



The Relevance of the Ideas of Marx Today

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ABSTRACT

This paper will argue that Marx's ideas are in fact, still relevant today however, not in the sense that there is place for an actual application of communism but rather that Marx's propositions about justice and equality should find application in improving the existing society. To determine the value of Marxism as a political theory political science in the twenty first century one needs firstly to establish what Marxism really consists of and then ask further why it apparently has failed. This paper will attempt to tie specific modern applications in the sense of Marxism to a general theoretical framework in which the relevance of Marx's ideas shall be explained. Furthermore, this paper will argue that the Marxian social theory constitutes an important factor in resolving today's problems, although some aspects appear to be outdated. Finally, this paper will conclude that although Communism has failed in real life application, it still provides important principles and thoughts vital for every political and social system.

Keywords: *Relevance, Communism, Theoretical Framework, Social System, irreversibly etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Few men have shaken the world as Karl Marx did. His death almost unnoticed in the mainstream press was followed by echoes of fame in such a short period of time that few comparisons can be found in history. His thought inspired the programmes and statutes of all the political and union organization of the workers movement, from continental Europe to Shanghai. His ideas changed philosophy, history, and economics irreversibly¹. A major reason for Marxism to have wielded such a global influence is that Marxism was a product both of and beyond its time. From the late nineteenth century, divergent receptions of its influence had already occurred across various regions and cultures. Reared in nineteenth-century Europe, in an era enveloped by the idea of progress in history, Marxism championed the notion that all human history would move in one direction and that the direction is upward, moving from a lower social developmental stage to a higher one.²

In more recent decades while few have continued to apply Marxist views in interpreting the historical movement, Marxist influence has loomed large and prominent in generating new ways of historical study and historical thinking. The rise of social history, which has its origin in the early twentieth century yet became especially robust in the post-World War II years, is a prime example. It goes without saying that the primal interest among social historians in describing the processes of social change coincided with Marxist historians.



This interest also prompted social historians as well as cultural historians of late to shift their attention from the life of the elite to that of the underclass in a society and accounting for its role in driving history.³

II. THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF MARXISM AND ITS TRANSFORMATION

The question of course, arises of what is understood by a Marxist conception or a Marxist approach to history and what are those aspects of Marx's thought that are still relevant to historical analysis today. The problem that arises in the attempt to define what constitutes the core of Marxism is that, while Marx was in many ways a dogmatic thinker he by no means presented a coherent view of society or politics, but contradicted himself on important points particularly as regards politics. He must be seen as a thinker of the nineteenth century whose analysis of the society of his time has not only been outdated by basic changes that have taken place since then, but that reflect Marx's incomplete and in many ways incorrect understanding of his own time.⁴

The question then remains of what constitutes the fundamental elements of Marx's theories in their nineteenth-century context, which later were often referred to as orthodox Marxism and how much remains valid in the very different circumstances of the early twenty-first century. We shall cite several important passages in which Marx formulates his conception of society and history. One is contained in the frequently cited preface to his book "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", first published in 1859, in brief that legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither by themselves nor from the so called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life and that the economic production and the structure of society arising there from constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch, that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.⁵ The other is a conception of history as an ongoing dialectical process by which the conflict between changing modes of production and property relations in which takes the form of class conflict, leads to a classless, i.e., communist society, overcoming the bourgeois order. These two points constituted the core of the ideology accepted first by the Second and then by the third International which became the official doctrine of the Soviet Union and of Western Communist parties. Yet equally important or even more important is that while Marxism views itself as a scientific form of socialism, it sees science not in terms of neutral objectivity but as political specifically revolutionary practice. As Marx had already written in 1845 in the first thesis on Feuerbach, the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism that of Feuerbach included is that the thing reality, sensuousness, is seen only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity practice, not subjectively.⁶

III. TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONCEPT OF CLASS

Marx and Engels conception of class underwent a fundamental revision in Marxist historiography in the course of the second half of the twentieth century. Yet already very early in 1899 Eduard Bernstein, who had been a



close associate of Engels in English exile and later played an important role in the German Social Democratic Party, in his book, *Evolutionary Socialism*, considered Marx and Engels conception of class, as formulated in its classical form in *The Communist Manifesto*, as oversimplified. While Marx and Engels had predicted that in the epoch of the bourgeoisie class antagonisms would be simplified and ultimately only two classes proletariat and bourgeoisie would confront each other, Bernstein pointed out that in the half century since then this had not occurred that the process of industrialization had not resulted in general impoverishment of the working population, but instead had seen the emergence of small entrepreneurs who had profited from the process of industrialization a middle class not identical with the bourgeoisie as Marx and Engels had defined it.⁷

Karl Marx lived in the 19th century an era very different from our own, if also one in which many of the features of today's society were beginning to take shape. A thought of the importance of Marx's thoughts in the mid-21st century may begin with isolating their outdated components from those equipped for advancement in the present. Both a researcher and a political extremist, Marx tended to an extensive variety of political and also social issues and is known for in addition to other things his examination of history. The translations of his hypotheses especially those on political economy, have over the span of history created many years of level headed discussion, motivated upheavals and give him a role as both demon and god in political and scholarly circles.⁸

Defamed by a few misjudged by others and celebrated as one of the world's incredible scholars by some more, Marx keeps on being a problematic and much examined person. While there has been an impressive recovery of enthusiasm for his hypotheses since the finish of the Cold War, principally those which manage the unpredictability and state of free enterprise, the inquiry stays in the matter of whether a man who kicked the bucket numerous years back still has any pertinence today. Marx's contemplations on the exploitative idea of the connection between industrialist businesses and their workers seem to be valid today he said. The working class or those without property keeps on looking for work from those with property. Control over private speculation keeps on giving the entrepreneur class vital impact over government and adequate control over the supply of work to guarantee that it is sold by representatives on terms good to the expansion of the abundance of managers.

IV.IS MARXISM STILL RELEVANT TODAY

Karl's Marx's original contribution was to analyze human society on the basis of the historical development of class relations. As long as class differences exist in society, there will be the need to understand them not only as a matter for scientific investigation, but also with the goal of ending the domination of one class over another. The need for Marx's particular approach arose in conjunction with the development of capitalism. In the case of earlier forms of class society, the relations of domination were visible and transparent. What was new under capitalism is that domination in particular, the exploitation of labor was hidden behind contractual and market



relations. Bringing to light the structure of domination therefore required the kind of complex analysis that Marx undertook in *Capital*.

Marx was the principal scholar to see entrepreneur relations as having grown generally, as getting under way unmistakable worldwide patterns and as making the conditions under which those relations would eventually separate. This was as opposed to past scholars who saw entrepreneur relations as the triumphant result of a procedure whereby markets having been freed from past limitations could routinely and apparently always into the future, play out the capacities for which they were in a perfect world suited.

Under free enterprise as opposed to past social requests, the market saturates each circle of monetary estimation, exchange merchandise and ventures, as well as substantial scale choices about the association of creation and the accessibility of work control. Marx's analysis pertains to the entirety of capital's sphere of operations. It provides the intellectual framework within which by definition, capitalism is viewed as a whole, in all its manifestations. For as long as any trace of capitalist relations persists, therefore, Marxism will be relevant.

In terms of "relevance for today" those who have proclaimed that Marxism is "dead" have based their argument on the collapse or reversion to capitalist practice of particular regimes whose leaders supposed to be implementing Marxian principles. What such arguments disregard is that all those regimes particularly those of the Soviet Union and of the People's Republic of China, evolved under particular conditions, both internal and external that reflected the continuing weigh of private and corporate capital. Thus as capitalist relations have been restored in settings where they seemingly had been transcended, we are once again confronted on a global scale with conditions similar to those that provoked the anti-capitalist movements in the first place. But there are several ways in which present day conditions differ from those that prevailed before 1917, making future transcendence of capitalism at once more difficult and more urgent than in the earlier period.

V.WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEORETICAL PROBLEMS THAT MARXISM NEEDS TO SOLVE AT PRESENT

Certain theoretical issues unrelated to current practice may still be under discussion, but they pertain primarily to the way Marx understood the dynamics of capitalism. The tendency toward ever greater concentration of wealth and power has certainly been demonstrated globally as well as within particular countries. Of course, there have been counter-tendencies, but capital has so far succeeded in limiting their reach where it has not crushed them altogether. In other words the class struggle continues.

The big problem is the same one that existed before 1917, namely, how the society of associated producers, i.e, a society not divided by class will come into being. The actuality that capital has kept its hang on control longer than Marx most likely expected has made this assignment of change more troublesome. Contrasted with Marx's chance there is substantially more now that must be fixed, not just a portion of the mechanical applications that we have examined, yet in addition the gigantic harm brought by war, hunger and natural annihilation. On the



other hand, we embark upon the process from a higher level of general awareness and also with due apprehension about some of the political approaches that need to be avoided.

The necessity of a transformation can only increase although this also magnifies the desperation of the ruling class to tighten its grip on vital resources, by means that include perpetual war.

Most of the answers to these questions will have to be found within the framework of particular political units taking into account all their specificities. But there are a few points that seem to apply generally. We build here not only on Marx's own work, but on that of generations of activists not all of whom have necessarily thought of themselves as Marxists. Marx's specific commitment is critical less for any express rules he gave with respect to his technique for moving toward issues and the case of his own work as a coordinator.

The underlying point is that the development must be in the expressions of the Communist Manifesto of the massive dominant part in light of a legitimate concern for the enormous lion's share. This majority has to be as Marx and Engels say there, self-conscious, which means organized. In particular the various separate movements against oppression, the new social movements that arose in the 1960s, need to reach the stage of recognizing their common class interest. They can then have an active role in defining the political mission of the working class which in turn will thereby be enriched and hence better equipped to constitute an independent political force.⁹ Current Left political projects seem to be more aware of this requirement the need to embrace and embody the demands of the separate oppressed groups than were their counterparts in earlier generations. From the opposite direction the separate groups have become more aware of the limits to what they can achieve without being part of a broader movement. On the threshold of the twenty first century humanity stands at the crossroads. On the one hand, the achievements of science, technique and industry point the way forward to a dazzling future of prosperity, social well-being and unlimited cultural advance. On the other, the very existence of the human race is threatened by the ravishing of the planet in the name of profit, mass unemployment, which was confidently asserted to be a thing of the past has reappeared in all the advanced countries of capitalism not to speak of the dreadful of poverty, unawareness, wars and epidemics which constantly afflict two thirds of humanity in the so called Third World.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the bureaucratic Stalinist regimes of Russia and Eastern Europe provoked a wave of euphoria in the West. The demise of Stalinism was heralded as the end of Socialism. The final victory of the free market was trumpeted from the pages of learned journals from Tokyo to New York. The strategists of capital were exultant. Francis Fukuyama even went so far as to proclaim the end of history. Henceforth, the class war would be no more. Everything would be for the best in the best of all capitalist worlds.

In the last few years we have seen an extraordinary offensive against the ideas of socialism on a world scale. The collapse of the bureaucratically controlled planned economies of the East was held up as the definitive proof of the failure of communism and of course, the ideas of Marx. This is not the place to deal in depth with the reasons for the collapse of Stalinism. That will be done in a future work in this series. The collapse of Stalinism came as no surprise to the Marxists, who had predicted it in advance. Indeed, Leon Trotsky already



analysed the bureaucratic government in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and, using the Marxist method, explained the inevitability of its downfall. In the first place Stalinism and socialism, so far from being identical are mutually exclusive. The regimes in the USSR and its Eastern European satellites in many ways were the opposite of socialism. As Trotsky described, a nationalised designed economy requires democracy as the human being requires oxygen. Without the democratic control and administration of the working class, a regime of nationalization and planning would inevitably seize up at a certain point especially in a modern, sophisticated and complex economy. This fact is graphically reflected in the falling rate of growth of the Soviet economy since the early 1970s, after the unprecedented successes of the planned economy in the earlier period.¹⁰

However, what the Western critics of Marxism do not want to publicize is that the movement in the direction of a capitalist market economy in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, far from improving the situation has caused an unmitigated social and economic disaster.

VI.CONCLUSION

So, the ideas of Marxism have proven to be correct and its correctness can be seen in the very lives we live in capitalist society. The basic ideas of Marxism remain unshaken and are proving a firm foundation for the workers movement of today. The times that Marx lived through however, did not give him the opportunity for applying these guidelines very often. It became the task of future generations to work out the question of organization. The most important conclusions came from the Russian revolutionary Lenin, who is perhaps more hated than Marx in the Marxist tradition. Too often on the left, the word “Leninist” is hurled around as a term of abuse without any effort to understand and answer the substantial political questions about organization that he posed. The importance of this question how to translate the framework of Marxism into real life struggles from day to day is perhaps the greatest challenge of today and the most important measure for judging the relevance of Marxism. I doubt that there is much disagreement on the importance of Karl Marx’s analysis of the nature and workings of capitalism. He was shortsighted on some questions. On many others, his arguments have been vindicated. But for Marx and for the genuine tradition of revolutionary Marxism, the analysis is only as important as the real world efforts to apply it and make it relevant to the struggle to change society.

Whether Marxism is relevant depends not only on whether the set of ideas helps us explain the world today, but whether it helps us to understand and organize the struggle to change it. As Marx put it, the philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, the point however, is to change it.

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