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MARX & ENGELS

**BASIC WRITINGS ON
POLITICS & PHILOSOPHY**

EDITED BY LEWIS S. FEUER



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Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy

KARL MARX AND
FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Edited by Lewis S. Feuer

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Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy

Introduction

LEWIS S. FEUER

A generation has gone by since Stephen Spender wrote:

Oh young men oh young comrades
it is too late to stay in those houses
your fathers built where they built you to
build to breed
money on money.

The revolutionary intellectual of the thirties has been replaced by the managerial intellectual of the fifties, and with this change in social temper the philosophy of Karl Marx would by many persons be consigned to the museum of their youthful indiscretions. Meanwhile, however, Marxism has become an even more endemic force in Asia and Europe than it was twenty years ago. The person who would understand the modern world must come to terms with Marx's ideas. The magnetic power of Marxism, unparalleled in the history of mankind, has drawn into its ideological orbit peoples of different continents and races, from China to Burma to Ghana, Moscow to Belgrade and Djakarta. Marxism, which declared itself the harbinger of a new international order has, in partial fulfillment of its prophecy, polarized the nations into power blocs.

Few will now deny that the communist movement, which invokes the name of Marx, has tarnished the ideal which inspired his work. But the reaction against Marxism in America has finally led to a distortion in our conception of our own past and future. Marxist ideas have had an important part in shaping our contemporary political philosophy, and we would do well not to try to banish that chapter from our consciousness. Classical American social

science, in the persons of such men as Beard, Veblen, and Dewey, was not only influenced by Marx, but shared with Marx the same basic tenets. The faith of these Americans in the ordinary man, in the underlying population, was also the messianic socialist one; their faith in science as the method of liberation and their belief in the primacy of the economic factor in human history were as powerful as Marx's. Classical American social scientists were indeed historical materialists in the way they regarded their social world, and this was one reason why many of their students found an evolution towards systematic Marxism a natural development in the thirties. There has, of course, been also a powerful conservative tradition in American social science, for from its beginnings American thought has been divided into two opposed trends. If Veblen and Lester Ward were radical in their plans for reconstructing society, William G. Sumner was on hand to warn against any tampering with the existent mores. The growing radical movements, however, tended to find in Marx a fulfillment of ideas which were in large measure defined in American liberal social thought.

Marxism has often been described as a religion; it can be called the first secular world religion. Its dialectic is akin to Calvinist predestination; like other creeds, it has its sacred text, its saints, its heretics, its elect, its holy city. If Marx was its Messiah, Lenin was its St. Paul. But after all these analogies have been made, what remains to be emphasized is how different Marxism is from other religions. Unlike Christianity, for instance, its appeal has always been first to the intellectuals. Christianity was resisted by the ancient philosophers, who regarded it as an aberration of the lower classes; it spread from below upwards. Marxism, on the contrary, has been carried by the intellectuals to the proletarians and peasants. To intellectuals it has appealed as no other doctrine has because it integrated for them most fully discordant psychological motives. In Marxism we find for the first time a combination of the language of science and the language of myth—a union of mysticism and logic. Scientific criticism in the nineteenth century had deprived intellectuals of their God and left them uncertain as to the foundation of their

ethics. Scientific agnosticism was an austere self-denial in a world inherently lifeless and undramatic, a world with neither purpose nor climax. Social movements had assumed the character of a superficial altruistic anodyne ungrounded in the nature of the universe. In Marxism, however, one's ideals could be taken as expressions of an underlying historical necessity in things. Here was a religion which was linked to so powerful a system of social science that endless academic books were written to confute it. Logicians in a few paragraphs could dispose of arguments for the existence of God, but dialectical materialism could challenge its critics to produce any theory which would explain anywhere near as much of social reality as it had. Here was a science which at the same time gave intellectuals a cause, a sense of mission, a conviction that their lives were worth while because history needed them. Here was a system which was both science and ethics, which called itself historical materialism and demanded idealist commitment.

No society can last long unless it provides for the motives of diverse personalities, and no philosophic system can have a universal appeal unless it incorporates the most contrary themes. A consistent philosophy can never have more than a sectarian following. Marxism as a world religion was a conjunction of incompatibles. It called upon human beings for a supreme deed of free will, that of intervening in their history with a revolutionary act and creating their own society. But it did so with a necessitarian vocabulary, so that the working class in its highest moment of freedom was fulfilling historical necessity. Freedom and determinism were joined in a dialectical unity. The language of liberty always had its determinist semantic commentary, and the mystic revolutionist became one with the scientist.

As a *secular* world religion Marxism furthermore offered its rewards on this earth. Other religions had postponed happiness as a gift in another realm, but Marxism could claim to speak for the foreseeable future. However, it also offered the pains and sorrows of asceticism. For revolutionists have always derived a satisfaction from conquering desire; they are priests of the people, and they deny themselves joys which are unshared. The revolutionist is a

Puritan, smitten with guilt if he partakes of fleshly pleasures and corrupts the purity of his consecration. And the revolutionist, uncorrupted by the social order, at war with it, can experience all the pride of his self-denial.

Marxism has had rival so-called "scientific" philosophies which have contended with it for people's allegiance: Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century, Dewey and Russell in the twentieth, have vied with Marx in every continent. But Marxism alone, in an era of crisis, could answer the psychological need for *struggle* against a personified obstacle. There were no villains in Comte's system, and he was even prepared to negotiate a fusion with the Church. Dewey summoned all men to solve their problems by intelligent discussion, while Russell affirmed that human struggles were insignificant in the cosmic order. Marxism, on the contrary, satisfied the impulses towards hatred and aggression. A religion of pure love has to make some men the bearers of evil. To do the Lord's work *against his enemies*, to fight the good fight, to "struggle," as Marx once said, is man's reality.

And finally, Marx offered the intellectuals leadership in the new world. Feudal society had been ruled by military lords, capitalist society by money-minded businessmen, but in the socialist society the intellectuals would rule in the name of the proletariat. The thinker, the planner, the teacher, the scientist, the technician, in short, the men of intellectual ability, would come into their own. The Platonic fantasy of the "philosopher king," always surviving in the intellectual's unconscious, would be finally realized in historical actuality.

What remains as the enduring contribution of Marx to philosophy and political theory? It seems fair to say, in the first place, that his case for the primacy of the economic factor in history has withstood criticism. Our social and political history does consist of responses to problems which have been generated essentially by economic disequilibria. This does not mean to say that our responses to these problems are rational in the sense of aiming at an economic optimum. Marx did tend to overlook the irrational responses which are often made. He overlooked the fact that history is as much a record of class submission as

of class struggle. But he set forth an unshaken argument that the problem-generating factor in history is found in societies' economic institutions. When we add to this insight a recognition of the alternativity in human responses, we are led not to an economic determinism but to an economic indeterminism.

In this sense historical materialism remains an essential component for political understanding. We could not, for instance, explain the rise of neo-conservatism in America without bearing in mind that it came with prosperity and full employment among the intellectuals. The ugly aspects of Soviet practice, of course, repelled Americans, but evidently were not the basic cause of American political attitudes, for where economic dislocation persisted, as among Asian intellectuals, Marxist theory retained its attractive power.

Second, Marxism endures as a contribution to our political ethics. This may seem a strange thing to say, for not only does Marx ridicule ethical language as nonsense, but his Soviet adherents have used his doctrine of historical necessity to justify an era of repression and denial of human rights. Marx, as a "scientific socialist," believed he could eliminate ethics from his political philosophy and found his program solely on historical necessity. Within his system he had to suppress such questions as: "Why do I, as an individual, choose to work for the socialist world? Why do I cast my lot with the exploited workers?" And the repressed ethical question returned in the form of an answer—the happy communist culmination to the historical process. Ethics repressed returned as pseudoscience; history realized the ethical end, which the individual never could avow. All this is true, and accounts for the skewness of the Marxist vision. Nevertheless, despite his contemptuous rejection of ethical terms, Marx stands out as among the imposing ethical personalities of modern times. His action was more expressive than his word. He became the symbol of the intellectual who has not succumbed to either class or organizational pressures. He refused to be an ideologist or apologist, and he even spurned the discipline of socialist editorial boards. He was an intellectual who continued the tradition of prophetic protest. For what is a

prophet? He is an intellectual who speaks with the voice of the lower classes, who articulates what they cannot say, and expresses their innermost, oftentimes crushed and unconscious, aspirations. And Marx's identification with the "masses" was as total as a person's can be; free from the ordinary kinds of self-seeking, he looms as a reproach to the acquiescent, the complacent, the place hunter, the trimmer, and the smug. Though Marx could sink to crude anti-Jewish epithets, he wore the mantle of the prophets Elijah, Amos, and Isaiah, and he foretold doom to the oppressors in the name of historical inevitability.

As a prophet using the language of social science Marx is alone among sociologists in giving meaning to the word "exploitation." This concept is not fashionable today among American social scientists; it smacks to them of the pamphleteer and soapbox orator. "Exploitation" is said to be an emotive word, scientifically meaningless. American sociologists often justify the existence of classes, and argue that they are a universal necessity on the ground that so long as jobs differ in their importance, and so long as there is a relative scarcity of talent, society will give greater rewards to those who do its more difficult tasks. There is really no exploitation, according to the "American school" (as we may call them), of the lower classes by the upper. At most, they hold, there may exist a peripheral "dysfunctionality" in the distribution of income. But to Marx "exploitation" is as characteristic of class systems as "parasitism" is of the fungi in the plant kingdom. The two ideas are equally significant as scientific terms. Just as there are organisms which live off the blood stream of others and contribute no labor of their own, there are likewise those who in the social world take something for nothing. Feudal lords, industrial captains, managerial intellectuals have all made use of their strategic position and their sheer control of force and power in society to take life's goods from the lower classes. Moreover, such exploitation can exist also among nations and races in their relations to one another; an advanced people can exploit the labor of a backward one. Forced labor, coolie labor, unfavorable terms of trade are among the devices which have been used. When Marx defined classes as involving the presence of exploitative rela-

tions, he was doing more than using words to emphasize his emotional dislikes. For the history of social institutions would be determined, in his view, precisely by the efforts of classes either to remove or impose exploitative burdens. Differences of function by social groups never create problems unless one group has the sense that it is being exploited by another. Then class struggle ensues.

Marx's vocation as the prophetic spokesman of the working class was, however, the source of his errors as well as of his insights. He could describe with unmatched eloquence the "great unfairness" which has been shown throughout history towards proletarians, serfs, slaves, and peasants. He pronounced the verdict of history's conscience—the extinction of the despoilers of the poor. But Marx also assumed that because the masses had been history's maltreated ones they were a chosen people with the highest virtues. He assumed that the proletariat would be liberal, friendly to learning, and truly the inheritors of science and art. The middle classes had produced a renaissance in thought and feeling, and Marx was confident that *the working class would do likewise*. The meek would inherit not only the earth, but all wisdom, knowledge, and beauty. So it was writ in history's dialectic. Marx tended to assume that suffering ennobles a class with intellectual as well as moral virtues.

The history of the masses, however, has been a history of the most consistently anti-intellectual force in society. The Bible, the book of the masses, is the supreme anti-intellectual book. It has, of course, often stirred the people with its revolutionary passages, its demand for justice, its invective against the oppressors. Cromwell's soldiers carried the book with them into battle, to give meaning to their muskets. Nevertheless, the Bible begins with curses against Adam for seeking knowledge, and it ends with populist prophets denouncing the culture of the cities. William Jennings Bryan in American history is a typical representative of the masses, with all their strengths and weaknesses, a passion for justice combined with a jealous hatred of intellectuals, the aristocrats of the mind. Plato and Aristotle exalted the sciences and pure knowledge, but though they wrote of justice they were moved by no sym-

pathy for the slaves and downtrodden, and their writings have never been circulated as revolutionary tracts. Their "justice" rationalized the exploitative status of the upper classes. The values of free science were born in Hellenism, the values of equality and justice in Hebraism. This has been history's dualism. The lower classes could perceive truths of justice but were blind to freedom of thought. It was the American lower classes, not the upper, who gave their overwhelming support to the attacks in recent years on civil liberties. It is among the working people that one finds dominant those sects and churches most hostile to the free spirit. Cults and mysteries from antiquity to the present have been supported by the masses. And the French revolutionist who mocked at Lavoisier going to the guillotine, "The republic has no need of savants," was expressing the anti-intellectualism which has frequently prevailed among common men.

In his theory of history Marx tended to underestimate the psychological complexities of human beings which upset any simple formula of social evolution. He misunderstood the character of economic causation itself. For decisions in historical crises are determined by what we may call "psycho-economic" facts rather than by the economic data themselves. The social reality consists not only of the economic stimulus but also of the emotions, habits, attitudes, and ideas which define the character of the stimulus and select the path of response. The significant questions are: How will people look at the facts, with what emotions will they perceive and misperceive them, what inner aggressions and affections will determine their action with regard to those facts? For instance, we often read that the basic cause of the Civil War was economic—that it was a conflict between a Southern slave-owning aristocracy as against Northern capitalists and laborers. But was this conflict an irrepressible one? What stake did Northern workingmen feel themselves to have in this conflict? In New York City they rioted in 1863 against the draft laws and lynched hundreds of Negroes in the streets. The Northern merchants were linked by a multitude of business ties to the South, and resented the abolitionist agitators who endangered the Union with their

moralistic fanaticism. New England, to be sure, was suffering from economic decline as its farms took second place to Western lands. In their frustration its farmers searched for different objects upon which to vent their resentment. Those who became mill hands in the burgeoning factory towns experienced all the gloom and monotony of the new industrial existence. New England became a prey to "isms," a "burnt-over" area, through which a succession of doctrines passed like successive holocausts. Temperance reform, vegetarianism, religious revivals, and the Know-Nothing movement were some of the fevers and fervors which were felt. The Know-Nothings in 1854 won not only the governorship in Massachusetts but almost the entire legislature with their program against Catholics and immigrants. A few years later all these aggressions were channeled against the South and endowed with the moral zeal of the crusade against slavery. Men who could stand no association with Negroes in their personal lives became the agents of a higher ethics in history. The twistings and turnings of the New Englanders from one cause to another have all the traits of an irrational process, and it was something of a historical contingency that the outcome was a war which freed the slaves. In Marx's philosophy all these irrationalities are obliterated and the actual outcome is given a rational interpretation as the one and only logical, historical necessity. The dialectic misreads the irrational as rational. The plight of the New Englanders, for instance, stemmed from economic causes, but the direction in which they would channel their latent aggressive energies, the way they would define their economic situation for themselves had an element of the indeterminate. This is what we mean by characterizing the causation as "psycho-economic."

Modern technology, Marx believed, is inherently "revolutionary" and intrinsically "social" in character, and consequently its whole influence would be towards making people equal as well as interdependent. The production process itself would tend to make for a co-operative society. Technological necessity had for Marx the qualities of a finally beneficent deity. In actual fact, however, modern technology has been among the principal forces working against socialism. The hierarchies of administrative control

make neither for equality nor for fraternity. The new modes of technological and scientific skill which industry requires create the strategic base for new types of exploitation. The socialist ethic is something which will have to be brought to modern industry; it is not something which will arise necessarily from the machine process.

Marx's theory of classes has often been criticized as a gross simplification of social reality. In his actual historical writings Marx showed himself keenly aware of the nuances in political attitude of society's different classes and sub-classes. He did tend, however, in the last analysis, to pose the basic contrast between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. For the prophets have always been dualists, and have seen history as constituted finally by the conflict between good and evil, the children of light and the children of darkness. Nevertheless, this simple class dualism in Marx's theory is also the source of his tremendous historical insight. Different classes do not perceive the class hierarchy in the same way. The lower classes tend to look at social reality most simply; they make the fewest gradations in the social world above them, for these subtleties have no significance in their lives. Their world is made up of the well-to-do and the poor, the haves and have-nots, the exploiters and exploited. The members of the higher social strata, on the other hand, perceive a more complex social reality. They are aware of a variety of distinctions in status based on the inherited age of people's wealth, their social elegance, and moral character. This relativity of class perspectives, abundantly documented by American social scientists, leads naturally to the query: Which class perspective, if any, is more valid than the others? Marx's theory is an imaginative triumph in depicting the class structure of society as seen from the perspective of the lowest class. But can this perspective lay claim to more historical truth than others? Here Marx's answer would be clear. His bold vision does grasp more of historical reality than the more complex bourgeois schemes. For what is distinctive in the modern revolutionary era is the entry of the masses as participants in the making of history. Reality, as a stimulus to action, can be defined as how the world is perceived, and when the masses act their reality is their

perspective, the world as they perceive it. The perception which guides the actions of a revolutionary working class will be precisely that described in Marx's simple portraiture. Perhaps revolutions will founder or develop in unintended ways, with new modes of class structure; Marx's theory offers little light on the stable, post-revolutionary era, when new classes differentiate themselves and the masses recede once more into the historical background. He has, however, given the phenomenology of the revolutionary consciousness, the world as it is experienced in crisis by the revolutionary workingmen. And to the extent that this class has a primary importance in historical crises, its definition of social reality will be basic, indeed, in determining the character of the efforts at social reconstruction.

A historical crisis, moreover, awakens the dormant anxieties in men. Hunger, the food anxiety, does not disturb a prosperous society, which can preoccupy itself with the activities of enjoyable living and perhaps the pursuit of competitive status. A crisis, however, restores the full significance of food and elemental security in people's lives. To hungry peoples in Asia and Africa the values of free thought, for instance, are relatively hollow and irrelevant, for their concern is primarily with the freedom to eat rather than to starve. When Marx mocked at the ethical ideas of democratic liberalism as nonsense, he was articulating the standpoint of the hungry, to whom food is the all-encompassing utility. When a large part of society begins to experience the sheer harsh threat of foodlessness, history becomes a tale told in the language of economic anxieties.

Curiously enough, although Marxism today has, in Asia, the dominant emotional attraction, its diffusion there cannot be explained within the framework of the Marxist system. The reasons for the reception of Marxism in Asia have little to do with the breakdown of the capitalist system, for in India, China, Burma, Indonesia and Viet Nam capitalism was a peripheral phenomenon. The soil for the spread of Marxism was prepared by the "good" effects of imperialism, which lowered the death rate by bringing stable government and measures of public health to Asia. Thereby it produced in Asia a tremendous pressure of population on the food resources. At the same time, the im-

perialist order educated a new colonial intellectual class which could not hope to find employment in the backward economies. The symbols of the Marxist philosophy became the vehicles of the resentment of Asian intellectuals. The Marxist terms were filled with a new content. The "capitalist" was identified with the Western rulers, the "proletariat" was taken as the Asian people generally, and the "class struggle" became the equivalent of racial and national liberation. The Asians were particularly receptive to Marx's apotheosis of technology in historical causation. For through building up industry they could guarantee their independence, eradicate their own inferiority feelings, and assert themselves as equal to the white men. And lastly, Marxism as a science of political leadership offered to Asian intellectuals a new ideology for their role as society's administrators.

Meanwhile American development is out of phase with the rest of the world. America, disenchanted with its own Marxist venture of the thirties, is learning the language of conservatism, and is finding itself ever more removed from the Asian and European worlds. Yet even we must re-learn the meaning of Marxism. For as freedom is reborn in Eastern Europe and Asia, it will speak in the Marxist idiom and try to disenthral the universal humanist bearing of Marx's ideas from their Stalinist perversion. As social scientists and philosophers, furthermore, we must acknowledge that tremendous segment of reality which the Marxist philosophy has come closest to grasping.

Every period has had its own anthology of Marx and Engels. Algernon Lee thirty years ago in his *Vanguard* selection stressed Marx's agitational pamphlets, while Max Eastman twenty years ago gave great weight to Marx's *Capital*. We have chosen to emphasize the writings of Marx and Engels on politics and philosophy. For Marx the economist is less important today than Marx the political sociologist and philosopher of history. Marx's economic terminology has turned out to be too cumbersome for even Marxist economists to use, and his insights can be formulated more cogently and with their necessary qualifications in the language of marginal economic analysis. As a politi-

cal sociologist, however, as an analyst of the class content of historical movements, Marx remains the master. Most contemporary political sociology consists of glosses to Marx. And as the bearer of a vision of man's destiny and place within the historical process Marx is pre-eminent. Among philosophers he is the supreme historical mystic by virtue of his self-identification with history. We have therefore selected for our edition material from Marx's and Engels' writings on general philosophy, ethics, religion, and mystical movements as well as from their now classical political works.