” and “outrageous squandering of labour power” that characterises capitalism’s “anarchical system of competition”. Instead, labour time would be carefully planned and apportioned in accordance with society’s requirements. This would not necessarily mean reducing the working day by eliminating all of the hours previously spent performing surplus labour for the capitalists. Firstly, rising living standards would require an increase in society’s labour time in order to produce the increased means of subsistence now regarded as essential. Secondly, what was once “surplus labour” (performed for the benefit of the capitalist) would become “necessary labour” (for the benefit of society) needed to form and maintain the “fund for reserve and accumulation”.<sup>82</sup> For Marx, only by increasing the intensity and productivity of labour would it become possible to shorten the working day.

In Volume I, too, he wrote in a footnote that “in a communistic society there would be a very different scope for the employment of machinery than there can be in a bourgeois society”.<sup>83</sup> This is because under capitalism the introduction of labour-saving machinery might put so many people out of work, thereby cheapening the price of labour power, as to make it unnecessary if not impossible to continue doing. In any event, employing labour – especially women and children – can sometimes be cheaper than mechanisation.

In his *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58*, Marx had drawn the contrast between the introduction of machinery under capitalism and its introduction under communism more explicitly, pointing out that in the latter case greater productivity should mean more free time for the worker to enjoy “leisure and higher activity”. Thus the ultimate objective should be to raise the mode of production to a higher form in which labour time and free time are not, as seen by

bourgeois political economy, in conflict with one another.<sup>84</sup> Machines would be no longer be an alien, dominating force over living labour, but the “property of the associated workers”, the new mode of production having changed the mode of distribution of the ownership of machinery.<sup>85</sup>

In Volume II, Marx conceived of a communist society where there will be no money-capital, which acts as a cloak for the transactions by which capital exploits labour. Instead, society will need to “calculate beforehand how much labour, means of production, and means of subsistence it can invest, without detriment, in such lines of business as for instance the building of railways, which do not furnish any means of production or subsistence, nor produce any useful effect for a long time, a year or more, while they extract labour, means of production and means of subsistence from the total annual production”.<sup>86</sup> In capitalist society, on the other hand, there is both a reluctance in the money market to provide the necessary capital and the wild speculation with borrowed money that has proved disastrous in the past. Indeed, a “band of speculators, contractors, engineers, lawyers, etc., enrich themselves”.<sup>87</sup> Investment capital for other branches becomes scarce as wages initially rise along with food prices, imports and yet more speculative profiteering. It might be noted that today, most capital investment in the railway industries – even the largely privatised ones – of the most developed capitalist economies takes place under state direction and control.

In Volume I, Marx made the point that a surplus of production of Department I commodities (means of production for use in both departments) is usually desirable, not least to hold in reserve in the event of extraordinarily destructive accidents or natural disasters. “This sort of overproduction”, he maintained, “is tantamount to control by society over the material means of its own reproduction”. However, such an excess under capitalist production is an “evil” and an “element of anarchy”, which “spells crisis”.<sup>88</sup> This echoes the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), where Marx and Engels had referred to “an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of overproduction”.<sup>89</sup> What would have been a cause for celebration in earlier types of society is a cause of crisis under capitalism!

In Volume III, Marx emphasised the importance of planning so that society’s labour time is not wasted on commodities for which there is not sufficient demand for them to sell at a price approximating to their value:



Maslennikov Fabrika Kukhnya kitchen factory in Samara, built in the early 1930s to a hammer and sickle plan

“It is only where production is under the actual, predetermining control of society that the latter establishes a relation between the volume of social labour time applied in producing definite articles, and the volume of the social want to be satisfied by these articles.”<sup>90</sup>

In the final part of Volume III, Marx considers how capitalism creates the conditions that make possible a higher form of society. In reproducing the relations of production between the capitalist class and the working class, capitalism pumps surplus labour out of the workers, enabling a stratum of society to enjoy its idleness. This surplus value is required not only as an insurance against accidents, but also in order to expand reproduction to develop and meet the needs of a growing population. While the capitalists see this process in terms of accumulation and profit, objectively it is also “one of the civilising aspects of capital” that it enforces surplus labour in such a way as to develop society’s productive forces:

“Thus it gives rise to a stage, on the one hand, in which coercion and monopolisation of social development (including its material and intellectual advantages) by one portion of society at the expense of the other are eliminated; on the other hand, it creates the material means and embryonic conditions, making it possible in a higher form of society to combine this surplus labour with a greater reduction of time devoted to material labour in general.”<sup>91</sup>

Marx then waxed lyrical about the “realm of freedom” made possible by the higher productivity of surplus labour in this new society with its new relations of production. Working together, the associated producers (“socialised man”) would rationally regulate their relations with one another and with the forces of nature instead of being ruled by them. In conditions that are worthy of their human nature, they would produce all that is necessary, but with the least waste of human energy. On the basis of necessity, a new realm of freedom will blossom and “the shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite”.<sup>92</sup>

### **The Soviet Union and the Law of Value**

Thirty-four years after the death of Marx, the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917 heralded the abolition of capitalism and a transition to socialism. Did it lead to the construction of a communist mode of production as defined, albeit only in broad outline, by Marx?

Certainly, Lenin and the ruling Communist Party claimed to have built a socialist system, using the term “socialism” – in the style of Engels – as synonymous with the lower stage of communism, the new system which emerges from the womb of capitalism.

After the New Economic Policy was dismantled, the collectivisation of agriculture and the first Five Year Plan from 1928 effectively put an end to generalised commodity production for market sale. The central plan and its subsidiary plans decided what and how much would be produced and at what price the products would be exchanged, whether as means of production – usually by prior contract – or means of consumption. Market demand played no independent role in determining such matters. Secondly, the means of production were almost wholly taken into social ownership by the state in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Thirdly, labour power was no longer a commodity to be bought because it produces surplus value for the capitalist. It was

employed by the state, at each level, in order to perform the necessary and surplus labour deemed so essential by Marx.

That this transition from one mode of production to another was carried out in conditions which limited the possibilities for mass-scale participative democracy and workers’ control, and on a basis of relative technological backwardness, does not negate the profound significance of the changes that took place. Political deficiencies in the ways in which state power was exercised can be combined with selected quotations from Marx to question whether this new system was, indeed, “socialism”. But economically, from the standpoint of *Capital*, it most certainly was.

In particular, controversy continues around the question of whether Marx’s Law of Value operated in the Soviet Union. The debate ignited by Yevgeni Preobrazhensky and Nikolai Bukharin in the 1920s was later joined by Che Guevara, Ernest Mandel and others. According to this theory, commodities are exchanged in the market at prices which broadly reflect their value in terms of the average socially necessary labour time taken to produce them. This includes the surplus labour time which creates surplus value which is, as Marx put it in *Capital* Vol III, the “immediate purpose and compelling motive of capitalist production”.<sup>93</sup> This is the basis on which decisions about employment, investment and production are taken under capitalism.

Stalin pointed out in 1952 that the Law of Value operated only to a strictly limited extent in the Soviet Union, tightly constrained by the small size of commodity production for the market – chiefly of commodities for personal consumption – and the absence of private ownership of the means of production. In Department I, while the Law of Value was taken into account when it came to production costs, accounting, profitability and pricing, it did not perform a regulatory role.<sup>94</sup> The key decisions about the allocation and deployment of resources, wages, prices and net revenue (or profit) margins were set by the state planning authorities, in accordance with the social, economic and political (not least the military) priorities decided by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Almost all prices were fixed or capped – for 5-15 year periods in the case of Department I – irrespective of changes in cost, supply or demand. While differential pricing between industrial and agricultural products eased after the 1930s, it persisted until at least the agricultural price hikes of 1953-54, while almost one-quarter of all collective farms still needed state-subsidised life-support in the mid-1960s. Levels of turnover tax and state subsidy also helped determine most price levels, with the former frequently varied in an effort to match retail sales to the plans. Following prime minister Kosygin’s economic reforms announced in 1965, capital charges on assets were introduced and prices of most primary industrial products (oil, iron ore, coal, metals and timber) rose sharply. All this meant that most prices bore little relation to labour-time values.<sup>95</sup>

Here is not the place for a detailed assessment of the performance, strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet Union’s economy or those of the socialist states of Eastern Europe (which differed substantially from one another in structure and policies). But it was the case that Soviet growth rates were consistently higher than those of the USA and Western Europe from 1950 until the end of the 1960s; Eastern Europe less consistently so. Soviet growth then became more erratic during the 1970s, falling behind the USA, France and – albeit narrowly – West Germany, although not behind Britain. The

socialist economies of Eastern Europe actually grew faster during the 1970s than those of France, West Germany, Britain, the USA and even Italy (although not Japan). In the decade before the collapse and counter-revolution began in 1989, the Soviet economy was outstripping Western Europe until 1984, while Eastern Europe held its own until 1987 before dipping steeply into recession, soon followed by the Soviet Union.<sup>96</sup>

Of course, in any international comparisons it should be borne in mind that the Soviets were measuring mostly tangible output and closely related services, with no significant 'output' from financial, commercial and property services. If we consider industrial production alone, for example, the Soviet Union's share of world output rose steadily from 4.9% in 1938 to 11.1% in 1966 and 14.2% in 1979, before levelling off; over the post-war period between 1948 and 1979, the US share fell by more than a third, Britain's halved while the rest of Western Europe remained more or less constant.<sup>97</sup>

### Theories of "state capitalism"

Planning and managing the Soviet Union's vast, interconnected, expanding economy proved to be an enormous, complex task. Problems of resource allocation, capital accumulation, investment, productivity and incentive recurred in different forms despite an often bewildering array of mechanisms and initiatives.

Furthermore, the transformation of surplus labour into fresh and additional means of production had to be a transparent process, undisguised by prices and the wages system. A combination of consent and coercion by various means was regarded as necessary on the part of the CPSU, the state, managers and even the trades unions.

This provided the pretext for sections of the left in the imperialist countries to abandon the often difficult responsibility of defending – however critically – the Soviet Union and the socialist states against an enormous, relentless anti-communist, anti-Soviet offensive. Whether in the adventurous, idealist traditions of Trotsky or Mao, some theorists developed an analysis that characterised the Soviet Union not as a society building socialism, but as a 'deformed' or 'degenerate' workers' state, stuck in the transition to socialism. Insofar as these critiques are solely or primarily concerned with the exercise of state power, they fall outside the scope of this article.

However, the theory which characterised the Soviet system as one of 'state capitalism' claims to be based on Marxist political economy in general, and *Capital* in particular, and so merits some attention. Whether in its semi-Trotskyist, Maoist or anarchist manifestations, this theory holds that the CPSU leadership and its apparatchiks took the place of the capitalist class in exploiting the labour power of the working class. A new bureaucratic ruling class or elite commanded the means of production and used its political power to maximise the extraction of surplus labour/value from the working class in accordance with capitalist imperatives, not least the accumulation of capital.

Although he was not the first to make a substantial case for the 'state capitalism' theory on ostensibly Marxist grounds, Tony Cliff's 1948 article, reworked as *State Capitalism in Russia* (1955 and 1974) has had the biggest impact over time, at least in Britain.<sup>98</sup> In it, Cliff portrayed the workers in Soviet Russia as defenceless, atomised, set against each other (by Nazi-style piece-work!), subordinate from 1928 to the means

of production and to capital accumulation (through "unprecedented brutality"), and poverty-stricken despite leaps in labour productivity. He dealt mostly in workers' net wages and largely discounted the growing and substantial 'social wage' paid through free and universal healthcare, education, transport and other services provided to the Russian people for the first time in their history. He pointed out that the armaments industry occupied a decisive place in Russia's economic system – although it's not clear whether or to what extent Cliff approved of the Soviet state's efforts to protect itself from capitalist fascism and imperialism in the run-up to World War Two. His contention that a "Stalinist bureaucracy" carried out a counter-revolution in 1928, and that this "political expropriation of the working class is thus identical with its economic expropriation", rests on a bed of purest sophistry, dragging Adam Smith, James Burnham and Nazi Germany (again!) into spurious comparisons. For Cliff, the "division of the total product of society among the different classes" not only persisted or, rather, was restored in the Soviet Union, based on the Marxist Law of Value: state monopoly ownership of the means of production, together with exploitation of the workers, also meant that dependence on that law had assumed its "purest, most direct and absolute form" in Stalinist Russia. (It should be noted that this was a counter-revolution of which most communists, socialists, workers and capitalists around the world in 1928 were entirely unaware).

Undaunted, Cliff pressed on to argue that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a class which represented "the extreme and pure personification of capital", although the Party and state officials had no entitlements to possess or pass on any economic assets at all. But they could bequeath their "connections", Cliff pointed out with breathtaking feebleness. Those who wielded political power and economic control in the Soviet system may have been able to divert and transform a very small portion of society's surplus labour into their own extra personal consumption, but this was an insignificant factor in economic decision-making and produced nothing like the levels of social inequality in capitalist society.

Cliff's divorce from the key concepts of *Capital* was complete when he dealt with the Law of Value in detail (in Chapter 7). There, he jumbled up and then re-labelled three distinct concepts: (1) 'state capitalism' as understood by Lenin, namely, direct state intervention in the capitalist economy through procurement, regulation or nationalisation; (2) 'state-monopoly capitalism', which Lenin defined as the fusion of the political power of the state with the economic power of the capitalist monopolies, as happened in the Great Imperialist War, characterising it as the "complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no intermediate rungs";<sup>99</sup> and (3) monopoly state ownership of society's means of production – what Lenin, along with Marx and Engels, would have recognised as the economic basis for the lower stage of communism, namely, socialism. Cliff then confined the term in (2) to describe a capitalist war economy (although militarism and war accelerate rather than define state-monopoly capitalism as a whole new stage in capitalist development); and transferred the term in (1) to concept (3), although they are separated by the Russian wall of a revolution, the transfer of state power from one class to another and the subsequent, near total, expropriation of the capitalist class.

Even more absurdly, in his desperation to claim that the Marxist Law of Value continued to operate more or less fully in the Soviet Union, Cliff drew a nonsensical analogy:

“The Stalinist state is in the same position vis-à-vis the total labour time of Russian society as a factory owner vis-à-vis the labour of his employees. In other words, the division of labour is planned. But what is it that determines the actual division of total labour time in Russian society? If Russia had not to compete with other countries, this division would be absolutely arbitrary. But as it is, Stalinist decisions are based on factors outside of control, namely the world economy, world competition. From this point of view the Russian state is in a similar position to the owner of a single capitalist enterprise competing with other enterprises.

“The rate of exploitation, that is, the ratio between surplus value and wages ( $s/v$ ), does not depend on the arbitrary will of the Stalinist government, but is dictated by world capitalism.”

The notion that the CPSU leadership (or the “Stalinist” state or bureaucracy) was in the same position as a factory owner is, of course, ludicrous. The Soviet economy was not one giant aggregated factory competing in a global capitalist market against rival capitalists, and thereby subject to the imperatives of capitalist accumulation, producing commodities for their exchange value in order to maximise surplus value, all basically in accordance with Marx’s theory of value. More than 90% of Soviet production was for home consumption, only half and often less than that was for any kind of market, and that was usually a market from which non-Soviet goods were excluded. The notion that Soviet domestic pricing policy was influenced by – let alone subject to – international capitalist market prices, for example, is not supported by any serious study. While it was the case, after the 1958 Bucharest Agreement, that trade between the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) countries was based on such prices, these were varied substantially through bilateral contracts. In any event, neither intra-COMECON nor wider international trade comprised more than a small proportion of Soviet economic activity (much less than 5% in total until the 1970s). Even towards the end, total foreign trade never accounted for more than 8% of Soviet GNP, and much of that was with other COMECON members or Third World countries on a non-competitive basis.

As though in recognition of his own theoretical confusion, Cliff also tried to explain how a system that was “really in permanent crisis” could conceal its true condition behind a mask of more or less permanent growth (albeit with cyclical slowdowns) and full employment. It could do so, he insisted, because it was in fact a “war economy” which occupied the opposite pole to socialism. This enabled the “Stalinist bureaucracy” to narrow the economic gap with the Western powers by pursuing an “imperialist policy” of expansion in order to “loot capital” and exploit the labour and natural resources of the Ukraine, the Caucasus, Rumania, Bulgaria, Manchuria etc, just as Japanese imperialism and Nazi Germany had done before.

Apart from being an odd way to characterise post-war reparations and the necessity for the Soviet state to defend itself against unremitting imperialist hostility, this utterly misrepresented COMECON arrangements – which helped

the East European economies to catch up with Soviet growth rates in the 1960s before overtaking them in the 1970s – and Soviet aid and solidarity policies. It also disregarded the negative impact of high military spending on civilian technology and investment, productivity and on the production of consumer goods. The CPSU leadership always regarded its defence preparations as a regrettable but necessary burden, rather than the means by which it could “loot” Russia’s neighbours.

Cliff’s work demonstrates how, in just about every single respect, state-capitalist theory failed to correspond to reality in the Soviet and other socialist COMECON economies, still less explain it. Charles Bettelheim’s three-volume Maoist analysis *Class Struggles in the USSR* (1974-82), now popular in some anarchist circles, likewise paid little attention to concrete realities and developments in the Soviet Union. Bettelheim philosophised tortuously against what he misnamed the “economism” of the CPSU leadership – or, rather, of a largely undefined “state bourgeoisie” – with its emphasis on public ownership of the means of production, the development of the forces of production (especially technology) and the capacity of both to transform the state, the working class and the peasantry in the direction of socialism. His work adds almost nothing to our knowledge or understanding of how the Soviet economy was organised, containing no new research to accompany its turgid, tendentious and superficial analysis.

In the Soviet Union and other fledgeling socialist economies, most goods were produced for their use value in the manner anticipated by Marx. Although, from time to time, the labour value of each product was calculated as an aid to accountancy and more efficient resource allocation and production, goods were not produced because they had an exchange value arising from the exploitation of labour power. Under capitalism, on the other hand, which goods will be produced and in what quantities is determined by their exchange value as commodities for sale in the market, where their surplus value can be realised. Of course, Marx noted in *Capital* Vol I, the capitalist will be praised as a “moral citizen” whose sole concern is to produce goods for their use value, for the benefit of society and the people in it. But the real motivation is to make a profit and reinvest much of it, with the intention of expanding its value.

“Use values must therefore never be looked upon as the real aim of the capitalist; neither must the profit on any single transaction. The restless never-ending process of profit-making alone is what he aims at. This boundless greed after riches, this passionate chase after exchange value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser. The never-ending augmentation of exchange value, which the miser strives after, by seeking to save his money from circulation, is attained by the more acute capitalist, by constantly throwing it afresh into circulation.”<sup>100</sup>

This production of exchange values rather than use values, in a system of generalised commodity production, is an essential feature of any kind of capitalism. So, it might be thought, is the presence of a class of capitalists who command the generalised production of commodities for their exchange value. None of this was the case in the Soviet Union.



## Socialism with Chinese characteristics?

Many of those on the far left who regard the former Soviet Union as 'state capitalist' also analyse the People's Republic of China and its economic basis in the same way, reaching the same conclusions. Indeed, they may believe that this characterisation has been amply borne out by the developments of recent decades. Interestingly, some champions of capitalism are equally keen to claim China's extraordinary economic and social advances for capitalism or – at the very least – for 'state capitalism'.

The questions therefore arise: is China's economy socialist? Has it ever been? Within a short time of the 1949 revolution, most industry and commerce in the cities and large towns had been nationalised and production was directed by the first Five Year Plan (1953-57). In what was largely a rural, semi-feudal society, the landowners were expropriated and agricultural and handicraft production taken over by village communes. Previously subjected to spectacular fits and starts, the process of industrialisation and technological progress accelerated enormously as a result of the "Reform and Opening Up" strategy adopted in 1978. Non-mainland Chinese and foreign capital was invited to establish enterprises in special coastal zones and has come to play a significant part in China's domestic economy, as major sources of advanced technology as well as investment and employment. Since the restructuring and consolidation reforms of 1993, state ownership has become concentrated in large enterprises with monopoly control retained in key sectors such as energy, transport, communications, armaments and finance.

Today, according to official statistics, what might be called the socialised sector (viz, enterprises designated as state- or collective-owned, cooperative, "joint ownership" and "state sole funded") account for 15% of all assets and 8% of revenues in China's domestic industrial economy, whereas private enterprises claim 42% and 57%, respectively. But two other categories – limited liability corporations (LLCs) and non-private share-holding corporations (SHCs) – control the balance of 43% of assets and 35% of revenues. These LLCs and SHCs are economic units with a mix of individual, private corporate and socialised sector investors or shareholders. The socialised interest is usually predominant, not least because of the powerful role played by the State Asset Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), which actively represents state shareholdings in all non-state enterprises to make sure that wider economic, social and environmental goals are fully taken into account. In effect, this means that around half of industry in China remains either socially owned or directly state-controlled. If we strip out non-Chinese owned companies, which account for 12% of assets and 13% of revenues, the socialised and state-controlled enterprises account for two-thirds of assets and half of all revenues.<sup>101</sup>

In the countryside, extensive reforms have transferred the larger share of agricultural and handicraft production, together with land-lease rights on the basis of social ownership, from village communes to households.

Various mechanisms are used – state ownership and shareholdings, state credit, direction of private investment, public sector contracts, licensing conditions for foreign transnational corporations (TNCs) etc – to ensure that all major economic operations assist or conform to the requirements of state policy and, in particular, the Five Year Plan. The current Thirteenth Plan (2016-20), like other most recent ones, sets out the main domestic priorities: economic growth in a small

number of metropolitan centres and across China's much poorer interior; the rapid spread of transport and communications links; the application of ecological principles and goals to all economic and social policies, not least in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability; more emphasis on efficient investment, bigger company surpluses, consumer-led production, higher wages and the ongoing alleviation of poverty; and all this on the basis of a long-term, constant, coordinated, innovation-driven and "medium-high" – very high by Western capitalist standards – level of growth in GDP.<sup>102</sup>

Beyond China, account must also be taken of the TNCs from mainland China that have made such a dramatic entry onto the globalisation stage. According to the Fortune Global 500 list, 98 of the world's biggest 500 TNCs in 2014 were Chinese (only the US has a larger number). Of these, no fewer than three-quarters (76) are state-owned, including the top twelve.<sup>103</sup>

The Chinese Communist Party (CPC) characterises its developmental model as a "socialist market economy" in which strategic public ownership and Communist Party rule are the decisive factors. The new General Programme of the CPC declares:

"China is currently in the primary stage of socialism and will remain so for a long time to come. This is a stage of history that cannot be by-passed as China, which used to be economically and culturally lagging, makes progress in socialist modernisation; it will take over a century."<sup>104</sup>

This is hardly a perspective without hazards and risks. Immediately after 1949, Chinese society faced the contradictions between its low level, largely pre-capitalist, forces of production and the CPC's aspirations for a society based on post-capitalist relations of production. There was little or nothing in Marx's *Capital* by way of theoretical guidance to help resolve those contradictions. The CPC had to proceed by trial, error and innovation. Today, its General Programme identifies the "principal contradiction" in Chinese society as that "between the ever-growing needs of the people for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development". Within this, as Chinese society's productive forces continue to grow rapidly and production relations have been transformed, a new and higher set of contradictions also arises: between the new Chinese capitalists and a new urban and industrial working class; between markets and centralised planning; and between Communist Party rule and narrow, 'economistic', perceptions of class interest within the capitalist and working classes. Naturally, these contradictions find some reflection within the CPC itself, as well as in the Chinese mass media and other aspects of society.

But before socialists and communists outside China rush to advice and judgement, they should study China and its recent history with some rigour, while also reflecting upon their own record when it comes to making revolutions and building socialism.<sup>105</sup>

## Cooperation and cooperatives

Marx attached great significance to the role that combined, social, labour plays in the development of capitalism's productive forces, helping to create the conditions and lay the foundations for the new, communist, mode of production. How could or should workers, freed from capitalist relations of production, continue to work in association with one another in the new sets of relations?

It is unfortunate that many would-be followers of Marx have allowed his critique of “utopian socialism” in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) to lead them to ignore or undervalue his subsequent remarks about producers’ and consumers’ cooperatives.

For instance, in a note in Volume I of *Capital*, Marx refers to Robert Owen’s cooperative factories and stores as “isolated elements of transformation”; they demonstrated how significant elements of capitalist production and exchange can be transformed although, as Owen but not his followers understood, cooperatives would not themselves overcome the capitalist mode of production – that was the mission of the working class.<sup>106</sup>

Furthermore, Marx points out in Volume III that, just as capitalist owners in their joint stock companies no longer directly supervise production themselves, hiring managers instead, so

“Cooperative factories furnish proof that the capitalist has become no less redundant as a functionary in production as he himself, looking down from his high perch, finds the big landowner redundant.”

Marx goes on to argue that

“in a cooperative factory the antagonistic nature of the labour of supervision disappears, because the manager is paid by the labourers instead of representing capital counterposed to them ... the capitalist disappears as superfluous from the production process”.<sup>107</sup>

Thus both cooperatives and joint stock companies exposed the reality that the capitalists’ wealth does not accrue from any work they might do in the production process, but from the profit and interest derived from surplus value created by the workers.

Most significantly of all, Marx saw in workers’ cooperatives glimpses of the future mode of production, in which cooperative labour could continue and flourish without capitalist ownership:

“The cooperative factories of the labourers themselves represent within the old form the first sprouts of the new, although they naturally reproduce, and must reproduce, everywhere in their actual organisation all the shortcomings of the prevailing system. But the antithesis between capital and labour is overcome within them, if at first only by way of making the associated labourers into their own capitalist, *ie* by enabling them to use the means of production for the employment of their own labour. They show how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one, when the development of the material forces of production and of the corresponding forms of social production have reached a particular stage. Without the factory system arising out of the capitalist mode of production there could have been no cooperative factories. Nor could these have developed without the credit system arising out of the same mode of production. The credit system is not only the principal basis for the gradual transformation of capitalist private enterprises into capitalist stock companies, but equally offers the means for the gradual extension of cooperative enterprises on a more or less national scale.”<sup>108</sup>

Later, Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) paid fulsome tribute to many of Owen’s ideas and activities, making a very specific point about cooperatives:

“He introduced as transition measures to the complete communistic organisation of society, on the one hand, cooperative societies for retail trade and production. These have since that time, at least, given practical proof that the merchant and the manufacturer are socially quite unnecessary. On the other hand, he introduced labour bazaars for the exchange of the products of labour through the medium of labour-notes, whose unit was a single hour of work; institutions necessarily doomed to failure, but completely anticipating Proudhon’s bank of exchange of a much later period, and differing entirely from this in that it did not claim to be the panacea for all social ills, but only a first step towards a much more radical revolution of society.”<sup>109</sup>

Lenin, too, grasped the potential value of cooperatives in the transition to socialism once state power had been achieved. They were no longer the stuff of “ridiculously fantastic” dreams of those who saw them as an alternative to the revolutionary class struggle for political power. Now near the end of his life, in 1923, he believed that state power, state control of all large-scale means of production and state supervision of private enterprise would be all that is needed to “build a complete socialist society out of cooperatives, out of cooperatives alone”.<sup>110</sup>

Although Lenin emphasised the need to enrol the mass of the peasantry into cooperatives, the collectivisation of agriculture from 1928 drew them into collective and state farms where they had little or no control of the enterprise. Land remained nationalised in Soviet Russia under the 1917 decree. Industrial cooperatives began to multiply in the mid-1920s, but they too were incorporated into the First Five Year Plan (1928-32) and its command system. While this substantially limited their autonomy, they were used to enrol private artisans. Even so, their membership across the Soviet Union never rose much above 2% of the total workforce and they were used extensively as a source of skilled labour for the state sector of industry.<sup>111</sup> Consumer cooperatives became part of the system of state stores in 1935, while remaining the predominant means of retail distribution in the countryside.

In most countries of eastern Europe, except Albania, cooperatives had risen to economic prominence in the period up to the Second World War, notably in agriculture. This also meant that, with the exception of Poland, authoritarian right-wing governments went to considerable lengths in efforts to control, corrupt or co-opt them.

In pre-war Czechoslovakia, there were more than 11,500 agricultural cooperatives including many involved in savings and credit, processing and manufacturing. After the 1948 revolution, the Unified Agricultural Cooperatives Act (1949) collectivised most of the land and, over the following 20 years, farm productivity caught up with the developed capitalist economies. Czechoslovakia’s dependency on food imports was brought to an end. In just five years, between 1954 and 1959, agricultural cooperative workers went from being 6% of the national workforce to 14%, while non-agricultural cooperative workers almost doubled to 2%.<sup>112</sup> However, until the early 1970s, the main beneficiaries of surplus labour in the countryside were the urban industrial workers and intelligentsia. By the 1980s, this transfer had been halted and the vast majority of agricultural workers (more than 70%) were employed in cooperatives, with only 15% on state farms and the remainder on private farms. Despite the inefficiencies of Czech agriculture’s socialist system – notably its lack of

incentives and heavy reliance on state subsidies – many cooperative members have resisted attempts by capitalist governments since the 1990s to abandon their cooperatives for the revived private sector.

The same is the case in Hungary, where cooperative farmers received extensive specialist education and technological assistance from the socialist state, while mostly working a standard 8-hour day over a 5-day week. Hungary's cooperative farms also enjoyed a large degree of autonomy under state control from the 1950s onwards.<sup>113</sup>

In Bulgaria, Communist-led state policy after 1944 was to encourage all agricultural cooperatives and, after the collectivisation of land use in 1949, award them an increasing share of arable land. In the absence of state farms, agricultural "labour cooperatives" grew in number from 382 in 1945 to 3,290 by 1958, occupying 93% of arable land. Then they were amalgamated in 1959 and, losing much of their autonomy, were turned into agro-industrial businesses in 1970, as the cooperators became waged employees.<sup>114</sup>

Housing cooperatives in Bulgaria accounted for more than one-third of house construction until the mid-1970s, when the state sector expanded rapidly before declining to previous levels in the 1980s. In war-torn Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, housing cooperatives were largely incorporated into the state sector in all but name, where the emphasis was on the quantity rather than the quality of new building. In Poland, where destruction was greatest, new forms of housing cooperatives were established by the socialist state power and given the central role in construction and management, supported by new savings, credit and social land ownership systems. By 1980, housing cooperatives accounted for 80% of house-building, while also collaborating with local authorities in the construction of many other community facilities. The whole system was abolished in 1990 as incompatible with the capitalist market system.<sup>115</sup>

In the GDR, the Workers' Housing Cooperatives Law (1954) led to workplace-based housing cooperatives producing between a third and a half of all dwellings in the early 1960s and the 1970s. However, coop members played a minimal role in policy-making, management and governance, while far-reaching reforms were aborted by counter-revolution in the early 1990s.<sup>116</sup> Artisan cooperatives were promoted in place of private self-employment to the extent that these were providing 36% of such services by 1962 – up from less than 2% just five years earlier. Such cooperatives producing industrial goods were nationalised in 1972.<sup>117</sup> Cooperative farms with their legal entitlement to land ownership were promoted as part of the post-war land expropriation programme, although these were increasingly absorbed into the state system from the 1960s.

In Yugoslavia, the socialist mode of production was characterised by the predominance of workers' self-managed enterprises within a state-controlled market economy. This allowed workers extensive control over the production, management and distribution of their own surplus value. On the negative side, however, it perpetuated at least some of the insecurity and crises of a capitalist economy while also exacerbating inequalities of income and wealth between the workforces, local communities, regions and nations of the Yugoslav federation. The decline and degeneration of centralised Communist Party political control helped create the basis for implosion and a calamitous civil war in the 1990s.

Marketisation, privatisation and the restitution of property to pre-socialist owners have, together with an end to state support, destroyed large swathes of the cooperative systems, particularly in artisan services and industry, and especially in Czechoslovakia and the GDR. While some capitalist regimes are attempting to revive their cooperative sectors, this is being done on a different economic, political and ideological basis.

At the same time, socialist experiments in cooperatism not only continue but are being reinvigorated in Cuba and China.

In the former, the cooperative farms that have existed since the 1959 revolution are now at the cutting edge of sustainable organic agriculture, producing a wide range of crops. Together with the innovations in state-backed urban farming, they have replaced Cuba's previous dependency on sugar exports to the Soviet Union. The recent economic liberalisation measures under President Raoul Castro have included not only licensing small-scale private enterprise, but also transforming hundreds of state-run services into democratic workers' cooperatives, owned and run by their members. While high levels of worker and consumer satisfaction are reported, the Cuban government has also found it necessary to combat a new problem – corporate tax evasion.

In China, the 1950 Law on Cooperatives, combined with tax and state credit assistance, hugely expanded the number of farming and marketing cooperatives to 19,000 by 1957. They accounted for one-quarter of agricultural production. But they were then converted into state farms. Since the 1978 reforms, however, rural Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (SMCs) have been re-established and incubated with a range of state supports and incentives. Federated together, they account for significant proportions of China's farm machinery, fertilizer, cotton, recycling and food production industries.<sup>118</sup> In addition, there are also thriving state-backed handicraft cooperatives and, embracing 200m households, a vast network of rural credit unions.

Thus, today as in the past, socialist construction is throwing up a rich variety of initiatives and experiences in relation to workers' and consumers' cooperatives. The same can be said about the many examples of such cooperatives that operate in developed capitalist societies, including in Britain. They demonstrate that enterprises can thrive without any necessity for private capitalist ownership. But in many cases they also show that in themselves, shorn of any political or ideological orientation, they are unlikely to play any significant role in the struggle to overthrow capitalist state power so that a new communist, cooperative mode of production can be built.

### Lessons for tomorrow

Capitalism has transformed itself, human society and the face of the planet since *Das Kapital* was published in 1867. Yet its essentials remain, albeit in modified forms: private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange; generalised commodity production; the universal employment of labour power as a commodity; and the drive to maximise surplus value. So, too, does its primary contradiction remain: that between the relations of production – based on private ownership and the drive to maximise surplus value – and the forces of production, which are integrated and social.

All previous efforts to overthrow capitalism and begin the construction of a socialist system have taken place before

that primary contradiction had matured. Capitalism's relations of production were not acting as an absolute barrier to the further development of society's forces of production, whether in Russia in 1917, eastern Europe in the 1940s, China in 1949, Cuba in 1959 or Vietnam in 1971. Rather, revolutionary opportunities had arisen at particular points of imperialist crisis and dislocation that had weakened ruling class power sufficiently to allow its overthrow, other conditions permitting.

In all those cases and others, the construction of a new society took place in very specific circumstances nationally and internationally, which in turn played a major part in determining significant features of their embryonic socialist system. These conditions included relentless hostility in a world still dominated by major capitalist powers and economic, political and military imperialism.

Nonetheless, despite and because of their peculiarities, these first attempts at constructing socialism have furnished Marxist political economy with some rich experiences and lessons.

Firstly, society's material base must be constructed as an overriding priority if socialism is going to satisfy the most basic needs of its people and be able to defend itself. This may involve partial retreats and compromises with capitalist interests, together with the utilisation of mechanisms more characteristic of capitalist economies. Clearly, the dangers posed by such policies to socialist construction have to be recognised so that the necessary safeguards can be put in place.

This material basis is also the only basis for strengthening the working class numerically, economically, politically and ideologically as the leading force in the revolutionary transition to communism. The Communist Party of Venezuela has been emphasising the centrality of this task in what is still an early stage in the revolutionary process in their country.

Secondly, central economic planning and public ownership of key sectors of industry and commerce are essential features of state power, helping to control, direct and maximise society's productive forces. They played the predominant part in transforming the Soviet Union and several countries of eastern Europe into modern, industrial and urban societies with substantial social and cultural provisions for the mass of their peoples. The same is happening today in China.

Nevertheless, there are also some specific economic features of past and present socialist systems that offer valuable lessons for the future, for example how – and how not – to develop and allocate the forces of production in a planned and balanced way; to introduce new technology while maintaining full employment; to measure and stimulate economic performance and – not least – labour productivity; and to distribute the product of surplus labour. Moreover, these contradictions will have to be resolved in an age when we understand much more about the vital necessity to pursue environmentally friendly and ecologically sustainable development. The solutions to these and other problems will, of course, also have to be combined with those solutions to political questions about the role of the working class, the people and their mass organisations in the exercise of state power on every front of communist construction, including in the workplace.

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# SOULFOOD

with Mike Quille

## “All that is solid melts into air”

**L**AST YEAR we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. In cultural terms that event was easily the most explosively creative period in the twentieth century, if not any century in history, not only in Russia but across the world. Across all the arts, and most areas of human cultural activity as well – science, religion, and sport, for example – the revolution has made its influence felt globally and right up to the present day.

The 200th anniversary of the birth of Marx gives us reason to celebrate an event which has had even more influence on the arts and culture generally. Marx and Marxism inspired not only the Russian revolutionaries but every other socialist revolutionary in every other country in the world since 1848, the year of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Marxism has also influenced socialist and communist poets, artists, film-makers, playwrights and musicians for the last 200 years. Because it generates such profound and powerful insights into what it means to be human, to be free and to live in just and peaceful society, it has inspired, enabled and strengthened creative cultural activity across all the arts.

It continues to do so, and in this special celebratory edition of *Communist Review* I am very pleased to publish some new poetry inspired by the *Communist Manifesto*.

First, though, a poem from Bertolt Brecht, the poet who more than any other in the 20th century absorbed Marx’s insights and integrated them into his artistic work as a playwright and a poet. The translation is by Jack Mitchell.

### *In Praise of Communism* by Bertolt Brecht

It is reasonable. You can grasp it. It’s simple.  
You’re no exploiter, so you’ll understand.  
It is good for you. Look into it.  
Stupid men call it stupid, and the dirty call it dirty.  
It is against dirt and against stupidity.  
The exploiters call it a crime.  
But we know:  
It is the end of all crime.  
It is not madness but  
The end of madness.  
It is not chaos,  
But order.  
It is the simple thing  
That’s hard to do.

Brecht wrote that poem in the 1930s. Towards the end of the Second World War, he made ambitious plans to rewrite the *Communist Manifesto* in verse, giving it “new, armed authority”, in the light of the Russian Revolution and the heroic struggle of the Soviet Union to defeat Nazism, as well as growing awareness of the humanism of early Marx texts, the prophetic insights of Marx’s later economic theories in the light of the Great Depression, and the writings of Marxian theorists since Marx.

Sadly, the poem was never completed. Readers of *Communist Review* can see for themselves fragments of it on the **Culture Matters** web site. Here though, I want to present another poetic effort inspired by the *Communist Manifesto*, and closely modelled on it.

Peter Raynard, the writer and editor of the excellent blog *Proletarian Poetry*, has started on a long modernist poem in response to the *Manifesto*. At the time of writing this column, he had only completed the fragment presented here – let’s hope he gets further than Brecht did! I hope that when you read this it will have been completed and published by **Culture Matters**. The form of the poem is a ‘coupling’, where you take a line from a text and write a line as a response. The only other rule is that overall it has to have poetic qualities – repetition, assonance and rhyme. The form was devised by the poet Karen McCarthy Woolf.

▲ Mural  
*In Praise of Communism*  
Ronald Paris  
born 1933.

From 1969 the artwork was in the GDR House of Statistics and from 2010 it is in the DDR Museum

Thanks to Jenny Farrell for sending in the Brecht poem, translated by her father, and thanks also to Peter Raynard for permission to publish his new poem.



**A Tragic Coupling of the Communist Manifesto  
by Peter Raynard and Karl Marx**

The history of all hitherto existing society  
*a Promethean tragedy in this late fading existence*

is the history of class struggles,  
*for how else can society prevail to its end?*

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian,  
*bounder and chained, leisured and leathered*

lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman,  
*hunter and hunted, clubbable & refugee*

in a word, oppressor and oppressed  
*indeed*

stood in constant opposition to one another,  
*at the gates, the fences, the walls, the mind sets*

carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight,  
*across the fields of parliaments and palaces,*

a fight that each time ended, either  
*by the courts, the jails, the coffins,*

in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large,  
*where the muscle of power was clay*

or in the common ruin of the contending classes  
who now lacked the spit to lick their skin clean.

In the earlier epochs of history,  
*of which you may pick and choose at your whim,*

we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement  
*such so it satisfied the fat palms of power*

of society into various orders,  
*though disorder of a nation lay bubbling below.*

a manifold gradation of social rank  
*a place for everybody, that didn't take place.*

In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians,  
slaves;  
*with its neat plebiscite of division*

in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters,  
*the thick rich cream with strawberries*

journeymen, apprentices, serfs;  
*the barley the bread the pancakes the porridge*

in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate  
gradations  
*for how else can society prevail towards its end?*

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted  
*like cold vegetables left on a plate*

from the ruins of feudal society  
*one of those gifts exported by the French*

has not done away with class antagonisms  
*for they are the stuff of life*

It has but established new classes,  
*from the super-rich to the precariat*

new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle  
*call centres, welfare checks, self-assessed deaths*

in place of the old ones  
*so there are now two types of estate.*

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie  
*the rule by the few to you and me*

possesses, however, this distinct feature:  
*with a blemish of distinction*

continued

it has simplified class antagonisms  
*which is very kind of them to do*

Society as a whole is more and more splitting up  
*hot and cold, wet and dry, black and white dolly  
mixture failings*

into two great hostile camps, into two great classes  
*quiet there at the back.*

directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat  
*indeed.*

From the serfs of the Middle Ages  
*for which we have to thank the precocious Romans*

sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns.  
*the quad stack Big Mac sheriff sweating over little  
cheeses*

From these burgesses  
*who were free from corvée and labour,*

the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed  
*new town dwellers with economic means.*

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape,  
*those outposts of 'savagery'*

opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie  
*taming indigents with their advanced type of  
savagery*

The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of  
America  
*out of the erection of European ascendancy,*

trade with the colonies,  
*where you give and we take,*

the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities  
generally,  
*along with our viral intent,*

gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry,  
*those elements of stable prosperity,*

an impulse never before known,  
*which we fucking well know now*

and thereby, to the revolutionary element  
*whose speed dropped a blast of death*

in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development  
*indeed.*

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial  
production  
*was a set of pipes excavated from the intestines of  
serfs,*

was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed  
*because human body parts were too emaciated*

for the growing wants of the new markets  
*who were still yet to discover the delights of the flesh.*

The manufacturing system took its place.  
*Robots of various stomach sizes, blustered and  
bulged their way ahead.*

The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the  
manufacturing middle class  
*something the middle class still feel aggrieved at*

division of labour between the different corporate guilds  
*confraternity contracts between belligerents, some  
say*

vanished in the face of division of labour in each single  
workshop  
*atomising systems turning the metal of men to  
powder.*

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever  
rising.  
*man-sized tissues no longer required, as it was  
nothing to sneeze at*

Even manufacture no longer sufficed  
*hands took to the machine not the article of craft*

Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial  
production  
*playthings of the mind, exponential change in  
fortunes*

The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern  
Industry  
*all hail the shibboleths of mammon and their bloody  
tongues*

the place of the industrial middle class by industrial  
millionaires  
*poor souls in the middle playing catch and missing*

the leaders of the whole industrial armies, the modern  
bourgeois  
*come and have a go if you think you're hard enough*

Modern industry has established the world market  
*connecting cracked palms that never shake hands*

for which the discovery of America paved the way  
*with their independent isolationist do what I say.*

This market has given an immense development to  
commerce  
*so fly high my sweet nightingales of the east, you  
bulbul song birds,*

to navigation, to communication by land  
*enabling the troops of civilisation and Sodom to rape  
for progress.*

This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension  
of industry;  
*a cleaning up if you will of virulent middle-aged faces*



and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation,  
railways extended  
*like a pop-up book with a mind of its own*

in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed  
*maturing like cancerous cheese*

increased its capital, and pushed into the background  
*its nodules of self-aggrandisement, displacing*

every class handed down from the Middle Ages  
*and so say some of us.*

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie  
*the one percent to you and me*

is itself the product of a long course of development  
*yes, yes, yes, we know what you meant*

of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and  
of exchange  
*round and round we go, where will we stop – stop, I  
know!*

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was  
accompanied  
*by the sound of Chas and Dave eulogising the end of  
days and*

by a corresponding political advance of that class  
*who still dance on this parliamentary isle to Milton's  
"light fantastick".*

An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility  
*as it was, as it is, as it's always meant to be,*

an armed and self-governing association in the medieval  
commune,  
*oh for those lazy, crazy anarchistic days*

here independent urban republic (as in Italy and  
Germany),  
*where townsmen gave purchase to their rights with  
moneyed fists.*

there taxable 'third estate' of the monarchy (as in France),  
*the 98% of us scrapping over a share of bronze  
medal*

afterwards, in the period of manufacturing proper  
*the threads of stratification began to untwine*

serving either the semi-feudal or the absolute monarchy  
*the Naxalites of India can tell you a thing or two  
about this*

as a counterpoise against the nobility,  
*it always comes down to standing, back straight!*

and, in fact, cornerstone of the great monarchies in  
general  
*whose spines were now curving to the submittal*

the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of

Modern Industry  
*with all its rising fallacies,*

and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the  
modern representative State  
*the porous borders of innovative disorder*

exclusive political sway.  
*you turn if you want to, but the old lady of England,  
is not for turning*

The executive of the modern state is but a committee  
*with their bingo numbers to hand*

for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie  
*so not the main party to make us all free.*

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most  
revolutionary part  
*through the bread of their circuses it became a fine  
art*

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand  
*by stroking each other with the back of it*

has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations  
*and so say all of us, and so say all us, and so say*

It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties  
*the basic fealty between vassal and lord*

that bound man to his 'natural superiors'  
*not forgetting the women and children hiding under  
their stairs*

and has left remaining no other nexus  
*the ermine gloves are off*

between man and man than naked self-interest  
*and so are all his robes*

than callous 'cash payment'  
*as Timothy foresaw, so began the wandering away  
from faith*

It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious  
fervour  
*though people still cling to the hymns, the ones that  
tell the hour*

of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism  
*the inn of oxymoron is closed, everything must go*

in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved  
*to take that which is no longer yours and dissolve*

personal worth into exchange value  
*that's debt to me and you*

and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered  
freedoms  
*like a two-week beano in Marbella*

continued

has set up that single, unconscionable freedom  
*don't say it, don't say it, let me guess, I know this one*

— Free Trade  
*ah yes, of course, off course, so where are now?*

In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions  
*you ain't seen me, right*

it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation  
*ah yes, un-reparative progress, but who will clean up the mess*

\*

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe  
*besides that of talent shows, reality TV, and who lives in a house next door?*

It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers  
*oh how the poets do scoff at such an assertion, sighing, 'if only'.*

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil  
*that one love bredrin*

and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation  
*you still owe me that fiver son, you thievin' little scrote*

The bourgeoisie has disclosed  
*in leaked documents from the dark web*

how it came to pass that the brutal display of vigour in the Middle Ages  
*that time between the wars with hyperinflation*

which reactionaries so much admire  
*for they stuffed their coffers with the sore throat of others, who*

found its fitting complement in the most slothful indolence.  
*get up you lazy corner shop capitalist, there is much work to be done*

It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about  
*with shiny glass towers by babel and able*

It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals;  
*steady on, it hadn't even got going back then, hold the thrill until*

it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades

*yes, the bile of its oil oozes into the crevices of corruption, war, across the UN floor*

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without  
*shouting out about repetition and scale*

constantly revolutionising the instruments of production  
*until virtually the pure essence of virtue is virtual*

and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society  
*is based upon algorithmic fornication limiting the need for physical labour*

Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form  
*everybody out!*

was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes.  
*a knife a fork, a bottle and a cork, that's the way we spell new work, right on, out of sight man, right on*

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions,  
*because the wheels on the bus go round and round with*

everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones  
*and all those who were to follow into this atomised internet thing we call time*

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away,  
*and its effects, whether the French Revolution or protests of '68, are still too early to say*

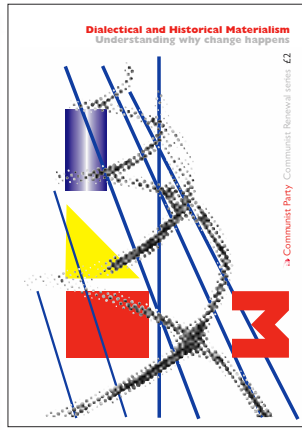
all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify  
*there is no such thing as the self-preservation society, so fly*

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned,  
*arseholes, bastards, fucking cunts and pricks*

and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind  
*all the people so many people, and they all go hand in hand hand in hand through their parklife.*



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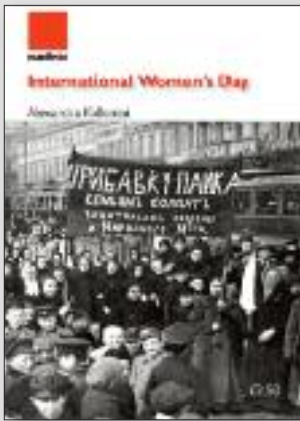
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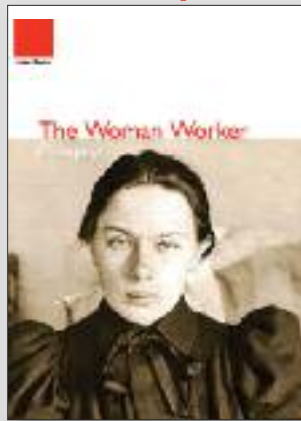
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