

The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library

The Impact of Marx on the Nineteenth Century

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Revolutions Conference Next Week

Top Professors Will Congregate

More than 30 leading scholars of revolutionary movement will meet at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace next Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday to examine "One Hundred Years of Revolutionary Internationals."

THE THREE-DAY conference open to the public, marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the International Workingmen Association in London. Established Sept. 28, 1864, this was the First International and was dominated by Karl Marx.

The impact of Marxism in the 19th and 20th Centuries will be discussed by Sir Isaiah Berlin of Oxford University and Raymond Aron of the University of Paris (Sorbonne) in evening lectures Monday and Tuesday.

Others attending the conference will include Peter Bauer of the London School of Economics and Political Science; Daniel Bell of Columbia University; Theodore Draper and Stefan Possory of the Hoover Institution; Merl Fainsod of Harvard University; Jacques Freymond, director of the Institute of International Studies at Geneva; Sidney Hook of New York University; Richard Lowenthal of the Free University of Berlin; Gerhart Niemeyer of Notre Dame; Leonard Shapiro of the London School of Economics and Political Science; Boris Souvarine, editor of *Le Contrat Social*, Paris; and Bertram Wolfe, author of the best-seller, "Three Who Made A Revolution."

Stanford Daily, 1 October 1964, 1

The Impact of Marx on the Nineteenth Century

On Monday 5 October 1964 Isaiah Berlin gave the following lecture in Stanford University's Memorial Auditorium to a conference on 'One Hundred Years of Revolutionary Internationals' held under the auspices of the Hoover Institution to mark the centenary of the First International Working Men's Association. A recording of the lecture is available [here](#). This transcript has been lightly edited by Henry Hardy: footnotes are editorial. The full text from which the lecture is loosely derived is included as 'Marxism and the International in the Nineteenth Century' in Berlin's collection *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History*, edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1996: Chatto and Windus). Thanks are due to the staff of the Hoover Institution Archives for their ready and efficient help in providing information and a copy of the recording.



Memorial Auditorium, Stanford University

CHAIRMAN¹ Ladies and gentlemen: This evening we have that delectable combination which all planners of lecture programmes seek, and few discover – a subject of great importance and a

¹ As yet unidentified.

speaker of rare distinction. To this, your recent forced march² has been eloquent tribute enough. About the subject, the impact of Marxism in the nineteenth century, I shall have nothing to say. Each of you in this audience already know, I'm sure, a hundred reasons why it is important; and Sir Isaiah Berlin will undoubtedly suggest several dozen more before the evening is over. Our speaker scarcely stands in need of introduction either. He was once described in the *New York Times*, with some degree of understatement, as lecturer in philosophy at Oxford and famous as a scholar, diplomatist and conversationalist in at least two continents. He is, in fact, Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls. In 1941–2 he served with the British Ministry of Information in New York. He then moved to Washington for three more years' service at the British Embassy and finally wound up with four or five months³ at the British Embassy in Moscow before returning to academic life. Many a Foreign Office career man might well stand in awe of that list of posts. I think that it is fair to say that his many published works have been uniformly brief and brilliant, a mixture warmly to be welcomed in an age that perhaps sees too many nine-hundred-page books by one-hundred-page minds on forty-page subjects. Most of you are, I'm sure, familiar with his often quoted lecture on historical inevitability, his masterly essay on Tolstoy's view of history entitled *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, and his biography of Karl Marx (who was a somewhat more prolix author), first published in 1939 and constantly reappearing in new editions since, because of the continuing demand for it. It is a distinct honour to present to you Sir Isaiah Berlin of Oxford University.

ISIAH BERLIN Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen: First, may I thank you for your kind remarks, which are more than my due, but I thank you particularly because it's more agreeable to receive

² Presumably a humorous reference to the very short journey to the Memorial Auditorium, which is next door to the Hoover Institution, and at the heart of Stanford University.

³ Four months: early September 1945 to early January 1946.

more than one's due than one's due. Secondly, may I come to the subject of this lecture? It is the impact of Marx on the nineteenth century.

We are met to celebrate the First International. It's difficult to think of a body of men more obscure than those who constituted the First International. Nobody would have been more surprised than these men, gathered in London in 1864, if they had been told that a hundred years after this momentous event they would still be remembered. I doubt whether anyone now attaches very much meaning to the names of Schapper and Lessner, Eccarius and Herman Jung, Dupleix, Limousin and Bobczynski. These, I admit, are the obscurest names: there are a few more famous names, such as Varlin and Tolain, who were made famous by the Commune, and perhaps a few better-known names than that: Major Luigi Wolff. None of them are persons 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, of course, is, as I need hardly tell you, 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.

Marx 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, from France and Belgium; a man better educated than they were, a fiery radical and revolutionary, somewhat intimidating, but useful for this purpose. In the end, of course, he transformed it 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 socialist parties of Russia in 1917. Nevertheless, the effect was much the same. That is to say, they won.

If the question is asked about the impact of the Marxist movement, in particular of Marxist ideas, in the nineteenth century,

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's not a very Marxist attitude, perhaps, not a very Marxist point of view, but I must admit that 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 in the world.

There are at least two classes of ideas 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 something to write about rather than to talk about, because the only way of investigating this in a valuable manner is by detailed research, minute description of detail and not by a few broad generalisations. I mean the influence of Marx on sociologists like 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, his impression upon philosophers of various types, for example upon thinkers like the young Croce towards the end of the nineteenth century, the impact that he made upon almost every humane discipline, and particularly humane disciplines, because his effect upon the natural sciences, at any rate in the nineteenth century, appears to me to be zero. This effect is of course of importance, and became more or less fulfilled by the time we reach 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 the extension, without any significant or original advance, of the kind of influence which he had already had by 1914. I don't propose to deal with this, important though it is, because, as I say, it needs detailed treatment.

The second topic with which I don't intend to deal is 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 and Allemanists in France, and populists in Russia. The impact of Marxism upon the populism of a thinker like 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 it 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, but should not be dealt with in a few broad brush strokes.

I propose to confine myself, if I may, 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 don't propose, to this audience, to spell out the familiar structure of Marxist thought. I propose to concentrate only upon what appears to me to be the most arresting and original of his ideas, those which have had the deepest effect until this day. And these appear to me to be two in number – with modifications, implications, 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. That is the first. And this had, of course, extremely powerful political implications in the form which he gave it. The second is the division of the world into the children of light and children of darkness, which in all kinds of peculiar implications, which he certainly can't 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 about the philosophy of history he called his book *On the Question of the Development of the Monist View of History*. He chose this title, which appeared long and cumbersome, in order to avoid the perils of the 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 Marxist 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, which accounts for all there is. Other thinkers have had similar ideas from the beginnings of philosophy onwards. In particular in the nineteenth century, of course, Saint-Simonists embarked upon this, and still more strongly the positivists, led by Auguste Comte.

Why, one may ask, did positivism, which made equally ambitious claims, not produce the powerful impact of Marxism? Two of the reasons for this, it seems to me, are these. 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. The fact that 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 large numbers of human beings found themselves – that this same doctrine also demonstrated that this state of affairs was bound to end in the triumph of a particular class, and in the triumph of certain humane principles, 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 didn't simply enunciate that anyone who understood his ideas or followed his doctrines would, by applying them to real life, be able to implement the consequences to which their implementation was supposed to lead. He did something which was strategically much more effective. That is to say, he identified an already existing class of men, the workers, industrial workers, more broadly the poor, with the people who would inherit the earth. That is to say, he attached his doctrine to an already existing army and made of them the chosen instrument of history. And this was a move of the highest strategic significance. He found a body of men in existence and provided them with a Bible and with leadership. This certainly didn't enter into Auguste Comte's calculations. And this is certainly one of the reasons for

the greater impact and success of Marxism over rival doctrines flourishing at the same time.

Now, let me go back, if I may, to the two cardinal ideas which I enunciated. First of all, this question of monism. Marx, like a great many thinkers before him, begins with the proposition that all true questions have answers, one true answer, all the other answers being false, and that this true answer can be discovered, and that when it is discovered, it can be implemented; and that this true answer, if it is implemented, will both in theory and in practice satisfy the cravings of the human mind and the human heart. He starts from the assumption that there is such a thing as a human nature, that there is something central to all men in virtue of which they are called men; that 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 self-expression; that given that there is this human nature, 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 he laid down with a certain degree of dogmatism, as indeed previous thinkers as well, particularly Hegel, 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 the assumption that all men's desires can be satisfied in a harmonious manner, compatibly with the harmonious satisfaction of 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 anyhow, that which their natures require or need; that the abnormal situation is a situation of struggle or strife or conflict.

Now this means that if Marxism is accepted as a doctrine, you would deny the other interpretation of politics. You would deny the interpretation of politics in accordance with which many men in different circumstances have different desires; these desires conflict both between bodies of men and between different periods and perhaps within a single man himself; the task of any practical discipline, say politics, say economics, is the adjustment

of these interests so that they don't 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; but the notion 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 to 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. Marx's notion 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 to try to hold these things in balance and 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, as I say, a fixed human nature with certain discoverable human desires. If there weren't such a thing as a fixed human nature, it would not make sense to talk about people as being degraded, or people as being dehumanised, or people as being 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 arises: How do we discover these ends? (I'm putting this in a highly simplified form because I haven't too much time at my disposal. I hope therefore to be forgiven for this.) The only way in which this 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 needn't rehearse to you, is the history of class struggles, which, as he rightly says, was discovered not by him but by the 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, is against another class or other classes which are not. Those 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 they alone understand what it is that will satisfy the cravings and desires of the class which is progressive, 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 in the best position to know what in particular will advance humanity forward. You identify a particular class with the general future of mankind at any given moment. 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 historically 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 to what goes on. Who are not blind? Those are not blind whose interests don't blind them to the facts. And 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 the dialectic of historical movement is condemned by history, as Marx would say – is bound to yield to some other body of men whose interests are more consonant with what the times require – if you do not belong to this progressive class, then you are systematically unable to face the facts, because no human beings can face too much reality.⁴ But it is particularly difficult to face it 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 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

⁴ An echo of T. S. Eliot's 'human kind / Cannot bear too much reality': 'Burnt Norton' (1935), lines 16–17, in *Four Quartets* (1943).

belong to a class in whose interests it is to know the truth as it really is. It is not in the direct interest of anyone else because people are not so made that they can watch their own impending doom with any degree of indifference.

Now let me explain to you what this comes to. Let me explain to you the second notion which enters into Marxist monism, which I hope I've said enough about, namely his doctrine of the unity of theory and practice. This is of importance because it affected the movement, and it made of the socialist movement, which Marx inspired, the marching army which in fact it became in all its transformations. The unity of theory and practice, which is probably familiar to most people here – and I must admit that I am ashamed of talking about this to persons whose lives are spent in far closer association with these things than mine ever was; nevertheless, I must make an attempt to explain what I mean – 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 – and it is an error which I myself have come near to making in the past – that fundamentally the Marxist attitude is one of a kind of crude cosmic utilitarianism. What I mean is this. 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. I have certain desires. How can I realise them? Why, I can only realise them 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 politician, societies, if I am a sculptor, marble, if I am an economist, the economic system, and so forth.

Now 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. Every man wishes to fulfill that which he desires. In order to fulfil

it, 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 don't understand reality or how to deal with it, it will get me in the end, to put it very crudely. This is a straight juggernaut theory of Marxism. Better find out where things are going, because if you don't find out, you'll pay for it. I, Marx, say that there is a class struggle. If you ignore this, you will in fact be crushed by the fact that you don't understand it. You had better find out which way the world is going. You might as well understand what it is that is inevitable, and try to like it, because if you don't like it, it will come in any case. Therefore, since you can't get what you want, you had better try to want that which alone you can get – something of this kind.

This is a very common interpretation of Marx's views, a common interpretation which makes him a kind of crude utilitarian realist. You want to satisfy your wishes, study the world in which you live, be realistic, not indulge in fantasies, not be an idealist, not believe in myths, unmask things, 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 in certain circumstances, because if you don't understand this, then you will in fact be destroyed by it. Better get on to the bandwagon if you don't 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's a very normal thing to think. It's realism in the ordinary sense of the word, in which when people say 'I'm afraid I'm rather realist', what they mean is 'I'm about to tell a lie, or do something rather shabby', the assumption being that reality is on the whole disagreeable, and had better be studied in its least attractive 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. It comes to something of this kind, if I

may just expound it for a moment. 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 towards it – *Wertfreiheit*, freedom from valuation. For those who follow the philosophy of Hegel, and it's important to remember that Karl Marx, in spite of all his deviations 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 this view, this is a false interpretation of how men live and think and will and feel. It is a more correct thing to say that I look at the universe with a particular set of eyes. I observe the process of life. I observe this process 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'm engaged in a constant process of action, a constant process of trying to dominate my environment in order to acquire freedom over it, 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 the philosophers of this school attribute to human beings. If I do this, 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. And that is a brute fact. I am what I am. Men are what they are. They have the desires they have. They have certain basic desires or basic ideals or basic cravings in terms of which human beings are defined as such. If they didn't have them, they wouldn't be human at all.

Since I am that, I can't look upon reality with indifferent eyes. Therefore it is fallacious to divide values from facts. The view of food of a man who is starving is very different from the view of a man who is satisfied. The view of 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 take. Human beings don't choose the form of life into which they are born. Above all, they don't choose the class into which they are born, and they don't choose the particular moment of 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 any attitude towards it is a profound piece of self-deception. If I think that I can do this, it is only because for some reason, some pathological or natural reason, I don't wish to be involved in this reality. It's a form of withdrawal, if you like 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 taking up an attitude, though it may not be the same attitude as that of an active participant. To say that I stand on the edges of fact, I merely describe, I am a mere observer – the word 'mere' is quite important there because it means that 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 doctrine of the unity of theory and practice. The doctrine is that whatever I do or don't do, whether I contemplate or act, I'm always in a state of activity towards something. I'm always striving for something or running away from something, failing to do something or doing something. And failing is also kind of doing; sitting still is also a kind of doing. That being so, it's 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, on the other hand there is a 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 purposes, purely philosophical purposes.

Now if you really think that, then it's 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 the particular political or economic situation in which, say, the workers of a given country are situated either to form a political party, to seize power or not to seize power, to collaborate or not collaborate – to say these things is not simply to give tips to people about how to gain certain subjective ends. To enunciate a theory of history is not simply to say: I am among the many people who simply explain to you how theory moves. Some people explain about matter: they are called physicists. I explain about 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 which I enunciate is itself bound by a myriad threads to a particular way of looking at things, to possessing 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 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 with a kind of take-it-or-leave-it attitude. This is how history moves. If you want to be a success, you will apply my theory. Like a man who says: This is how one builds a

bridge. You needn't build a bridge; but if you want to build 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 was to provide a total answer, because in the view of Hegelians and Marxists one can't stop at any particular discipline, one can't 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, to understand it – is to spell out these particular relationships. In this respect Marx is vastly superior, even from a political or tactical point of view, from such rivals of his as Auguste Comte or liberal reformers or even to a certain extent the Christian socialists of his time who attracted men's loyalties also, 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 the religious establishments, the Churches. 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 followers certainly tried to construct something called a positivist Church. But Marx succeeded better, partly because he was a profounder thinker, but also because he identified the cause of human progress, that is to say the 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 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 worked as members of armies, and so forth.

Marx was horrified by the same phenomena as 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 men 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, in which 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, say, the feudal ages or the Middle Ages possessed, was being knocked down in favour of these vast nameless herds. But whereas people like Schopenhauer or Nietzsche were very conscious of it, or Ruskin or Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky, 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 escaping into some kind of individual aesthetic satisfaction, or general despair, or various forms of private religions and 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 round 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 that it is the capitalists themselves who, whether they know it or not, are by the very nature of the industrial process, disciplining huge armies of workers into competence, efficiency, technical knowledge, which would enable them, the workers, then to get rid of their oppressors far more easily than if they had remained ignorant unindustrialised craftsmen. It is an ambitious attempt to turn vices into virtues, at any rate to make enormous virtues out of obvious necessities. And this, of course, is a source of great strength to a movement.

Now let me come to the second central idea which, it appears to me, Marx enunciated. And this is perhaps the more important of the two. In all previous human thought, whenever there was 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 in a certain kind of truth, and there was before me a Protestant heretic, I tried 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, theology, 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 passion. 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 a situation where the truth would shine upon him and he would really see it. If I couldn't persuade him, if I couldn't 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 in the Catholic Church, the general theory 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 a man in danger of losing eternal salvation, I took steps in order to procure it for him in his interest. But throughout I was 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.

Now it appears to me that Marx – perhaps this is an exaggeration – was the first thinker really to destroy this assumption in a very formidable and, from the point of view of our lives, 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 the 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 can't 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, as it were, conditioned by the forces of history into systematically misinterpreting experience to your advantage. Now 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 the opium with which you put yourself to sleep. This is the whole doctrine of rationalisation, of myths, of ideology, by which a class whose interest is bound up with some situation which is fundamentally unsatisfactory is bound to disguise this fact both from itself and from others, and can deceive both itself and others by all kinds of myths and inventions which becloud the truth, which keep it from its members because they can't quite dare to look at it.

Let me give you three metaphors which I have thought of in order to make this present to your imaginations. The first metaphor which I thought of using 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, who are on the downward-moving stairs, and fundamentally there can't be communication between us because what you see is different from what I see. People who move downwards have a vista before them different from that of people who move upwards, and there isn't enough in common to make direct communication possible.

Or let me take a second metaphor. Suppose you are drowning: if I ask you about the temperature of the water, this is not the moment to ask you that question, nor are you in a 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 therefore you are desperately clinging to every kind of straw which is going to give you false hopes about ultimately being rescued. Of course, these hopes are false, but you can't help entertaining them.

Let me try my third metaphor upon you. It [concerns the situation], for Marx, of the enlightened person, that is, the person who understands the historical situation and therefore either is born into the correct class or by his own act of will has transferred himself to it – because 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'm a madman, I understand neither the psychiatrist nor myself. If I ask the madman questions, it isn't in order to find out the state of affairs. It's only in order to find out his symptoms, to find out what pathological condition he may be in. And I have to find this out not merely for the humane reason that I'm 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, and therefore I must protect myself against him.

This is somewhat the attitude of the Soviet Union, certainly in the 1930s, towards the Western world, where they saw themselves as understanding the machinery of history, whereas those with whom they were dealing did not, and therefore they had to protect themselves against these lunatics. It's exactly the attitude of a psychiatrist to a lunatic. This is the position of a man who understands towards a man who doesn't 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 there is a whole class of human beings at any given moment 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 can't talk to

them, you can't try to save them, however kindly you may feel towards them, because they've been rendered deaf by history to your form of locution. And therefore they are condemned. This constantly occurs in the works of later Marxist writers. Since they are condemned, there is no point in wasting effort in trying to save them. It isn't that you take up an attitude of hatred towards them, or an 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, of course, is an enormous advantage from the point of view of a party fighting to assert itself, because it means you needn't bother about the enemy, in a certain sense, at all. You have to bother him because you don't wish to be defeated by him. He may still be too strong, but you needn't communicate with him. He is out of your moral range because history has placed him there. Now this division of human beings, this cutting of human beings 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 be something new. Even the Jacobins, who presumably, let us say, put to death aristocrats or priests because they belonged to the wrong class, allowed that in theory these men, if they changed their views and understood about liberty, equality and fraternity, could all of them be integrated into the new state. There was no doctrine by which they were conditioned into inability to understand, and therefore made automatically expendable.

But this Marxism brought into 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 divisions, 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's not simply a question of practical convenience or, as in war, of having to defeat the enemy, otherwise we can't attain the goal. We know that these people can't be rescued in any case, and 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. And 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 doomed, impotent, unable to resist, not worth thinking about. This seems to me the second central notion which Marx introduced into the world. And this is something which all Marxist parties in some degree accepted, or rather those which didn't accept only didn't accept at the price of a certain degree of inconsistency.

Now we come down to brass tacks, to actual facts. The fact that Marx believed this is extremely clear. 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' or all the various clichés, if you like liberal clichés, which Proudhonists or Blanquists borrowed from the liberals, which was the normal stock-in-trade, and the quite sincere stock-in-trade, of radical parties, socialist parties, left-wing parties of all kinds – 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 words like 'rights' meant something different from what they would mean in the mouths of other persons. And therefore the use indiscriminately of a language common with that of the bourgeoisie was a recognition of the existence of certain common values. And the whole point of his doctrine was a denial of just that. And 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's why he writes to Engels, at a famous moment of drafting the First International, pointing out that he had allowed one or two of these expressions to come in, but he didn't think they would do very 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 wouldn't quite understand if one didn't 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 self-conscious proletarian from what they did for a bourgeois or member of some other class.

This, I think, is symptomatic. In the case of the Gotha Programme, everyone remembers 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 base had 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 economic system determined everything else, and a right could be what it was only in virtue of the 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. So that the whole of moral language was transferred to the eschatological stage after the Revolution has been won, after the flow of production becomes wide and generous, after human beings have liberated themselves from these fearful chains which bind them now, after they've ceased exploiting and persecuting each other, and together exploit inanimate nature. Until then, such language couldn't be used.

The implication of this is serious and interesting, because if you ask yourself what it was that made various persons quail, shy back from accepting the full implications of what Marx's socialism bound upon them from the days of the First International onwards, you will find that what makes them quail, what sets them back to a certain extent, is always the fact that they can't 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 really oughtn't to use common terms except as a stratagem, except in a Machiavellian way. The examples are obvious. What,

for example, horrifies people about certain practices of people who profess Marxism are not mistakes of tactics, what horrifies them is usually cruelty, brutality, immorality of some sort. Now immorality means what? A sin against what moral code? You will find that the moral code against which it is a sin is not the moral code which can be deduced by the rigid application of Marxism. And this is quite interesting.

Let us begin with minor examples. When, for example, 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 the Dreyfus case was simply a row of the bourgeois among themselves, a lot of capitalists fighting other capitalists, nothing to do with us, nothing to do with the workers, Jaurès, who was perhaps not completely a 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 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 in some way he became a symbol of anticlerical illiberal tendencies. He hadn't committed this crime, and these people refused to take part on the narrow and perfectly defensible Marxist grounds 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.

When 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 the 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 stream 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 militates towards that end is good, anything which goes against it is bad. Wartime is no time for brooding over old-fashioned scruples. The worst which you can urge against such an attitude, provided you believe in the sincerity of the leaders of the proletariat, is: You've made 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 from 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. And this is theoretically inadmissible in the rigid Marxist schema.

In 1914, for example, 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 thought that European civilisation was in danger. When Lassalle gave Marx evidences of the fact that he thought 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 there civilisation, and there was our civilisation. The notion of a common civilisation was already a concession to the enemy, it was a misunderstanding of the unity of theory and practice.

When Lenin pointed out to Trotsky, I can't remember the building, the National Gallery in London or the British Museum, I

can't remember which,⁵ and said 'This is their National Gallery', 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 can't be bridges. When Rosa Luxemburg was shocked by Lenin's dictatorial tactics, when in after years people were shocked by Stalin's brutal behaviour, and so forth, all these shocks, if you ask what they were, in particular whether they were moral shocks, about purges, about trials, about Austro-German pacts or whatever it might be; when, for example, Martov talked about Lenin's boundless cynicism, what do you suppose he meant? I don't for a moment wish to say whether I think that Martov was right or wrong – that is comparatively irrelevant – but one knows what he meant. Now when he accused Lenin of boundless cynicism, this is something quite different from accusing him of, let us say, making errors, making mistakes. Why shouldn't Lenin be 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

⁵ It was Westminster (sc. the Houses of Parliament?), though the British Museum also gets a mention: 'Vladimir Ilyich and I went for a long walk around London. From a bridge, Lenin pointed out Westminster and some other famous buildings. I don't remember the exact words he used, but what he conveyed was: "This is their famous Westminster", and "their" referred of course not to the English but to the ruling classes. This implication, which was not in the least emphasised, but coming as it did from the very innermost depths of the man, and expressed more by the tone of his voice than by anything else, was always present, whether Lenin was speaking of the treasures of culture, of new achievements, of the wealth of books in the British Museum, of the information of the larger European newspapers, or, years later, of German artillery or French aviation. They know this or they have that, they have made this or achieved that – but what enemies they are! To his eyes, the invisible shadow of the ruling classes always overlay the whole of human culture – a shadow that was as real to him as daylight.' Leon Trotsky, *My Life: The Rise and Fall of a Dictator* (London 1930), 125–6: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch11.htm>.

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. Your indignation should, strictly speaking, be confined to that.

Obviously what Martov meant, and what people who object to Stalin's practices meant, was the trampling on certain (what they assume to be) common human values. And the existence of these common human values is a permanent thorn in the flesh of actual Marxist thought because it keeps obtruding uprooting at points at which the theory is not supposed to admit it. This famous division of sheep and goats, by which what they, the goats, think is irrelevant to us, is constantly being broken into. That is what is interesting. It's constantly being broken into 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.

Now let me go back a little to history. The great heretic of the Marxist movement was, of course, Eduard Bernstein in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century: his famous revisionism. Now what was Bernstein's real crime? Of course, among his real crimes was the fact that he said that most of the Marxist prophecies didn't come true; that he said that, whereas Marx said that wages would fall, they were both relatively and absolutely rising. He said that land would be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands – 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 be 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 which was fundamentally true, and concealed a profound contradiction in the

whole Marxist approach, which had important and interesting consequences in the nineteenth century as well as the twentieth, on a practical even more than on a theoretical plane, and that is this. One of Marx's doctrines was that there must be a political party of the proletariat. They mustn't 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 countries to which they belonged, and creating mass parties, instead of indulging in idle conspiracies of the 1848, 1851 type.

Very well. Now if you do that, if you have a mass party and you take part in the political life of the people round you, then what happens is that you insensibly and inevitably become identified, to some extent at any rate, become mixed up with 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, early Christians or Blanquists who say: These people are doomed, they are done for, they are all corrupt, 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 premisses; 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 Tkachev, 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 in democracies, but really in any country which allows you to do that; if you do that, 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 simply noted, noted simply as a fact, and of course there is a moral implication behind it. He

simply took up Engels's 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. Well, all that Bernstein was noting was that the German Social Democratic Party, by organising itself in a magnificently disciplined way, by developing its own social services, health services, educational services, political services, everything whatever, by creating a splendid, unified, disciplined, typically German organisation – by doing this, was enabled to march forward not merely to improve its own position, but to set a model to others and to embody the most progressive tendencies of the society of their time; and in that sense, of course, to acquire allies amongst 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.

Now this, of course, was a real, profound heresy. This really was a heresy of principle, not just of the periphery – of 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 that you create a party which collaborates with the bourgeoisie to a certain degree, and while you are weak, puts them in the saddle, but having put them in the saddle, then proceeds to harry them until it finally ousts them – the whole Marxist theory of what might be called the expanding Trojan horse, the Marxist theory of what you might also call a kind of cuckoo-in-the-nest politics, by which the proletarian cuckoo is warmed in the nest of capitalism while it is still weak, and as soon it acquires sufficient strength, proceeds then to dispatch those who against their own wills and by historical necessity have in fact nurtured it.

This theory may work with a conspiracy, but obviously doesn't work with a mass party of a political kind. During this conference⁶ people talked about a certain subculture which the German Social Democrats developed in Germany, and somewhat condemned 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 Marxist advice, they produced the opposite result. They integrated German social democracy into the life of the country – for better or for worse: that is not the point about which I am concerned at the present. And so you get Bernstein implying that there is a certain moral life and a certain political life and a certain social life common to these workers and the people who surround them. And this is obviously true about the West in general, and if you ask why was Marx so profoundly mistaken, why, having prophesied revolutions in developed industrial countries, which according to his doctrine should have occurred, say in England, say in the United States, possibly in Holland – why did they in fact occur in quite a different set of countries, in Russia or in Spain or in China or in Africa or wherever it may be? Why did this happen? It is precisely because he united two incompatible things. On the one hand, 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 penetrates the general social life of a country. These two things couldn't, in fact, in practice be combined. And 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 Mohammed without a Koran, as Marx

⁶ The Congress of the Marxist Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) at Erfurt in 1891. Bernstein was one of those who drew up the Erfurt Programme, adopted at the Congress in place of the Gotha Programme of 1875.

called him, and had a right to call him, because one of the points of Marx was that he did provide a Koran for his movement, and this 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 – and of course it was part of the doctrine of the syndicalists as well – was roughly this. 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'⁷ – and you have a party of persons who use the latest techniques of industrial civilisation, then you will breed 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 strikes, by successful organisation, by using all the implements of a

⁷ Bakunin seems not to have used this exact term, though he does address the topic. For example, in *L'Empire Knouto-Germanique et la révolution sociale* (1870–1) he speaks of 'the government of science' and 'the government of savants' (sc. Marxism/ists), and says that they display 'doctrinaire ambition and pedantry' ('ambition et pédantisme doctrinaires'): *Archives Bakounine*, ed. Arthur Lehning (Leiden, 1961–81), vii 121, 128–9 (cf. 284); Michael Bakounine, *God and the State* [the latter part of Bakunin's work was originally published in 1882 as *Dieu et l'état*], trans. Benj[amin] R[jicketson] Tucker (Boston/Tunbridge Wells, 1883), 34, 39. And in *Gosudarstvennost' i anarkhiya* (1873) he writes: 'To be the slaves of pedants – what a fate for humanity!' *Archives Bakounine* iii 112; Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, ed. and trans. Marshall Shatz (Cambridge, 1990), 134. IB probably borrowed the term from J. S. Mill, who seems to have coined it in a letter of 25 February 1842 to Auguste Comte, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson and others (Toronto/London, 1963–91) [MCW] xiii 502. The assertion, found here and there, that Comte himself coined the term in an article entitled 'La Pédantocratie académique' in the *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* in 1840 appears to be false. No such article exists, and Comte's reply to Mill of 4 March 1842, referring to 'votre heureuse expression de *pédantocratie*' ('your felicitous term "pedantocracy"'), together with later remarks by Comte and Mill to one another, makes clear that Mill invented the term: *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à John Stuart Mill, 1841–1846* (Paris, 1877), 24. Mill later speaks of the danger that a bureaucracy will degenerate into a pedantocracy in *On Liberty* (1859), chapter 5, and in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), chapter 6: MCW xviii 308, xix 439.

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 they are a part. The only people who really can make the kind of revolution that is desirable, namely something which really 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 people who have no vested interest in the old. And these people must be people who have nothing to lose, landless peasants, 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 this was far truer than in the countries about which Marx prophesied it. And that is the interesting sense in which Marx powerfully impressed the imagination of the nineteenth century with the doctrine of we-or-they, with the doctrine of sheep and goats, with the doctrine of non-communication between different classes, and at the same time gave tactical and strategic advice which nullified this.

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 better the workers were organised, the shrewder they were, the more they heeded Marx's advice, the more they politically organised themselves, the more they pressed the capitalists, the more concessions they obtained, the more they wedged themselves into society, the stronger they became, 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 these concessions. The only real revolutions occurred in societies where these concessions

were not given them. In Russia, 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 their system would soon be broken, in any case, by the advance of production and so forth. And that is why, curiously enough, this paradox turned in upon Marxism itself. The more successful Marxists were, the further away the Revolution in the countries in which they used those advanced techniques which had been urged upon them by Marx.

Let me say this. 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 saw the development of big business before other persons had done so. He understood extremely well the contradictions between collectivised production and individualised distribution. He understood this. He understood the degree to which human beings are transformed by the very productive processes in which they take part, the self-transformation of human beings, which had certainly not been noticed so far in the past. He was extremely brilliant and effective in explaining what he meant by the fetishism of commodities, in explaining what he meant by the fact that human beings assume all kinds of laws to be eternal laws like the laws of nature: the laws of economics, laws of sociology, 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 do not let me derogate from the depth or importance of his genius. But there are certainly two things which he failed to perceive. These are very commonplace points, but I think 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 couldn't be penetrated. This, in fact, didn't occur. It was penetrated. The more the workers pressed, the more the system gave. There is no doubt that he vastly exaggerated both the power and the obstinacy of tycoons and military

commanders. The kind of social policies that we associate with various kinds of welfare state activities, all the Lloyd Georges and the Roosevelts and the Keyneses of the world, created a situation in which, in fact, a great deal of the accumulated violence of the contradictions which Marx prophesied were, to some degree anyhow, alleviated and resolved. You may say, as some Marxist try to say, 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 wasn't merely saying: You must be careful if the bourgeoisie is stupid enough to get it into these various tangles. He was sure that it would because it couldn't be un stupid enough, because it was conditioned by history to be blind and deaf in certain ways. So that, if you like, Marxism created its own antibodies, a very odd form of dialectic by which Marxism, by its very success, created the flexibility and the elasticity on the part of its enemy which made a certain degree of coexistence possible.

The second thing which he failed to perceive is the force of nationalism. Nationalism is, of course, according to the Marxist theory, simply part of the superstructure, and itself is 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 somebody said, I can't remember who,⁸ that no movement in the nineteenth century succeeded without being an ally of nationalism and no movement succeeded against it. In 1815 it killed the German liberalism and cosmopolitanism of people like Humboldt and Goethe. It was that which arose from the ashes of the revolutions of 1848. It was the nationalism of the Southern Slavs which 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

⁸ In 'A Note on Nationalism', published in the same year in which this lecture was delivered, IB attributed this view to J. L. Talmon: see POI 303/1.

the troops wouldn't march, because they were all members of the German Social Democratic Party, because 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 intervention is not at all clear. Nor need I dwell unnecessarily upon the force of nationalism in China today or in Africa – the new nationalisms to which ex-imperialism, anti-imperialism gives rise. This was systematically discounted by Marx. One of the peculiar situations in Hungary was that it was genuinely not allowed for: a nationalist outburst was 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, didn't enter into the Marxist picture. And to this extent it proved a somewhat purblind prophet. Nevertheless, the other things which I spoke of, the great monistic vision, the theory of the unity of theory and practice, the notion of the growth of the class, namely the proletariat, which by the very nature of industrialisation, by the very nature of the technical civilisation in which we live, was bound to some extent to take over the productive apparatus – that in fact it was class struggles more than any other struggles which determined the course of history, whether they took the form of proletarians versus capitalists in a given state, or even the forms of, for example, men of different race and colour who are nevertheless also penetrated by acute sense of differences of status, which ultimately reduces itself to class again, that insight he may be credited with, and he was certainly the only person who saw this. 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 nobody before him, and I shouldn't have thought anyone after him, came anywhere near to doing.

Oxford Prof Analyzes Basic Marxist Drives

By **MARY K. BECKER**

Marx's total "monism" and his division of men into "children of light and children of darkness" were his two most arresting and original contributions, Sir Isaiah Berlin of Oxford University told a capacity crowd in Memorial Auditorium last night.

Speaking on the "Impact of Marxism in the Nineteenth Century," Berlin said that Marx's doctrine of one central, discoverable truth is the basis of his theory's impact. It afforded "Bible and leadership," for a proletarian movement in that it accounted for the miseries of man and included them as evidence for the coming felicitude of man, and attached this doctrine to an already existing army, the proletariat.

A common theory of Marxism, which Berlin termed "crude, cosmic utilitarianism," says that one must see the direction of the bandwagon of "reality" and get on, or be run over. This, Berlin asserted, assumed the ability of man to be impartial and free of pre-existing values concerning

his environment.

The second new idea, according to Berlin, centers around the inability of different classes to communicate with each other. The declining class traditionally refuses—for economic reasons—to be persuaded by the enlightened progressive class. This gives the latter the moral right — according to Marx—to eliminate the former. "This doctrine is an enormous weapon of belief and propaganda," said Berlin.

Basically, then, Marx's doctrine is "We or They—not Both," i.e., no intellectual or moral compromise from Marxism. This theory, however, contradicts his tactical recommendation for a mass party, party, Berlin said. Size, as well as the accumulation of vested interests, cripples the revolutionary power of pure Marxism.

Although Marx was a remarkable prophet, Berlin concluded, he failed in the West because he didn't recognize the flexibility of the capitalist system or the force of nationalism as an independent movement.

Stanford Daily, 6 October 1964, 1

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