

THE IMPACT OF MARXISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

This is a lightly edited transcription of a lecture given in Stanford in 1964. A lengthier typescript, entitled 'Marxism and the International in the Nineteenth Century' and also available on the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library, was written in preparation for this lecture. No attempt has been made to bring it to a fully publishable form, but this version is posted here for the convenience of scholars.

IT IS DIFFICULT to think of a body of men more obscure than those who constituted the First International. Nobody would be more surprised than these men gathered in London in 1864 if they thought that one hundred years after this momentous event they would still be remembered.¹ I doubt whether anyone now attaches very much meaning to the names of Schapper and Lessner, Eccarius and Hermann Jung, Dupleix, Limousin and Bobczynski. These, I admit, are the obscurest names. There are a few more famous names such as M. Varlin and Tolain, who were made famous by the commune, and perhaps a few names better known than that, such as Major Luigi Wolff. None of them is a person of world significance. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the First International began something which altered our lives, in the end, and the reason for this is, of course, as I need hardly say, that in spite of the influence in the International of thinkers like Proudhon and Bakunin, in spite of the presence of neo-Jacobins and Blanquists of various sorts, what really made the International a significant affair was the presence in it of Karl Marx. He was no doubt thought of by these worthy men in London as a learned German, better at drafting manifestos than most of the honest working men who were gathered together for this purpose from England, France and Belgium, a man better educated than they were, a fiery radical and revolutionary, somewhat intimidating but useful for this particular purpose. In the end, of course, he transformed the International into an instrument of his own will and influence. The number of Marxists in the First International was perhaps not greater than the number of Bolsheviks in the

¹ [This talk was delivered in 1964.]

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socialist parties of Russia in 1917. Nevertheless, the effect was much the same: that is to say, they won.

I must say unashamedly that it appears to me that it is Marx's personality and Marx's ideas which played this decisive part; it is not a very Marxist attitude, not a very Marxist point of view, but I must admit that I think it is the force of his personality and the content of the ideas which he pumped into this not very receptive audience that in the end produced an effect on the world.

What were these ideas, and what was their impact? In attempting to answer this question, there are at least two subjects with which I do not propose to deal. The first is the general effect of Marx's ideas on the cultural and intellectual life of Europe. This is an important and interesting subject, insufficiently investigated, but it is beyond my present scope, because the only way of treating it in a valuable manner is by detailed research, by minute description of detail, and not by a few broad generalisations. I mean the influence of Marx on the thought of sociologists such as Weber and Pareto; the influence of Marx on historians, both ancient and modern, who began to apply his theories of the class struggle across a very wide canvas; the impression he made upon thinkers and philosophers of various types, for example upon the young Pareto, the young Kautsky, toward the end of the nineteenth century; the impact that he made upon almost every humane discipline, in particular, of course, on historical and humane disciplines, especially humane disciplines (his effect upon the natural sciences, at any rate in the nineteenth century, appears to me to be zero). This kind of effect is, of course, of importance, and had more or less done its work by the end of the nineteenth century, which I would place in 1914. That is to say, all the Marxist histories, all the political thought that is influenced by Marx, the historical and sociological thought, the many branches of human learning into which Marxism penetrated in our own day, appear to me to be extensions, without any significant or original advance, of the kind of influence which he had already had by 1914. I do not propose to deal with this subject, important though it is, because I think it needs detailed treatment.

The second topic with which I do not intend to deal is that of the various chemical compounds of Marxism with other doctrines – with anarchism, with populism, with syndicalism – which produced all the various Marxist and para-Marxist parties towards the end of the nineteenth century: all those Possibilists

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and Allemannists[sp?] in France; the impact of Marxism upon the populism of a thinker such as Mikhailovsky in Russia; the modifications which Marxism went through in the minds of such popularisers of his doctrines as Plekhanov and his friends; the effect which Marxism had in Italy; the effect, although it was rather feeble, which it had in the United States and in England. This again is a broad and important subject which should not be dealt with in a few broad brush-strokes.

Instead I propose to confine myself to something more familiar, namely, to what appear to me to be the major ideas which Marx put across and with which he affected his audiences and ultimately the world. I shall not spell out the familiar structure of Marxist thought. I shall concentrate only upon what appear to me to be his most arresting and original ideas, those which have had the deepest effect until our day. These appear to me to be two in number, with modifications, implications and variations upon them. The first is his monism, the fact that he believed that all things, both nature and history, both man and objects, can ultimately be explained in terms of one vast, single hypothesis, one systematic doctrine, which accounts for everything there is. This of course had extremely powerful political implications in the form in which he propounded it. The second is the division of the world into the children of light and the children of darkness, which because of all kinds of peculiar implications which he certainly cannot have thought of in his own lifetime, also had an extremely violent, sometimes beneficent, more often devastating effect upon posterity. Let me begin with the first.

When Plekhanov came to write a work about the philosophy of history, he called it *On the Monistic Interpretation of History*. It is true that he chose this title, which appears long and cumbrous, in order to avoid the perils of Russian censorship. What he really wanted was to give it a far more violent title. Nevertheless, what he said was perfectly true. A central stand in Marx's theory is his monism. By monism I mean that he supposes that it is possible to construct a theory compounded in equal parts of what he, at any rate, regarded as natural science, of understanding of history, and of messianism, a theory which accounts for all there is. Other thinkers have had similar ideas from the beginnings of philosophy onwards. In particular, in the nineteenth century Saint-Simonists embarked upon such a programme, and still more strongly the positivists, led by Auguste Comte. Why, one may ask, did

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positivism, which made equally ambitious claims, not produce the powerful impact of Marxism? Two of the reasons for this are, it seems to me, the following.

First of all Marx stressed, much more strongly than ever Comte did, what might be called the 'happy ending' element of his theory: the fact that his doctrine accounted not merely for the conflicts, the miseries, the servitude and slavery of men hitherto, but also used these very servitudes and slaveries and miseries as evidences of the coming felicity of mankind, one day. One and the same doctrine accounted both for misfortunes, for the decayed state in which humanity found itself, in particular for the condition of exploitation and suffering in which a large number of human beings found themselves; and also demonstrated that this state of affairs was bound to end in the triumph of a particular class and of certain humane principles: this was certainly a stronger mixture than anything which was provided by anyone else, outside the Churches, in his time.

The second reason is that, unlike Comte, he did not simply enunciate that anyone who understood his ideas or followed his doctrines would by applying them to real life be able to achieve the particular consequences to which their implementation was supposed to lead. He did something which is strategically much more effective: he identified an already existing class of men, industrial workers – to put it very broadly indeed, the poor – as the people who would inherit the earth. That is to say, he attached his particular doctrine to an already existing army and made of them the particular chosen instrument of history. This was a move of the highest strategic significance. He found a body of men already in existence, and he provided them with a bible and with leadership. This certainly did not enter into Auguste Comte's calculations, and this is certainly one of the reasons for the greater impact and success of Marxism as compared with rival doctrines flourishing at the same time.

Now let me go back to the two cardinal ideas which I enunciated: first of all monism. Marx, like a great many thinkers before him, begins from the proposition that all true questions have answers – one answer is true, all the other answers being false – and that this true answer can be discovered and, when discovered, implemented. If this true answer is implemented, it will, both in theory and in practice, satisfy the cravings of the human mind and the human heart. He starts from the assumption

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that there is such a thing as human nature, that there is something central to all men, in virtue of which they are called men. But part of this nature is to need certain things: in material terms food, clothing, shelter, security, and so forth; in spiritual terms, perhaps, a certain degree of opportunity for social expression. Given that there is this human nature, it follows that there is a certain normal state of affairs in which this nature is realised, and an abnormal state of affairs in which this nature is not realised. All this Marx laid down with a certain degree of dogmatism, as indeed previous thinkers – particularly Hegel, but other thinkers as well – had done before him, from Plato and Aristotle onwards.

The assumption here is that the normal condition of man is the satisfaction of his desires in a harmonious manner, and that all men's desires can be satisfied compatibly with all other men's desires; that there is some situation in which all men can obtain that for the sake of which they were made, or, as Marx would put it, that which their natures require or need; that the abnormal situation is a situation of struggle, of strife or conflict.

This means that if Marxism is accepted as a doctrine, you deny the other interpretation of politics in accordance with which men in different circumstances have different desires. These desires conflict. The conflict occurs both between bodies of men and between different periods and perhaps within a single man himself. According to this view the task of any practical discipline, say politics or economics, is the adjustment of these interests so that they do not collide too violently. The state both of the individual and of society is one of constantly imperfect equilibrium: all that politics can do is to prevent the pot from boiling over. The notion is rejected that there is one state of affairs in which all the little balls roll into all the little holes – that there is one pattern, that life is a kind of jigsaw puzzle, and that if you find the solution, if you find all the scattered parts which lie about and fit them into their proper pattern, then there is a final solution into which everything fits, after which there is no need to do anything further, humanity marches on, the gates of paradise open, and some kind of guaranteed felicity begins.

Marxism certainly belongs to the group of theories which deny the view which, for example, Burke and liberal thinkers in general propagated, namely that ends conflict with each other, that there is a permanent state of friction between them, and that all that men can do is, as I say, to try to hold these things in balance and to

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prevent the desires of one man, one class, one group, one nation, from destroying or frustrating the desires of other men, other classes, other nations. According to the Marxist theory, there is a fixed human nature which gives us certain discoverable human desires. If there were not such a thing as a fixed human nature, it would not make sense to talk about people as degraded, or dehumanised, or perverted from their proper ends. It is only if you grant that there are certain ends of man, which men as such are bound to pursue, that you can say that men are prevented from pursuing them, or that human nature has somehow been twisted out of its proper direction.

The question now arises, how do we discover these ends? The only way in which they can be discovered, according to Marx, is by certain persons – not by everyone, everywhere, but by persons in a certain privileged situation. Who are these persons? On the assumption that history, as I need not rehearse, is the history of class struggles – which, as Marx rightly says, was discovered not by him but by bourgeois historians, already before his time – at any given moment there must presumably be one body of persons, a class, economically defined, which is progressive, as against another class or other classes which are not. Those members of the progressive class who understand their position in the world, who understand what class they belong to, what the historical position of this class is, what the needs of the class are, these people and these alone understand what it is that will satisfy the particular cravings and desires of their class, which is progressive because the satisfaction of its desires is the satisfaction of those general human needs which the particular historical moment generates. Those who understand the position are best placed to know what, in particular, will enable humanity to advance. At any given moment a particular class is identified with the general future of mankind. It was the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century, but it is the proletariat in the nineteenth. You then say, what will in fact advance humanity? Why, that which will satisfy its most progressive section in those respects in which it is capable of being satisfied. Who can know this? Those persons who are in some way aware of the nature of the historical process, and who are not blind as to what is going on. Who are not blind? Those whose interests do not blind them to the facts. Who are these persons? Well, if you belong to a class which is about to be eliminated by history, that is to say, if you belong to a class of persons which in

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the particular dialectic of historical movement is condemned by history, as Marx would say, which is bound to yield to some other body of men whose interests are more consonant with what the times require, if in short you do not belong to the progressive class, then you are systematically unable to face the facts, because no human beings can face too much reality; it is particularly difficult to face reality if, whenever you look around you in the world, you observe that everything is (if you are honest with yourself) a symptom of, or evidence for, the coming destruction of the particular body of men to which you belong. Therefore only one body of persons is in a position to detect what is the progressive thing to do, what will in fact advance humanity: namely, persons who belong to a class in whose interests it is to know the truth as it really is. It is not in the direct interests of anyone else to know the truth, because people are not so made that they can watch their own impending doom with any degree of indifference.

The second notion which enters into Marx's monism is his doctrine of the unity of theory and practice. This is of importance because it made of the socialist movement, which Marx inspired, the particular marching army which it in fact became in all its transformations. The unity of theory and practice is something different from that which it is sometimes made out to be. It is customary in textbooks on Marx to say (it is an error which I myself have come near to making in the past) that fundamentally the Marxist attitude is a kind of crude cosmic utilitarianism. You say to yourself: I have certain desires which I wish to implement; I am a practical person; I want to do certain things; I wish to express myself; I wish to be happy; I wish to be well fed; I wish to acquire power. Given that I have these desires, how can I realise them? Why, I can realise them only by understanding what the world is like; what the causal structure of the universe is; what consequences follow from what causes; what kind of material will yield to what kind of treatment. In other words, I must study history; I must study society; I must study the material in which I deal; namely, if I am a politician, societies; if I am a sculptor, marble; if I am an economist, an economic system; and so forth. So if in fact the Marxist analysis of history is correct; if, let us assume, history is best explained by the collision of classes, economically determined, however that is done; then in order to implement my wishes I must study which way the world is going.

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Every man wishes to fulfil his desires. In order to fulfil them I must understand the direction in which the world is proceeding. If I do not understand this, I may fall foul of it. I must understand reality, in other words, because if I do not understand reality, or how to deal with it, it will get me in the end, to put it very crudely.

This part of Marxism is simply a juggernaut theory: you had better find out where things are going because if you do not find out, you will pay for it. I, Marx, say that there is a class struggle; if you ignore this fact you will be crushed by it. You might as well understand what it is that is inevitable and try to like it, because even if you do not like it, it will come in any case. Therefore, since you cannot get what you want, you had better try to want that which alone you can get.

Something of this kind is a very common interpretation of Marx's views, an interpretation which makes him a kind of crude utilitarian realist. If you want to satisfy your wishes, study the methods of the world in which you live, be realistic, do not indulge in fantasies, do not be an idealist, do not believe in myths. You must penetrate the veil which surrounds reality, understand that economic laws, which are said to be eternal, are in fact not eternal but made by men, understand the processes of politics, which are but men trying to make history, for certain motives and in certain circumstances, because if you do not understand these things, then you will be destroyed by them. You had better get on to the bandwagon if you do not want to be crushed by it.

This is what might be called, as I say, a kind of cosmic utilitarianism. This I believe to be a false interpretation of Marx, and a very shallow one. A great many political thinkers have enunciated this principle, and it is a very normal thing to think. It is realistic in an ordinary sense of the word 'realism', in which, when people say, 'I am afraid I am rather a realist', what they mean is, 'I am about to tell a lie' or 'do something rather shabby'. The assumption is that reality is, on the whole, disagreeable and had better be studied in its least subjective aspects if you want to get things done. This I believe to be a falsification of Marxism.

The unity of theory and practice is both more complicated and more interesting than this. The previous assumption was that it is possible to contemplate reality as a body of facts without any emotional predisposition towards them; that it is possible to be dispassionate; that it is possible to be a scientist who simply describes the universe without taking up any particular attitude

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towards it. This is called *Wertfreiheit*, freedom from valuation. For those who follow the philosophy of Hegel – and it is certainly important to remember that Marx, in spite of all his deviation from the master, in spite of all his translations into materialist terms, remained profoundly within the Hegelian orbit, perhaps even until the end of his life – for those who follow Hegel, this is a false interpretation of how men live and think and will and feel. It is more correct to say that I look at the universe with a particular set of eyes. I observe the process of life not indifferently, but with certain desires, with certain feelings. I am a willing creature; I am a feeling creature; and I am an active creature. Above all, I am engaged in a constant process of action; a constant process of trying to dominate my environment in order to acquire freedom from it; I have a constant desire not to be dominated by it, to be independent, to be able to impose myself upon the matter around me, whether persons or things, in order not to be dragged about by them. That is the natural desire of human nature; that is the craving towards freedom which these philosophers of this school attribute to human beings.

If I this is so, then I look upon reality with certain eyes. I see everything in the light of those wishes, desires, ambitions, feelings, that particular set of volitional and emotional characteristics without which I cannot be. That is a brute fact. I am what I am. Men are what they are. They have certain basic desires or basic ideals or basic cravings, in terms of which human beings are defined as such. If they did not have them, they would not be human at all. Since I am human, I cannot look upon reality with indifferent eyes. Therefore it is false, it is fallacious, to divide values from facts. The view of food on the part of a man who is starving is very different from the view of a man who is satisfied. The view upon life of a soldier is clearly different from the view of life of a bank clerk, or a lion-tamer, or anyone you wish to choose.

Human beings do not choose the particular form of life into which they are born. Above all, they do not choose the class into which they are born; and they do not choose the particular moment of the class struggle, out of which, for Marx, history is to a large degree compounded. Therefore I look upon reality with certain class-conditioned eyes. The pretence that I can be impartial, that I can be detached, that I can be free of values, that I can be a cold, remote scientist, simply noting and describing reality without taking up attitudes towards it, is a profound piece of self-

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deception. If I think that I can do this, it is only because for some reason, pathological or natural, I do not wish to be involved in this particular reality. It is a form of withdrawal, a form of cowardice; at any rate, it is taking up a certain sort of attitude. Detachment is a form of flight. Detachment is itself a taking up of an attitude, though it may not be the same attitude as that of an active participant. If I say that I stand at the edge and merely describe, that I am a mere observer, the word 'mere' is quite important, because it means that this is the part I choose to play – but I always choose to play a part. The notion that I can choose to play no part, that I can merely observe, merely record, merely describe, is for thinkers of this school impossible. Therefore to say about a man that he is fully objective or that he is fully detached or that he is completely passionless is not false, but meaningless. There is no human situation which such a description could conceivably fit.

This is the theory of the unity of theory and practice. The doctrine is that whatever I do or do not do, whether I contemplate or act, I am always in a state of activity towards something. I am always striving for something or running away from something, failing to do something or doing something; and failing is also a kind of doing, sitting still is also a kind of doing. That being so, it is false to say, with Hume and other thinkers, that values can be distinguished from facts – that on the one hand there is such a thing as a description of the world, and that on the other hand there is the taking up of a certain attitude towards it, favourable or unfavourable. Any kind of conscious activity already involves me in some kind of evaluation. That being so, the two processes are one. Thinking is action; action is thinking. These things are aspects of one activity and not distinguishable from one another except for purely technical, philosophical purposes.

If you really think this, then it is clear that if you enunciate a political doctrine, for example, that there is a class struggle, or that it is desirable for the proletariat to form a political party, or that it is important, in a particular political and economic situation in which, say, the workers of a given country are situated, either to seize power or not to seize power, to collaborate or not to collaborate, then to say these things is not simply to give tips to people about how to gain certain subjective ends. To enunciate the theory of history is not simply to say: I am among the many people who simply explain to you how the theory works. Some people explain about matter – they are called physicists. I explain about

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history – I am a philosopher of history. In both these cases we are just scientists performing a certain scientific task of describing how things are. We are not recommending; we are not advising; we are not urging; we are merely dispassionately describing. This is not a possible situation. Whatever I say and whatever I do, any theory which I enunciate is itself an invitation to a certain form of life, because the theory I enunciate is itself bound by myriad threads to a particular way of looking at things, to the possession of certain kinds of eyes, which, for Marx, are class-conditioned. They might have been conditioned by something else. He happens to believe that the strongest single factor in moulding human beings, in influencing both their action and their thought, is the particular position of the class to which they cannot help belonging in the particular concatenation of forces, the particular conflict, the particular relationship which classes are in at any given moment of history. Therefore what Marx sought to give to his followers is not simply a theory of history, provided with a kind of ‘take it or leave it’ attitude – ‘Here, this is how history moves, if you want to be a success you will apply my theory’, as in the case of a man who says, ‘This is how one builds a bridge: this is how to build it.’

This is not the attitude. What Marx conveyed to his followers is a total attitude to life, moral, aesthetic, political, economic, social, scientific. The ambition certainly was to provide a total answer, because, in the view of Hegelians and Marxists, one cannot stop at any particular discipline; one cannot stop at any particular frontier; each involves the rest. Any kind of interpretation of experience is itself a symptom of or an element in a particular attitude to society, to myself, to other human beings, to things, and therefore to be conscious of what I am, and the only way in which I can become free and dominate my environment, is, of course, if I understand them, to spell out these particular relationships.

In this respect Marx is vastly superior, even from a political or tactical point of view, to such rivals of his as August Comte, or to liberal reformers, or even, to a certain extent, to Christian socialists of this time – who also attracted men’s ambition, men’s loyalties – because he really did construct a kind of anti-Church. The only other institutions which gave a complete answer to the problems of life were, of course, the religious establishments, the Churches. There is a certain sense in which it is just to say that Marx was the first person consciously and deliberately to construct a secular anti-Church. Comte tried to do this too, to a certain extent; and his

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followers certainly tried to construct something called a positivist Church; but Marx succeeded better, partly because he was a more profound thinker, but also because he happened to identify the course of human progress – that is to say, the particular path along which a just appreciation of the facts would lead any sane or rational person – with an already existing body of men who were being beaten into shape, as he supposed, by the industrial process. That is to say, he identified his particular movement with an already existing army which was being disciplined into some kind of unity by the fact that they worked in factories, by the fact that they were members of armies, and so forth.

Marx was horrified by the same phenomena that had disgusted and horrified and embittered a great many sensitive men of his time. There was a general sense of the vast anthill of the nineteenth century: those huge anthills or beehives in which people were clamped together and degraded and dehumanised; in which their individuality was taken away from them and they were knocked into some kind of impersonal association with each other in vast factories, in armies, in bureaucracies, in other huge impersonal bodies in which an older life (where a greater degree of freedom was given to the individual personality, and to the relations between human beings in families or in the social groupings which the feudal ages or middle ages possessed) was being knocked down in favour of these vast nameless herds. But whereas people like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were very conscious of this – or Ruskin, or Tolstoy, or Dostoevsky – most of the sensitive persons of the nineteenth century escaped into all kinds of other attitudes such as either mild liberal reformism, or a desire to be saved by art, by escape into some kind of individual aesthetic satisfaction, or general despair, or various private religions or private mystiques. Marx was virtually the only person who tried to convert the very vices of his age into guarantees of future virtues; who tried to make out that these dreadful phenomena which were going on around him were not only inevitable, but necessary stages in the advance of man towards freedom, towards justice, towards plenty, towards happiness. In other words, these very phenomena were not merely to be condemned but to be seen as inevitable miseries *en route* to splendours, and this is the meaning of his famous doctrine to the effect that it is the capitalists themselves who, whether they know it or not, are by the very nature of the industrial process

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disciplining huge armies of workers into competence, efficiency, technical knowledge, which will enable the workers to get rid of their oppressors far more easily than if they had remained ignorant, industrialised craftsmen. His was an ambitious attempt to turn vices into virtues, or at any rate to make enormous virtues out of obvious necessities; and this, of course, is a source of great strength for a movement.

The second central idea Marx enunciated is, of the two, perhaps the more important. In all previous human thought, whenever there was a disagreement about the truth, there was an assumption on the part of human beings that any man could, in principle, understand any other man. It might be difficult, but it was worth trying. If I was a Catholic and believed a certain kind of truth, and there was before me a Protestant heretic, I would try to convince him of the truth of my doctrine and the falsity of his, the assumption being that we had certain common values in terms of which it was possible for me to communicate with him. The whole purpose of philosophy, of theology, of any intellectual discipline at all, was to try to convert somebody to my point of view, on the assumption that we were both adequately rational creatures, or, if I was a rational creature and the other was not rational, I could at least educate him into rationality. Perhaps he was badly educated; perhaps his thought was obstructed by ignorance. I could try to remove these things; I could teach him; I could educate him; I could place him in situations where the light would shine upon him, and he would really see it. If I could not persuade him, if I could not get him to see my point of view by persuasion, which is one of the arts of politics, in extreme cases violence might have to be applied. But even the theory of torture, even the theory of the inquisition, say, in the Catholic Church, the general view of coercion, at least in theory, was based upon the assumption that all I was trying to do was to make the other person understand. If the devil had possession of him and blocked his vision, I tried to unblock it by somewhat violent means. If I felt that he was in danger of losing eternal salvation, I took steps in order to procure it for him in his interest. But throughout I was at any rate bound to him by some kind of common assumptions. He was a human being. I was a human being. We had enough in common to make it possible to communicate. The whole theory of persecution was founded upon the possibility of communication, provided these rather terrible obstacles could somehow be liquidated.

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Marx was perhaps the first thinker really to destroy this assumption in a very formidable and, from the point of view of our lives, in a very far-reaching way. If his doctrine is correct; if a man thinks as he thinks because he belongs to the class to which he belongs; if, in other words, the existence of certain classes, that is to say relationships to the system of production, conditions human beings to look upon the world in a certain way; to approve of some things, disapprove of others; think certain thoughts; see things in a certain light in which they cannot help seeing them because the interest of their class is bound up with a particular way of acting, thinking, willing, and so on; if that is so, then supposing you belong to a decaying class and I belong to an advancing class, it is impossible for me to communicate with you directly because you are conditioned by the forces of history into systematically misinterpreting experience to your advantage. I, who am progressing, can afford to look the truth in the face, because whatever happens is grist to my mill, because my class is going to come out on top. You, who are declining, cannot afford to look at reality in the face, and therefore systematically misinterpret it as a form of unconscious comfort. You generate an opium with which you put yourself to sleep. This is the whole doctrine of rationalisations, of myths, of ideology, by which a class whose interest is bound up with some situation which is fundamentally unsatisfactory cannot help disguising this fact both from itself and from others, and can deceive both itself and others by all kinds of myths and inventions which cloud the truth, which keep the truth out of sight, because to look at it is not quite bearable.

There are three metaphors which may give this idea more imaginative substance. The first metaphor is that of two escalators, two systems of moving stairs. If I am on the upward-moving stairs, my vision is totally different from yours, if you are on the downward-moving stairs; and there cannot be communication between us, because what you see is different from what I see. People who move downwards have a different vista before them from people who move upwards. There is not enough in common to make direct communication possible.

The second metaphor is this. Suppose you are drowning, and I ask you about the temperature of the water. This is not the moment to ask you that question, nor are you in any condition to be able to give me a reliable answer, because your attention is otherwise engaged. You are a class about to be destroyed, and

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therefore you are desperately clinging to any kind of straw which is going to give you hope about ultimately being rescued. Of course these hopes are false, but you cannot help entertaining them.

My third metaphor concerns the relation of the enlightened person – that is, the person who understands the historical situation, either because he was born into the correct class or because by his own act of will he has transferred himself to it – to the unenlightened person. (Individuals, of course, can move from one class to another, though entire classes cannot be converted, owing to the machinery of history.) The metaphor is that of a psychiatrist and his patient. If I am a psychiatrist, I understand myself and I understand the madman. If I am a madman, I understand neither the psychiatrist nor myself. If I ask the madman questions, it is not in order to find out the true state of affairs, it is only in order to find out his symptoms, to find out what particular pathological condition he may be in; and I have to find this out not only for the humane reason that I am trying to cure him, which I may or may not be trying to do, but because the madman may be armed and may in fact do me damage. Therefore I must protect myself against him. This was somewhat the attitude of the Soviet Union, certainly in the 1930s, towards the Western world. They saw themselves as understanding the machinery of history, whereas those they were dealing with did not; and therefore they had to protect themselves against these lunatics. It is exactly the attitude of a psychiatrist to a lunatic. This is the position of a man who understands towards a man who does not understand. But the implication is this. If it is really the case that there is no communication, because there is a whole class of persons blinded by history to the implications of their true position (although individuals may see, the whole class cannot) – if this is really to be taken seriously, then at any given moment there is a whole class of human beings who are doomed by history to disappear, in which case there is no point in talking to them, there is no point in arguing with them, there is no point in listening to them. You cannot talk to them, you cannot try to save them, however kindly you feel towards them, because they have been rendered deaf by history to your particular form of locution, and therefore they are condemned. (This constantly occurs in the works of the later Marxist writers.) Since they are condemned, there is no point in wasting effort in trying to save them. It is not that you take up a particular attitude of hatred towards them, or a

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particular attitude of enmity, even, but they have been doomed by history, and the sooner they get off its stage, the better. Individuals may be rescued but classes cannot. This is an enormous advantage from the point of view of a party fighting to assert itself, because it means that you need not bother about the enemy, in a way, at all. You have to bother about them because you do not wish to be defeated by them – they may still be too strong – but you need not communicate with them. They are out of your moral range, because history has placed them there.

This division of human beings, this cutting of human beings in half, into sheep and goats, whereby the goats are for ever goats and nothing can save them from being goats, is an enormous weapon both of belief and of propaganda. This division of mankind into the about to be rescued and the unrescuable seems to me something new. Even the Jacobins, who put to death aristocrats or priests presumably because they belonged to the wrong class, allowed that in theory these men, if they had changed their views and understood about liberty, equality and fraternity, could all of them have been integrated into the new State. There was no doctrine by which they were seen as conditioned into inability to understand, and therefore made automatically expendable. This Marxism brought to the world, and ever since then there have been doctrines of all kinds, non-Marxist doctrines as well, which have divided human beings into these two categories, whereby one can, without any compunction, without any qualms, execute the rest, remove the rest, because this is the only way in which humanity can advance. It is not simply a question of practical convenience, as in war, where we must defeat the enemy, otherwise we cannot ever attain the goal. We know that these people cannot be rescued in any case. Therefore they might as well be dispatched with all the rapidity and all the humanity possible, in order that history might shorten its birth-pangs and human felicity come sooner than it otherwise will. This, of course, gives a huge impetus to a comparatively feeble and comparatively suffering class, because it not only promises future felicity, but represents the rest of the world as in a sense doomed, impotent, unable to resist, not worth thinking about. This seems to me the second central notion which Marx introduced to the world; and it is something which all Marxist parties in some degree accepted, or rather those which rejected it did so only at the price of a certain measure of inconsistency.

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If we come down to brass tacks, to actual facts, then it is extremely clear that Marx believed this. When, for example, the statutes of the First International were created and Marx (obviously) objected to words like ‘universal human rights’ or ‘freedom and justice’, and all the various liberal clichés which Proudhonists or Blanquists borrowed from the liberals, which were the normal stock-in-trade, and a quite sincere stock-in-trade, of radical parties, socialist parties, left-wing parties of all kinds and sorts – when he objected to these it is normally assumed that he was simply objecting on the grounds that they had become used-up liberal slogans. But this is not quite so. He objected to them because he genuinely thought that in the mouth of the proletariat words like ‘justice’ or ‘rights’ meant something different from what they would mean in the mouths of other persons. The indiscriminate use of language shared with the bourgeoisie was a recognition of the existence of certain common values, and the whole point of his doctrine was the denial of just that. That is why there is constant protest on Marx’s part against the use of expressions of this kind, which distressed and surprised his followers, who saw no harm in them at all. That is why he writes to Engels at a famous moment in the drafting of the rules of the First International, pointing out that he had allowed one or two of these expressions to be included but that he did not think they would do much harm. What he meant was that he had to make concessions because there were these foolish Proudhonists, and there were these foolish Blanquists, and there were all kinds of other foolish socialists and radicals in the party, who would not quite understand if one did not talk about justice, and about rights, and about liberty, and about all these other things which people were supposed to be struggling for. But he himself certainly believed that these words acquired a quite different sense for a conscious proletarian from what they had for a bourgeois or a member of some other class.

This is symptomatic. In the case of the Gotha Programme everyone remembered that he objected to the use, for example, of ‘brotherhood of nations’, saying nations cannot be brothers because nations and States are evil as such. He objected to phrases such as ‘equal rights’ because, he said, until the economic bases are changed, until there was a genuine cornucopia flowing, until there was plenty, there was no such thing as equal rights. Rights could occur only at the level created by the economic system. The

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economic system determined everything else. A right could be what it was only in virtue of the particular economic situation. So long as the class system persisted, so long as society was riven by class war, there could be no talk about equal rights, because such a thing was a chimera and an impossibility. The whole of moral language was transferred to the eschatological stage. Until the revolution had been won, until the flow of production became wide and generous, until human beings had liberated themselves from these fearful chains that then bound them, until they had ceased exploiting and persecuting each other and were together exploiting inanimate nature – until then such language could not be used.

This has a serious and interesting implication. If you ask yourself what it was that made various persons quail, that is, what made various persons shy back from accepting the full implications of what Marx's socialism bound upon them, from the day of the First International onwards, you will find that what makes them quail, what sets them back, to a certain extent, is always that they cannot quite swallow the full implications of the fact that the moral values of my class are genuinely incompatible with the moral values of yours, and we ought not to use common terms except as a stratagem, except in a Machiavellian way. Examples are obvious. What, for example, horrifies people about certain practices by people who profess Marxism? What horrifies them are not mistakes of tactics; what horrifies them is usually cruelty, brutality, immorality of some sort. But what does immorality mean? Sin against what moral code? The moral code against which the sin is committed is not the moral code which can be deduced by the rigid application of Marxism. This is quite interesting.

Let us begin with minor examples. When towards the end of the nineteenth century the leader of the French Marxists, Jules Guesde, refused to take part in the Dreyfus case, because, he said, it was simply a row conducted by the bourgeois amongst themselves, a lot of capitalists fighting it out with other capitalists, nothing to do with us, nothing to do with the workers, Jaurès, who was perhaps not completely Marxist, but certainly regarded himself as a militant socialist, was shocked. So was Anatole France, who was afterwards regarded as a socialist, almost a communist. What were they shocked by? They were plainly shocked by the fact that here was a case of blatant injustice, here was a man falsely accused

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by the Church, by the army, by right-wing persons, and so forth, in France, of having done something simply because he was a Jew, or simply because he had become in some way a symbol of anti-clerical or liberal tendencies. He had not committed this particular crime, and these people refused to take part on the narrow and perfectly defensible Marxist ground that we Marxists, we proletarians, have our own scale of values, and to take part in these other people's fights is in some way compromising.

In 1903, on the famous occasion of the split between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, Plekhanov, and after him Lenin, said that if necessary for the sake of the revolution elementary human rights might have to be suspended – I mean rights of what the Russians used to call inviolability of personality, that is to say, the individual rights of not being cruelly treated, not having one's physical freedom removed for no reason. When people were shocked by that, what was the scale of values in terms of which they were shocked? The scale of values was some kind of non-Marxist scale, because if you were a consistent Marxist you said to yourself: 'Here is the scheme of history, here are two classes locked in mortal combat. What we must do, we the leaders of the progressive class, is whatever is going to accelerate the coming of the revolution. The coming of the revolution will be brought nearer only by the strengthening of our proletarian army. We are at war – anything which helps towards that end is good, anything which militates against it is bad. Wartime is no time for brooding over old-fashioned scruples.' The worst that you can urge against such an attitude, provided you believe in the sincerity of the leaders of the proletariat, is that this is a tactical mistake. This is not the way to bring about the revolution. You are doing something to weaken the proletariat, not to strengthen it. You are doing something to destroy its power, you are doing something which is economically stupid, socially retrogressive. But this has a very different quality of indignation about it as compared with what is normally called moral indignation, which is conceived in terms of values which you assume most other human beings will understand and sympathise with – which is theoretically inadmissible in a rigid Marxist schema.

In 1914 both sides were shocked when the Second International proved impotent in the face of the coming of war. Particularly when someone like Plekhanov wanted to defend the French, or wanted to march against the Germans, because he

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thought that European civilisation was in danger, or when Lassalle gave Marx evidence that the war between France and Prussia might endanger what he called European civilisation, Marx in one case, Lenin in the other case, were suitably shocked as Marxists. There was no European civilisation. There was their civilisation and there was our civilisation. The notion of a common civilisation was already a concession to the enemy, a misunderstanding of the unity of theory and practice.

When Lenin pointed out a building in London to Trotsky – either the National Gallery or the British Museum – and said ‘This is *theirs*’, what he meant was literally that. ‘Theirs’ means that of the bourgeoisie, that of the other side. Everything which is theirs is theirs, everything which is ours is ours, there cannot be bridges. When Rosa Luxemburg was shocked by Lenin’s dictatorial tactics, when in future years people were shocked by Stalin’s brutal behaviour, what were all these shocks, particularly when they were moral shocks about purges, about trials, about Russo-German pacts, or whatever it might be? When Martov talked about Lenin’s boundless cynicism, what did he mean? Forget for a moment whether Martov was right or wrong, that is comparatively irrelevant, but one knows what he meant. When he accused Lenin of boundless cynicism, this is something quite different from accusing him of, let us say, making errors, making mistakes. Why should not Lenin have been boundlessly cynical if it was for the benefit of the proletariat? Boundless cynicism meant he broke his word; he betrayed party comrades; he altered his views without telling them; he rigged elections; he seized power by all kinds of irregular means. Well, what of it? If you could demonstrate that this weakened the workers’ movement, if you could show that this put the revolution further off, then of course you had the right to protest. But you had the right to protest only as you protest against a commander-in-chief of an army who is not being competent, and your indignation should strictly speaking be confined to that. Obviously what Martov meant and what people who objected to Stalin’s practices meant was the trampling on certain (what they assumed were) common human values; and the existence of these common human values is a permanent thorn in the flesh of Marxist thought, because it keeps obtruding at points at which the theory is not supposed to admit it. This favoured division of sheep and goats, by which what they, the goats, think is irrelevant to us, is constantly being broken into – and this is what is interesting –

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by the interposition of certain common values. This is what occurs when people think the Marxists have gone too far, or Communism has gone too far, Lenin has gone too far, Stalin has gone too far. Too far for what? Too far, usually, for some kind of common human values which we share to some extent with the other side – which in theory should not be admitted.

Let me go back a little. The great heretic of the Marxist movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the famous revisionist Eduard Bernstein. What was Bernstein's real crime? Of course, among his real crimes was the fact that he said that most of the Marxist prophecies did not come true: whereas Marx said that wages would fall, they were both relatively and absolutely rising; Marx said that land would be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, but it was not; and other points of a similar kind. All this could have been got over; one could have argued that this was a temporary phase, or that he had made mistakes about the facts. Something could have been done to remedy that. What was really wrong with his whole attitude was of a more far-reaching kind. What Bernstein was really saying was something that is fundamentally true and concealed a profound contradiction in the whole Marxist approach, something which had important and interesting consequences in the nineteenth century as well as the twentieth, on a practical even more than a theoretical plane, and that is the following.

One of Marx's doctrines was that there must be a political party of the proletariat. They must not desist from political action, as syndicalists recommended, lest they be corrupted by bourgeois values. The only way to bring about the revolution, to create a situation in which the proletariat could in the end win power, was by participating in the political life of the particular countries to which they belonged, and by creating mass parties instead of indulging in idle conspiracies of the 1848-51 type. But if you do that, if you actually form a mass party and take part in the political life of the people around you, then what happens is that, insensibly and inevitably, you become to some extent identified with, or at any rate mixed up in, the general life of the people with whom you are forced to collaborate in parliaments, in municipal councils, in the general conduct of life. This is inevitable for human beings in general. So long as you believe in the self-insulation of a conspiratorial sect, such as early Christians, or Blanquists, who say, "These people are doomed; they are done for; they are all corrupt;

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they are all wicked; we shall have nothing to do with them; we insulate ourselves; we are a community of saints; we work entirely within our own premises, we have as little communication with them as possible, we are the party of the future'; so long as you confine yourself to small, bitter, organised conspiracies, such as Martov, for example, recommended, and Lenin to some extent implemented; so long as you do that, this attitude is possible. But if you believe in mass parties, if you believe in parties participating in political life, particularly democracies, but really in any country that allows you to participate, then inevitably you eat with them, and you drink with them, and you speak to them, and you follow their rules, and to some extent you become identified with their whole form of life, in which case their values to some extent overlap with yours.

This is precisely what Bernstein noted, simply as a fact, and of course there is a moral implication behind it. He simply took up Engels' position, who said in the 1890s, '1891 is not 1848. Our position is quite different. We conspirators, we subversives are able by legal means, namely by voting in German elections, to obtain far more than we were able to obtain by illegal means. Legal means help us more.' All Bernstein was noting was that the Germans' marvellous German Social Democratic Party, by organising itself in its magnificently disciplined way, by developing its own social services, health services, educational services, political services, by creating a splendid, unified, disciplined, typically German organisation, was enabled to march forward, and not merely to improve its own position but to set up a model for others, and to embody the most progressive tendencies of the society of the time, and therefore, of course, to acquire allies among the sympathetic bourgeoisie, to become, in short, integrated into the normal political life of the country, which they could painlessly and gradually lead into some kind of democratic socialism.

This was a profound heresy. This really was a heresy of principle – not just at the periphery, but at the centre – because it meant that their values and our values overlap. It is possible to live in peace with them. It is possible to some extent to collaborate with them. It is possible to live a common life with them. But of course if you have a political party, if you have a mass party, this is inevitable. The Marxist recipe is to create a party which collaborates with the bourgeoisie to a certain degree, and while you

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are weak puts them in the saddle, but, having put them in the saddle, then proceeds to harry them until it finally ousts them. But the whole Marxist theory of what might be called the expanding Trojan horse, or a kind of cuckoo in the nest of politics – whereby the proletariat cuckoo is warmed in the nest of capitalism while it is still weak, and as soon as it acquires sufficient strength then proceeds to dispatch those who, against their own wills and by historical necessity, have nurtured it – this theory may work in the case of a conspiracy, but obviously does not fit a mass party of a political kind.

People sometimes talk about a certain subculture which the German Social Democrats developed in Germany, and condemn the Social Democratic leaders for insulating their people to some degree from the common life of their country. My thesis is the opposite. By creating a mass party, by following Marx's advice, they produced the opposite result. They integrated German social democracy into the life of the country – whether for better or for worse is not the point with which I am concerned at present. So we find Bernstein implying that there is a certain kind of common moral, political and social life shared between these workers and the people who surround them – and this is obviously true about the West in general. If we ask why Marx was so profoundly mistaken – why did he prophesy revolutions in developed industrial countries, which according to his doctrine should have occurred, say, in England, or in the United States, possibly in Holland? why did they in fact occur in quite a different set of countries, in Russia, or Spain, or China, or Africa, or wherever it may be? – the answer is that it is precisely because he united two incompatible things. On the one hand he adopted the sheep and goats theory, we versus they, either we or they, which will do only for self-insulating conspiracies which really can build ghetto walls around themselves and nurture themselves upon their own hopes and their own strength, and keep out the contaminating elements without. He combined that with the need for a political party and a mass movement, which inevitably penetrate the general social life of a country. These two things could not in fact in practice be combined. That is why, curiously enough, this extraordinary historical paradox occurred by which the despised Bakunin, the romantic anarchist, the man who never really understood doctrine, the Muhammad without a Koran, as Marx called him – and had a right to call him because one of the achievements of Marx was that

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he did provide a Koran for his movement, and his Koran played an enormous part – this Muhammad without a Koran proved to be prophetically right, and Marx to a certain degree proved to be mistaken.

Bakunin's doctrine, which is a comparatively simple one, was roughly this (and of course it is part of the doctrine of the syndicalists as well): If you have an industrially developed society, and you have in it a competent party led by sophisticated intellectuals (what he called, rather unkindly, 'pedantocracy'), and you have a party of persons who use the latest techniques of industrial civilisation, then by the very competence of your arrangements – because you will create an efficient social democratic party, and you will raise its level of existence by successful organisation, by using all the increments of a mounting industrial civilisation for your benefit – you will create a class which will gradually begin to acquire a certain vested interest in the continuation of the society of which it is a part. The only people who can make the kind of revolution that is desirable, namely something which will destroy the whole bad old world and build a new world on its ruins, and not simply modify it in trivial respects – the only people who can do that are who have no vested interest in the old, and these must be people who have nothing to lose: landless peasants, the *Lumpenproletariat*, desperadoes of various sorts. This may have gone too far, but doctrinally Bakunin proved to be right, because the countries in which these revolutions really did break out were countries where what he described was far truer than in the countries for which Marx prophesied revolution. Marx powerfully impressed the imagination of the nineteenth century with the doctrine of we or they, of sheep and goats, of non-communication between different classes, and at the same time gave tactical and strategic advice which nullified it.

Let me put it in another way. Marx says that the capitalists are the gravediggers of their own system; that by following the natural lines of higher and higher productive efficiency and centralisation, they create a situation in which the proletariat is trained, by these very methods, to take over power comparatively painlessly. To some degree the opposite occurred. That is to say, what happened was that Marxism dug its own grave, at any rate in the West, to some degree. It dug its own grave because the more, the better the workers were organised, the shrewder they were, the more they

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heeded Marx's advice, the more they organised themselves politically, the more they pressed the capitalists, the more concessions they obtained, the more they wedged themselves into society – the more they did all this, the stronger, and therefore the more comfortable, they became. This is precisely what the syndicalists had always warned them about. By becoming stronger they became more wedded to the societies out of which they extorted concessions. The only real revolutions occurred in societies where concessions were not given them – in Russia, for example, where there was no great proletariat, where the ruling class really was caught in its own contradictions, because it was semi-feudal, because it was stupid, because it realised that, whether it made concessions or whether it stuck to its guns, it was likely that its system would soon be broken in any case, by the advance of production and so forth. That is why, curiously enough, this paradox turned in upon Marxism itself. The more successful the Marxists were, the further the revolution receded in the countries in which they used those advanced techniques which had been urged upon them by Marx.

Marx was a very remarkable prophet. Far be it from me to deny this. In the nineteenth century his prophecies really were of an astonishing depth and extent. He foresaw the development of big business before other persons had done so. He understood extremely well the contradictions between what might be called collectivised production and individualised distribution. He understood the degree to which human beings are transformed by the very productive processes in which they take part, that self-transformation of human beings which had certainly not been noted before. He was extremely brilliant and effective in explaining what he meant by the fetishism of commodities, in explaining that human beings assume all kinds of laws to be eternal laws like the laws of nature – the laws of economics, the laws of sociology, and various other forms of bourgeois morality – which are in fact the work of human hands and disappear when the classes which profit by them themselves disappear. All this is very remarkable and testifies to the depth and importance of his genius.

But there are certainly two things which he failed to perceive (these are very commonplace points but I feel I must make them). One is the flexibility of the capitalist system. The assumption was that the capitalist system would be a stone wall which could not be penetrated. This in fact did not occur; it was indeed penetrated.

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The more the workers pressed, the more the system gave. There is no doubt that Marx vastly exaggerated both the power and the obstinacy of tycoons and military commanders. In fact the kind of social policies which we associate with various kinds of welfare state activities by the Georges, the Roosevelts and the Keyneses of the world created a situation in which a great many of the accumulated contradictions which Marx prophesied, with their potential for violence, were, to some degree anyhow, alleviated and resolved. Some Marxists maintain that all Marx was saying was that unless these people yielded, unless the bourgeoisie was wise, these various crises which he predicted would occur, but this is not so. He was predicting them absolutely. He was not merely saying that you must be careful; that if the bourgeoisie is stupid enough it will get itself into these various tangles. He was sure that it would, because it could not be un stupid enough, because it was conditioned by history to be blind and deaf in certain ways. Marxism created its own antibodies – a very odd form of dialectic, whereby, by its very success, it created the flexibility and the elasticity on the part of its enemy which made a certain degree of coexistence possible.

The second thing that Marx failed to perceive is the force of nationalism. Nationalism, according to Marxist theory, is simply part of the superstructure, a form of self-delusion which disappears when the economic base to which it gives rise is itself superseded. The whole history of the nineteenth century belies this. It would almost be true to say (as has indeed been claimed) that no movement in the nineteenth century succeeded without being the ally of nationalism, and no movement succeeded against it. In 1815 it killed the German liberalism and cosmopolitanism of people like Humboldt and Goethe. In 1848 it was what arose from the ashes of the revolutions of that year. It was the nationalism of the southern Slavs that killed the revolution in Austria. It was Bismarck and Napoleon III – who played upon nationalism to a violent extent – who arose out of those ruins. In 1914 it was clear that, whatever Marxist leaders might have thought, Bethmann-Hollweg and the Kaiser were not afraid that the troops would not march because they were all members of the German Social Democratic Party, since it was clear that nationalism was a powerful independent motive, whatever else people might believe. Whether Russian communism would have succeeded if nationalism had not been stimulated by the civil war and by

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intervention is not at all clear. Nor need I dwell unnecessarily upon the force of nationalism in China today, or in Africa, or everywhere else – the new nationalism to which ex-imperialism or anti-imperialism gives rise. All this was systematically discounted by Marx. (This explains one of the peculiarities of the situation in Hungary: a nationalist outburst was genuinely not allowed for, because of over-addiction to Marxist theory.)

These two things, then, the elasticity of capitalism and the independent force of nationalism, however it may have been bred, did not enter into the Marxist picture, and to this extent it proved a somewhat purblind prophetic device. But this does not detract from the other things which I have described – the great monistic vision; the theory of the unity of theory and practice; the notion of the growth of a class, the proletariat, which by the very nature of the techniques of the civilisation in which we live was bound to some extent to take over the productive apparatus; the idea that it was class struggle more than any other struggle which determined the course of history, whether in a given State it took the form of proletarians versus capitalists, or even the form of conflict between men of different race or colour, groups which were nevertheless also penetrated by an acute sense of a difference of status, which ultimately reduced itself to class again. The doctrine based on these insights he may certainly be credited with. He was the only person who had this vision; he was the only person who found a body of men upon whom he could impose it as their doctrine; and he wedded theory and practice in a manner which certainly nobody before him, and, I should have thought, no one after him, could come anywhere near to doing.

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