

**ATTITUDE ON MARXISM STATED
DR BERLIN AMPLIFIES HIS REMARKS
MADE AT MOUNT HOLYOKE**

To the Editor of the *New York Times*

In your issue of June 29 there appeared an item with the headline, 'Study of Marxism Backed at Parley', and a sub-headline, 'UN Institute at Holyoke Told Russian Revolution Was Paramount Event'. The account given of my remarks by your correspondent John H. Fenton conveys the clear impression that my principal purpose was to impress upon my audience the importance of studying Marxism, and specifically of not placing a ban upon such studies. I should like to point out that in the first place, whatever remarks I made in connection with the subject were not made in any address delivered by me to the United Nations Institute, since this was not, at my request, given any publicity, in order not to compromise my informants, some of whom came from behind the Iron Curtain.

The remarks upon which your correspondent based his report were made by me in the course of a private interview with him at his request in answer to his questions: I was asked whether I favoured the study of Marxism in general. I replied that the October Revolution was clearly an important event if, in some respects, a disaster; that it was made by men steeped in Marxism; that like other semi-obsolete nineteenth-century doctrines which had had a large influence both on its adherents and its opponents, it deserved careful study; that Marx was more important as the father of economic history and the originator of a new approach to social history than as a revolutionary theorist; and that I saw no reason to forbid the study of his views, provided that those responsible preserved an attitude sufficiently critical to take account of the errors and distortions in which Marxism abounds.

Above all I remember insisting that such students of the subject must remain detached and analytic and not on any account slip

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into the attitude of preachers; and that if Marxism were to be refuted, which I believed to be both possible and desirable, it must first be understood.

Your correspondent's report, as well as the headlines attached to it, clearly conveys the impression that my lecture to the United Nations Institute was mainly concerned with the advocacy of Marxist studies. As anyone who heard it can testify, my actual lecture stressed the incompatibility between any form of democratic belief and Marxist doctrine; while my replies to your correspondent's questions were intended mainly to stress the necessity for a sharply critical approach to doctrines which even today tend to be swallowed whole by the fanatical Marxist sectaries, both orthodox Communists and the heretics whom they have excommunicated. Since I feel that my position in this matter has not been correctly represented, I should be grateful if you would be so kind as to publish this letter.

*Isaiah Berlin,
Fellow and Tutor of New College, Oxford, England
Cambridge, Mass., June 30, 1949*

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