The Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels

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KARL MARX and
FRIEDRICH ENGELS

The Communist Manifesto

with selections from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte and Capital by Karl Marx

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INTRODUCTION

MARXISM, it is often said, is a secular religion. That term, strictly speaking, is self-contradictory. A religion, in the usual meaning of the word, involves a belief in some timeless, and therefore nonsecular, dimension. Yet there are good reasons for using the word to describe the Marxist system. If, as students of society, we are to find parallels to this system and its effect on men, we are obliged to fall back on analogies with religion. Like a religion it is at once a theory of the world and a program of action. As a theory it is comprehensive, comprising doctrines touching every important aspect of individual and social existence. It includes a theory of economics, sociology, politics, and ethics; attempts have been made to give it a bearing upon the various spheres of natural science. As a program of action, it has shown a capacity to inspire the fanatical loyalty and rigid discipline of patriotism, but unlike patriotism and like religion, it has swept over national boundaries as the creed of a world-wide movement.

Marxism is especially like religion in the nature of certain basic questions which it attempts to answer. It includes—though not under these names—a theory of how evil came into the world and how it will be eliminated; a vision of powers which are beyond man's control and inflict suffering upon him, but which carry him onward to a blessed fulfillment; a prophecy of a final paradise where humanity will live in perfect freedom and happiness. It is impossible to understand the deep appeal of the Marxist system unless we consider its powerful effect upon emotions which are essentially religious.

As a whole, the Marxist system is prophecy founded upon vision. But it can and ought also to be considered on its intellectual merits. Its assertions can be tested by the

usual canons of evidence and logic. The appeal to internal consistency and, especially, to the facts of history can settle the question of the validity of its theories of sociology, economics, and politics. These deserve serious consideration and should not be rejected simply out of moral disapproval or because Communists, who accept them, are an evil influence in the world today. Often, within the exaggeration of Marxist doctrine, a kernel of truth may be found. The Marxist system of thought is particularly useful, however, because it raises questions which force the reader to state his own beliefs—or doubts—on important subjects. We may, for instance, reject the extreme economic determinism of the Marxist theory, but we need to think out our own position on the possible relations between economic development and other aspects of society. For the person who believes in the power of conscience and moral ideals and in the capacity of the human mind to understand and control society, there is no better exercise than matching his beliefs against the challenging dogmas of Marxism.

To reduce Marxism to a single, coherent body of thought is far from an easy task. The term refers not only to the views of the two inseparable collaborators, Marx and Engels, whose ideas quite naturally changed and developed from one work to another. It also includes the interpretations and restatements of these views by the host of disciples who have acclaimed the system in the past hundred years or so. Even if we were to try to confine our discussion to the doctrines of self-proclaimed Marxists in the world today we should have a wide variety of views to recount: not only those of the Communists of Soviet Russia, Western Europe, and China, but also the quite different, though still allegedly Marxist ideas, of anti-Communists such as the Social Democrats of Germany, the socialists of France, and the leftwing Laborites of Britain. Quite sufficient is the effort to state in broad outline what may be called the Marxism of Marx; that is, certain of the main doctrines which he (and Engels) elaborated in their principal works. These are not by any means unambiguously clear, and the reader is encouraged

to use this Introduction merely as a starting point from which to conduct his own study and criticism of what Marx and Marxists have written.

I

THE THEORY OF OBJECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Marxist system has many branches. The central doctrine, however, is the conception which came to be known as Historical Materialism, or the materialist conception of history. The classic formulation of this doctrine is found in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* which Marx published in 1859. There he describes how he was led to "the conclusion that legal relations as well as forms of the state could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but that they are rooted in the material conditions of life." Expanding on this statement, he continued:

> In the social production of their material life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their wills; these relations of production correspond to a definite state of the development of their material forces of production.
>
> The sum total of these relations of production makes up the economic structure of society—the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.
>
> The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but rather it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.
>
> At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—what is but a legal expression of the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work before. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

Three essentials of the Marxist conception of history are involved in this statement: (1) That the economic structure of society—in the precommunist period—is not and cannot be deliberately planned and controlled, but develops independently of human will and thought and according to objective social law; (2) That this developing economic structure determines what takes place in other spheres of social life, such as class structure, the state, law, religion and ethics; (3) That the course of history is inevitably punctuated by violent revolutions, each marking the transition to a more advanced stage of historical development.

Equally important, although not suggested in the passage quoted above, is a fourth idea: that men shall surely be delivered from their slavery to one another and to historical necessity when in the fullness of time the proletarian revolution ushers in the communist society. In what follows we shall consider these four essentials of Marxism, beginning with the problem of objective development.

How can the economic structure—which Marx also refers to as the relations of production and as the mode of production—develop except through the ideas and motives of men? When goods are bought and sold, when factories are built or fields cultivated, conscious decisions and purposes lie behind these events. As Marx himself emphasizes, when a human being makes something—for instance, a house—the thing exists first as a plan or image in his mind before it is constructed in material reality.[1] Quite different are the changes of physical nature. The processes of geology, for instance, take place without being planned or intended or directed by a mind. How

[1] "We have to consider labor in a form peculiar to the human species . . . many a human architect is put to shame by the skill with which a bee constructs her cell. But what from the very first distinguishes the most incompetent architect from the best of bees, is that the architect has built a cell in his head before he constructs it in wax. The labor process ends in the creation of something which, when the process began, already existed in the worker's imagination . . ." *Capital* (Everyman edn., London, 1930), pp. 169-170.

can one hold, as Marx does, on the one hand that men are conscious, purposive, and indeed inventive, and on the other hand, that their social life, like the processes of blind, physical nature, develops independently of their thought and will?

Thanks not a little to the influence of Marx, this paradox is today a commonplace of social science, which is very much concerned with studying what may be called objective development in society. Economists interest themselves, for instance, in working out the unintended consequences of the behavior of a number of people buying and selling in a free market. In such a situation, each individual is continually making decisions such as whether he shall or shall not offer his goods and what prices he shall ask for them. Yet the final outcome of the "higgling" of the market is not planned and very likely not even foreseen by anyone. So with the other processes of a free, competitive economy: while on the one hand they are carried on by inventive, calculating human beings, on the other hand they arrive at results which no mind has previously conceived and purposively carried out. It is as if, to use Adam Smith's phrase, these processes were guided by "an invisible hand."

Not only in economics, but also in other spheres, processes of objective development take place, providing a subject-matter in which the social scientist seeks to discover uniformities or "laws" of social change and causation. To accept this general conclusion one need not be a Marxist. Nor is there anything peculiarly Marxist about its application to the study of long-run historical development, although Marx was concerned less with repetitive and short-run processes—such as price formation in a free market—than with the long-run tendencies of economic development.

What then distinguishes the Marxian theory of objective development from the notion of objective development in general? Economic development, according to Marx, is subject to certain inexorable laws and must pass through certain definite stages. Each stage has its distinctive mode of production, its system by which the means of produc-