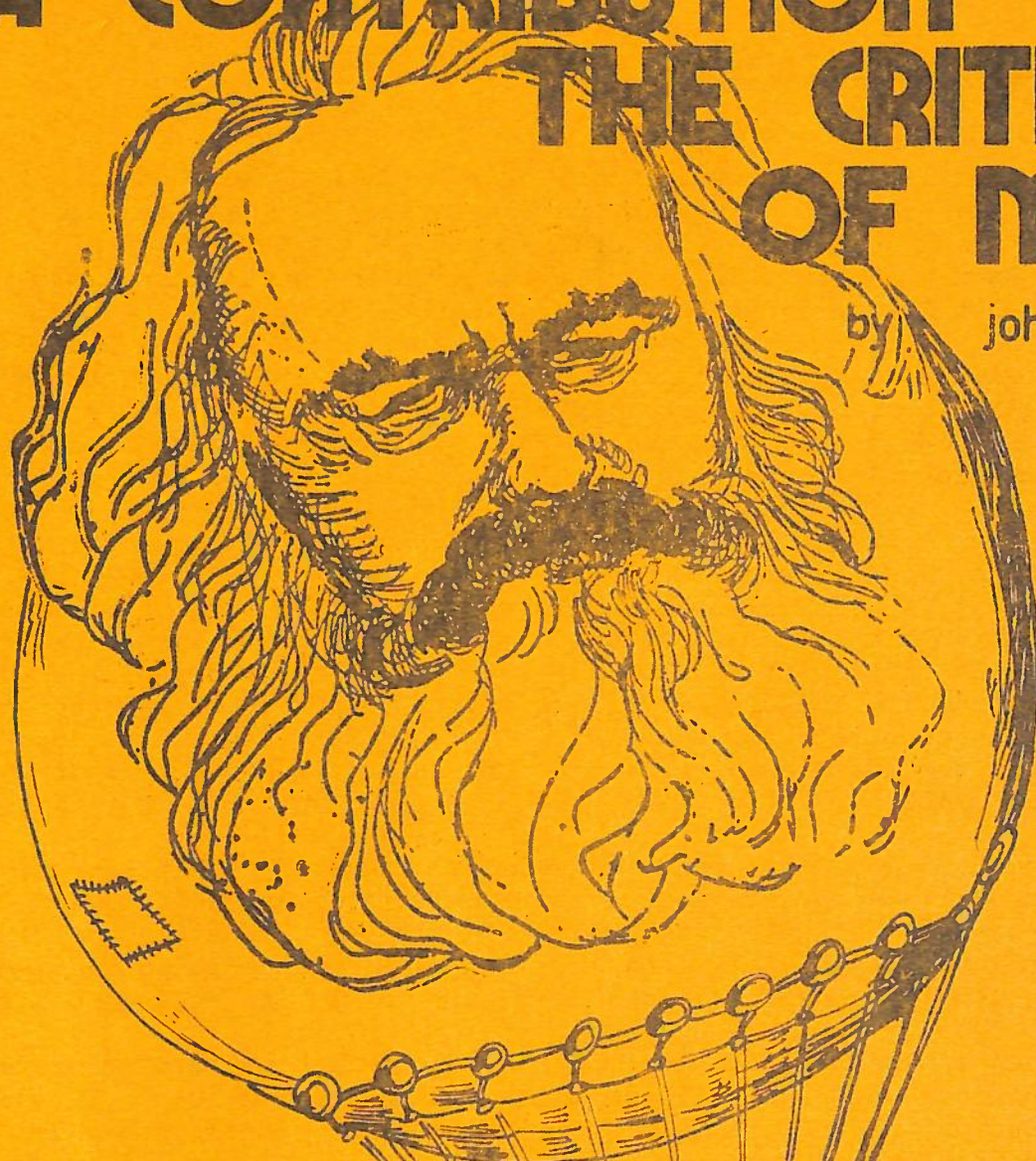
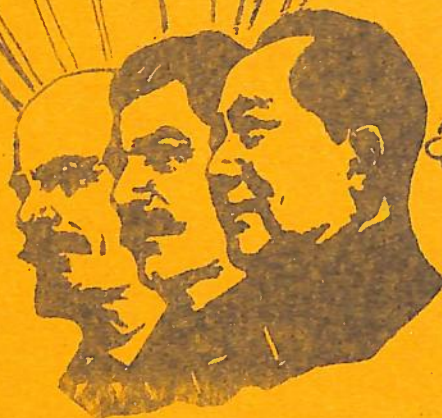


A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF MARX

by john crump



a joint
'social revolution'(london)
and solidarity(london)
pamphlet ~ no.50 ~



10p

INTRODUCTION BY 'SOCIAL REVOLUTION' (LONDON)

Marxists, Marxists, who nowadays is not a Marxist? The 'Communist' bureaucracies of the USSR and China, of Yugoslavia and Cuba are Marxists. The followers of the late Bordiga, the SPGB and the schismatic sects of Trotskyists are Marxists. And, if we are to believe the hack journalists of Fleet Street, her Britannic Majesty's loyal Labour Party is packed full of Marxists, from the constituency wards to St. James' Palace. And what of the man who said 'I am not a Marxist', who admonished his followers 'to doubt everything'? Alas, he, like so many revolutionary thinkers, has - at the hands of his epigones - been made a god. And so ideas become ideology and in the end theology, replete with witch-trials and heresy-hunts.

It is as a man, with all the faults and failings of men and not as an infallible being whose prescriptions for a given set of historical circumstances are valid for all times and all situations, that John Crump asks us to consider Marx. And if, as Marxists, as revolutionaries, we believe the working class is capable of consciously and independently organising for its self-emancipation and building a worldwide libertarian communist society, and if we direct our activity towards this end, it is as a man we must consider him. And we too must remember that we are human, and as such both fallible and vulnerable.

No-one nowadays would dream of attacking a tank with a flintlock musket, or of smoothing wood with a flint adze. Yet how many self-styled revolutionaries are working with ideas that were already outdated a century ago? And not only that - they cling to them like the fundamentalist Christian clings to his Testaments, however discredited they are in the eyes of others.

Surely, we must see Marxism as a toolbox from which we take specific tools to do specific jobs. And if a tool does not measure up to a job, then it must be adapted or, if that is impossible, thrown away and replaced by something more suitable.

For Marx, as for every revolutionary in a non-revolutionary period, every activity had of necessity to be a compromise between utopia and reality while attempting to transform the former into the latter. It is all very well to criticise with the gift of hindsight the apparent contradictions in Marx's theory and practice. But it must be remembered that Marx's activity, both as a practical politician and as a theoretician, spanned 40 years, years of unparalleled changes which left no area of human life, no corner of the earth, untouched. At the very least Marx, as his writings on the Paris Commune show, was prepared to revise his theories in the light of practice on the part of the working class, which is a great deal more than many of his self-proclaimed followers are prepared to do. And how many of us who are libertarians can in all honesty defend what we were saying and doing 10 weeks, let alone 10 years, ago?

There is more than a grain of truth in John Crump's statement that Marx and Engels can be identified as the theoretical leaders of the bourgeois revolutionary movement which culminated in the German Revolution of 1918. For did not Noske and Ebert see themselves as Marxists just as much as Kautsky and Bernstein or, for that matter, Luxemburg?

But even as Social-Democracy reached the zenith which heralded its death as a revolutionary force in Russia, in Hungary, in Germany, in Italy, even in Britain, a new form of working class organisation was being forged in the heat of struggle: the soviet or workers' council. It is to the task of building such councils that we 'proletarians' must now apply ourselves, for they will probably be the instruments of our liberation.

Social Revolution, a group containing both Marxists and non-Marxists, feels that the old labels and the ideologies which gave rise to them are no longer pertinent and can only be harmful. We do not endorse everything John Crump has written, but we do feel that what he has said needed saying. We therefore are publishing this pamphlet jointly with Solidarity (London) in the hope that it will contribute to the demystification so necessary if communism is to be a living reality and not an empty platitude. Discussion on John Crump's ideas will be published in our discussion journal 'Libertarian Communism'.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION (London group), January 1976.

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INTRODUCTION BY 'SOLIDARITY' (LONDON)

'Solidarity' (London) is glad to participate in the joint production of this text. Firstly because we find it interesting and valid. Secondly because the joint production of texts renews a tradition which we consider a good one, namely that revolutionaries in different groups should at times stress points on which they agree (to a greater or lesser extent) rather than constantly emphasise areas of disagreement.

In Modern Capitalism and Revolution, The Fate of Marxism, History and Revolution and Redefining Revolution we already suggested the need for a serious reconsideration of attitudes and beliefs which many of us had held throughout most of our political lives. When we see very similar ideas developing elsewhere it gives us great encouragement.

The demystification of the modern revolutionary is often a painful task. But it also has its lighter moments, when it appears as a sort of 'dance of the seven veils'. Would-be revolutionaries can, with greater or lesser ease, shed the illusions of social-democracy and stalinism, of maoism and trotskyism, of leninism and of various, now outdated, brands of 'left' communism. But when it comes to shedding the seventh veil, to criticising marxism itself, there is a great fear of political 'nakedness', a great feeling of intellectual and emotional insecurity. And yet the new has to be created, in order only to understand a world in constant evolution. The discarding of what is no longer relevant is more and more necessary today, as marxism in practice is revealed as the ideology of established power, and as the religion of various state capitalist regimes, concerned at all costs with 'developing the productive forces'.

Marxism today is too ambiguous and riddled with contradictions to provide any longer a meaningful philosophy of liberation. It can no longer conjure up a worthwhile vision of a totally new society. To paraphrase the eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach 'revolutionaries have only interpreted Marx, the point now is to transcend him'.

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A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF MARX

What do we say about Lenin? We see him now as a bourgeois revolutionary who expressed his bourgeois aspirations by using communist terminology. This is not to say that Lenin represented the interests of the existing bourgeoisie in Russia in 1917; nor are we focusing attention on Lenin's own personal bourgeois social background. All that we mean when we call Lenin a 'bourgeois revolutionary' is that he and the Bolsheviks were instrumental in building up capitalism in Russia following the capitalist revolution of 1917 (which included the October seizure of power as one of its episodes).

Naturally, Lenin thought of himself as a communist, and there is no reason to doubt that he was perfectly sincere when he said so. Yet it is easy enough for communists to point out numerous ways in which his practice and the theory from which it was derived fell far short of communism. His concept of the role the working class was to play (or, more to the point, was not to play) in the revolution and his Jacobin ideas on dictatorship are just two of the more obvious of his deficiencies when we measure him against communist standards. As is equally well known much of what he had to say about socialism/communism also indicates a peculiarly warped concept of the new society. The famous formulation of socialism in The Impending Catastrophe And How To Combat It, written in September 1917, is that "socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people"(1) - an explicit statement that his image of socialism was a fundamentally state-capitalist one. Then there was the phony distinction made between 'socialism' and 'communism' in State And Revolution, which served to give the illusion that this arbitrarily labelled 'socialism' was within striking distance for the Bolsheviks in 1917, even if 'communism' was not. Coupled with this went the often expressed assertion that "There is...absolutely no contradiction in principle between Soviet (that is, socialist) democracy and the exercise of dictatorial powers by individuals" (2) - unashamed defences of the continuing oppression of the working class.

Of course this is all becoming rather old hat. But it is on this sort of evidence that our rejection of leninism rests, and it is by applying to Russian reality standards which can be obtained from Marx's works (or simply by thinking them out for yourself) that we have been able to show the Russian social system to be capitalist, and the leninist ideology which masks and justifies it to be an essentially bourgeois body of thought. It is a simple matter to put side by side with certain quotations from Lenin's writings and speeches and equal number of totally contradictory ones lifted from Marx and

Engels' texts. For example, as a random selection:-

"...the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness." (3)

"...the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself..." (4)

"If socialism can only be realized when the intellectual development of all the people permits it, then we shall not see socialism for at least five hundred years..." (5)

"Marx...entirely trusted to the intellectual development of the working class, which was sure to result from combined action and mutual discussion." (6)

"We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice; ...we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out, or to the amount of work done..." (7)

"Let us now consider a little more closely the characteristic peculiarities of piece-wages. The quality of the labour is here controlled by the work itself, which must be of average perfection if the piece price is to be paid in full. Piece-wages become, from this point of view, the most fruitful source of reductions of wages and capitalist cheating." (8)

It is these sorts of passages which have led us to say that leninism and marxism are qualitatively different, that they express the interests of totally different revolutionary processes.

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All of this appears to be completely cut and dried, yet what has been gradually occurring to me is that there is a real danger of one-sidedness in the way in which we go about assessing leninism and marxism here. In other words, we have to be careful not to contrast leninism only with what is best in marxism. We have to be very careful to compare leninism with the whole of marxism, and not with some carefully selected and refined 'marxism' which only represents one side of Marx's thought and activity. I would of course agree that there is an entire area of Marx's writings which amounts to an often brilliant and penetrating exposition of communism. If we take the communist doctrine expressed in this section of his writings and apply it to Lenin's ideas, true enough we can show (as we did above) the bourgeois revolutionary nature of leninism. But, on the other hand, what happens if we take that same communist doctrine and apply it both to the rest of Marx's own writings, and to his overall activity as a revolutionary? How does Marx himself begin to show up then? Since I don't want to mince my words, I'll say frankly that Marx then starts to look like a bourgeois revolutionary himself. More specifically, he and Engels can then be identified as the theoretical leaders of the bourgeois revolutionary movement (social-democracy) which culminated in the German revolution of 1918.

Now, to say this is not to retract what I said above - that there is an "entire area of Marx's writings which amounts to an often brilliant and penetrating exposition of communism". Nor is it to deny that Marx's contributions to socialist theory in this area of his writings are enormously valuable and that we can still learn a great deal from them even today. What it is to say, though, is that the communist ideology which Marx developed here was a socialist theory expressing an entirely different (bourgeois) political practice. To put it another way, the communist ideology which Marx elaborated here was precisely what he himself meant by the term 'ideology' - a set of ideas which (even when intrinsically correct) mask rather than reveal the true nature of the problem.

The particular problem which several generations of European radicals were wrestling with throughout the long years of Marx and Engels' political activity was the problem (or, rather, the series of problems) of bourgeois revolution. This was why there was nothing contradictory in the fact that the movement into which most of them were eventually to become organised (the Second International) should have culminated in a wave of capitalist revolutions which swept across Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the First World War. This bourgeois revolution expressed itself in a variety of guises - demands for German unity, Polish independence, the overthrow of tsarist autocracy in Russia, etc. - and one of the theoretical forms it took was 'socialism' or 'marxism'. To the extent that this 'socialist' doctrine was theoretically correct (i.e. was genuinely socialist) it was little more than a disembodied theory, having no real point of contact with the problems of the day. Ultimately, this was precisely what some of the social-democrats came to say about it. On the other hand, to the extent that this doctrine did relate to the problems inherent in bourgeois revolution (the pressing problems of Marx and Engels' day), it was capitalist. Needless to say, it was just this state-capitalist area of marxism which was eagerly taken up by social-democrats and (later) Bolsheviks alike, while in their hands the communist sector of Marx's thought was either ignored or else ritualised into harmless scripture.

The communist element within marxism could not have been anything other than a disembodied theory at the time it was put forward because, in the conditions of the nineteenth century, communist revolution was simply impossible. Just how near or far the communist revolution is from us today is not something which I will go into here, but at least we can say that for Europe and the other advanced, industrialised parts of the world the era of bourgeois revolutions is well and truly finished. Even if the prospects for a communist revolution remain fairly bleak, at least we now have the opportunity (which Marx and Engels never had) to engage in the work of constructing a theory of communism with minds which are relatively uncluttered with the baggage which belongs to the bourgeois revolution. As we set about constructing this theory of communism, many of the foundation stones from which to build it can be cut from the rich communist vein which runs through Marx's writings. If we want to build soundly, however, we need to be perfectly clear in our minds about those other sections of Marx's works which are fit only for the state-capitalist slag-heap. Above all we need to free ourselves from the sort of mystifying generalisation which

declares that "all attempts to deny or 'transcend' marxism lead logically to counter-revolution". (The quote comes from Revolutionary Perspectives No.1, obtainable from 78 Torrisdale St., Glasgow S.2..) The only worthwhile comment is to enquire which particular 'marxism' it is that those who come out with this sort of remark have in mind: the 'marxism' which stood for the "Abolition of the wage system!", or the 'marxism' which declared itself for the "gallant Turks"? (9, 10) The 'marxism' which maintained that the "complete domination of the alienated thing over man is fully manifested in money", or the 'marxism' which wanted "Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly"? (11, 12)

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This pamphlet is not intended as a systematic explanation of a new way of looking at Marx. A hefty tome would be required for that. All I want to do in the remaining sections is to put a little flesh on the skeleton of the case which I have argued so far.

It is impossible to unravel the contradictions which exist within Marx's theory and practice unless one understands his morbid horror of utopianism. One of Marx's best points was his vision of communist society, and the passion with which he clung to it throughout most of his adult life. In place of a society based on private property, where "my work is an alienation of my life, because I work in order to live, to furnish myself with the means of living" (13), Marx's image of a new society where "my work would be a free expression of my life, and therefore a free enjoyment of my life" (14) has won for his early texts their current popularity. But the achievement of such a society was not (even distantly) on the horizon at the time that Marx was writing such texts. Communism remained just as much a utopia when Marx wrote about it as it did in the hands of (say) Owen. No doubt it is expecting too much of Marx, but what was required was a cool understanding that the struggles which were in process in his day were not (even remotely) the struggle for the society that he was dreaming of. Even the struggles of the working class of his day, however heroic they might have been, could not be artificially drafted into the service of communism.

Of course, Marx was only made of flesh and blood and the urge to be active was a strong one for him and Engels. But, if they chose to be active, it was their duty as communists to make absolutely clear the difference between, on the one hand, the bourgeois-revolutionary and reformist working class activity in which they engaged (there was no other activity worth talking of for them to engage in), and on the other, the communism to which they were committed in their theory. To have failed to make this difference clear would have resulted in socialism being fatally confused with bourgeois revolution and working class reform of capitalism. As everyone knows, this is just what did happen. And it happened thanks, at least in part, to Marx and Engels.

I want to try to avoid being misunderstood here. There is a passage in Engels' Marx And The Neue Rheinische Zeitung where he writes: "If we did not desire that, if we did not desire to take up the movement from its already

existing, most advanced, actually proletarian side and push it further, then nothing remained for us to do but to preach communism in a little provincial sheet and to found a tiny sect instead of a great party in action. But we had already been spoilt for the role of preachers in the wilderness; we had studied the utopians too well for that. We had not drafted our programme for that." (15) It is worth mentioning, just as an aside, that the phrase "take up the movement from its already existing, most advanced, actually proletarian side" is little more than bluster. There was no real proletarian class in Germany at the time Engels was writing about, and "most advanced" is a purely relative expression. One could substitute "hopelessly backward" without doing any great damage to the meaning of this passage. Apart from this aside, however, I am not arguing that Marx and Engels should have "preach(ed) communism in a little provincial sheet and (ought) to (have) found(ed) a tiny sect". It is true that, if they had done so, it would at least have been striking a blow (however small and insignificant) for communism rather than against it, since less confusion would have been caused. But doubtless there were good reasons - in the sense of applying the materialist conception of history to the conditions in existence at that time - for their encouraging and participating in bourgeois revolutionary movements in 1848 and at later dates too. To put it another way, there were doubtlessly good reasons for their behaving as capitalist revolutionaries even while they remained communists on the theoretical plane. To have consistently applied the materialist conception of history in this cold, unemotional way, however, would have required a super-human degree of mental toughness. Cold and unemotional though Marx and Engels might have been on some occasions, there was a healthy slice of romanticism in their characters too. Since they were men and not angels, there is nothing surprising in the fact that they should have sought some escape from the tension that was set up between their theoretical commitment to communism and their actually engaging in bourgeois revolution. This escape was nothing less than kidding themselves (and most of the rest of the world too) that the bourgeois revolution in which they engaged was itself communist - or that at least it included a (non-existent) communist potential. Whatever the personal relief that this escape from reality gave to Marx and Engels, it did incalculable damage to the development of a correct theory of communism.

Perhaps who has ever read Marx with a critical communist consciousness could deny that the criticism which we have made of him here applies to his early writings. The very idea that "the German proletariat" (what proletariat?) stood in an "excellent situation...for socialism" in 1844 is too preposterous to waste any time on. (16) Precisely the same goes for the notion expressed in the Communist Manifesto that the "Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution...and because the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution." (17) Interestingly enough, when Engels wrote many years later that "Never has a factual programme justified itself as well as..." the one put forward in the Manifesto, he quoted the section containing the above passage. (18) Wisely, however, he cut his quotation short in mid-paragraph - before it came to the forecast of a proletarian revolution in Germany!

Obviously this sort of romantic nonsense looks ridiculous in retrospect. Yet in itself it was not particularly damaging to communism. If this were all that was wrong with the position which Marx and Engels adopted vis-a-vis the revolution of 1848, it would be quite reasonable to say that they were guilty of nothing more than their enthusiasm for socialism getting the better of them. They imagined socialism to be a great deal nearer than it eventually turned out to be, and hence were mistaken only in terms of the time-scale that was likely to apply to the social changes which they were predicting. Unfortunately, however, there is more to it than this. In the Communist Manifesto and elsewhere we find a mixture of starry-eyed romanticism and hard-headed realism that was to prove fatal.

If Marx had simply projected an image of communist society in the Manifesto and suggested that this would be the more or less rapid outcome of the revolution which he saw coming, this in itself would not have done too much harm. Marx was not too much of a realist for this however. Instead of an out-and-out utopian (but not particularly harmful) projection of socialism, what we get is a semi-realistic recipe for state capitalism which was fraught with danger because its relation (or non-relation) to socialism was left unclear. Firstly, the proletariat was to take power. In the conditions of the time this was no more realistic than suggesting that the moon would drop out of the sky, but at least as an abstract end - as it were - ahistorical statement of communist principle, this was correct. Having taken power, though, the proletariat was to exercise its rule within a continuing capitalist society. In other words, the proletariat, as a unified class, was to be the political master of a system which economically continued to exploit it. What can be made of this? As far as Marx's understanding that in the middle of the nineteenth century an immediate advance to communism was impossible, is concerned, the position he took up was again realistic and correct. But to imagine that within the economic system of capitalism, the proletariat could maintain its undivided unity and hence its political rule, so that a new ruling minority class would not appear, (nor the politically dispossessed bourgeoisie regain control of the state) was utterly wishful thinking. Lastly, and for the same reason, the idea that this (supposedly proletarian administered) capitalism could peacefully and gradually transform itself into communism was just as mistaken (and as dangerous).

Anyone who notices a similarity between the programme we have criticised here and the policy which Lenin and the Bolsheviks subjectively thought they were pursuing from 1917 onwards is, of course, perfectly right. True, there were differences between Bolshevik policy and the programme outlined in the Communist Manifesto. For Marx it was the working class as a whole which was the revolutionary actor: for Lenin the party. One can criticise leninism on these grounds as a throwback to Jacobinism, as Rosa Luxemburg did. But such a criticism is, in the end, more or less peripheral. The whole notion of a proletarian-administered form of capitalism, which was common to Marx in the Communist Manifesto and to Lenin in 1917, was disastrously wrong. Lenin's concept of the role of the revolutionary vanguard might well be an additional error on top of this, but the communist critique of leninism does not centre on this additional mistake.

Even if some people can accept this criticism of the early Marx up to and including the Communist Manifesto, they will probably tell us that Marx in his maturity is a different kettle of fish. I do not agree with this and I think it is possible to prove it wrong. It is, for example, no defence of the mature Marx to refer to his and Engels' joint preface to the German edition of the Manifesto of 1872, where it was stated that "no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section II." (19) Anyone who reads that preface carefully can see that what Marx and Engels were talking about was a change in the details of the policy they advocated, emphatically not a change in the principle on which that policy rested ("...the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever." (20)). Unfortunately I do not have the time or the materials to hand to trace the state-capitalist thread right the way through Marx's literary output in the years following 1848. However, as an illustration that state-capitalism was still being advocated by Marx in his maturity - and, what is more, was being even more explicitly (and erroneously) identified with socialism than in the Manifesto - we can refer to the Critique Of The Gotha Programme of 1875. The Critique is worth taking up because, as with the Communist Manifesto, it also shows the theoretical continuity which exists between Marx and Lenin, as well as the discontinuity which exists between them.

Of course, just as with the Manifesto and Marx's earlier texts, the Critique of the Gotha Programme contains plenty of good points. 'Good points' here means valid statements of communist principle. As before I am not disputing Marx's commitment to communism as a theory in the Critique, and this commitment to communist theory is just what provides the theoretical discontinuity which exists between Marx and Lenin. One searches in vain in Lenin's writings for an exposition of socialism which can even begin to be compared to any of the many excellent explanations of socialism which occur within Marx's works. Lenin never properly grasped what socialism was all about and normally seems to have identified it with 'proletarian-' (i.e. vanguard party, in his case) administered state-capitalism. Not so Marx. Marx knew exactly what socialism was. But in his concern to convince himself - and the world in general - that the capitalist revolutionary activity he was engaged in had something to do with socialism, he ended up presenting a proletarian-administered state-capitalist image of socialism alongside the correct image of socialism which is also to be found in his writings. It is this proletarian-administered state-capitalist image of socialism found in Marx as well as Lenin's texts which provides the theoretical continuity which exists between them, and it was this parallel existence of two distinct images of socialism within Marx's thought which also gave rise to the formulae of the "first phase of communist society" and the "higher phase of communist society" which are found in the Critique Of The Gotha Programme.

Let us analyse these two "phases of communist society". The so-called "higher phase of communist society" corresponds, in fact, to communism. At first glance, so too does the "first phase of communist society". The state has disappeared, the means of production have been socialised, "producers do not exchange their products" any longer we are told. (21) Formally, at any rate, the

"first phase of communist society" rests on these corner-stones of communism. Marx admits that the "first phase" suffers from "defects", that it is still "stamped with the birthmarks of the old society"(22) but such admissions never shake his conviction that it is still communist. What is important in Marx's description of the "first phase of communist society", however, is not so much what he says about it as what is left unsaid. What we have to do is to think out the unspoken implications behind what Marx tells us about his so-called "first phase".

"...the social working day consists (we are told) of the sum of the individual labour hours; the individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social labour day contributed by him, his share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common fund), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another."(23)

Formally, the means of production are owned communally. But, as far as the individual is concerned, without working he cannot consume. In order to live he has to supply his labour power in exchange for the certificate which enables him to eat. He is, in other words, nothing but a wage labourer (a certificate labourer if you like) and will probably need quite a bit of convincing that his condition is basically any different to his propertyless status under capitalism.

"Producers do not exchange their products", Marx tells us, but he admits that "the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities".(24) Equivalent amounts of labour are still in fact exchanged, only in this case it is certificates which are exchanged with products. True enough, these certificates are not money - since they are not intended to circulate - and exchange is supposed to be confined to relationships between the communally owned warehouses (or whatever one calls them) and the individual. Yet, even if we assume this to be so, this would still not prevent Marx's "first phase of communist society" from being a form of capitalism. The fact is, though, that even these restrictions on the process of exchange could in reality be nothing more than pious hopes. Exchange between individuals would still be bound to occur and, whatever the intention behind the labour certificates, they would be bound to circulate too. The only way to prevent this, or at least to drive it underground, would be to devise some strict form of policing system for suppressing exchange between individuals.

This last point brings us on to the question of the state. Marx's "first phase of communist society" would inevitably be a society well supplied with social tensions. As we have seen, certificate labourers (whatever the mythology employed to obscure this state of affairs) would in fact stand before the means of production as a propertyless certificate earners forced to 'sell' their labour power. The means of production would therefore confront them as an alien force, from which they were divorced, but to which they had to submit. As far

as personal consumption was concerned, this would be as rigidly controlled as it is within existing forms of capitalism. In addition, the only way to restrict exchange between individuals would be to suppress it forcibly. To keep the tensions engendered by such a society under control, some form of policing authority - employing force where necessary and defending what were in fact property rights would be required. One might of course suggest that no special armed body of men and women would be needed to do this job - that all would participate in the business of policing themselves. Difficult though it might be to imagine this working in practice, there would be nothing to recommend it even if we grant it as a possibility. It would be no more preferable to have certificate labourers policing themselves than it would to have them policed by a special social group. Indeed, one could say that it would be even less preferable, since the chances of workers (sorry - certificate labourers!) fighting back would be reduced.

No matter how insistently Marx might have applied the label "first phase of communist society" to this society which he described in the Critique Of The Gotha Programme, as soon as we examine it in any sort of depth we can see that it is a form of capitalism. Marx's presentation of communism is perfectly correct as long as he deals with it in an abstract, theoretical fashion - or as long as he relegates it to the distant future (the "higher phase of communist society"). But as soon as he tries to relate his presentation of communism to the struggle he was actually engaged in, or to what was materially possible in the latter half of the nineteenth century, he inevitably starts to reduce this 'communism' to the level of capitalism.

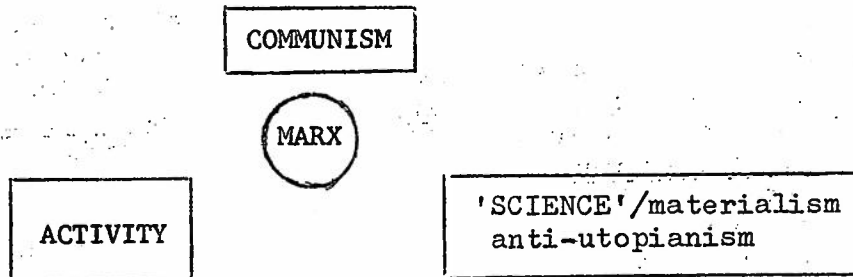
Within a 'proletarian'-administered state-capitalist image of socialism of his own, Lenin was the last person likely to notice any inconsistencies in Marx's description of the "first phase of communist society". On the contrary, when Lenin wrote his commentary on the Critique Of The Gotha Programme in State And Revolution he did so entirely uncritically. But the remarkable thing about this section of State And Revolution is that, while Lenin accepted the basic inconsistencies incorporated in Marx's treatment of the "first phase of communist society", having once accepted these inconsistencies he consistently thought them through to their conclusion in a way which Marx himself had never done. Lenin thus realised what we ourselves have pointed out above, that the description of the "first phase of communist society" given by Marx in the Critique Of The Gotha Programme means inevitably the "strictest control by society and by the state over the measure of labour and the measure of consumption".(25) Lenin is quite right to point out that, once Marx's basic inconsistencies that 'bourgeois right' will continue to exist within communism is accepted, it consistently "follows that under communism there remains for a time not only the bourgeois right, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie!"(26)

Naturally, anyone who has a reasonable grounding in Marx's writings can ridicule what Lenin wrote here. It is after all quite possible to sift out any number of bald statements that socialism and the state are incompatible, that there will be no state under socialism, from Marx and Engels' texts. It is, however, a singularly pointless exercise to do so. Statements that the state is an organ of class society, that there can be no state in the classless society

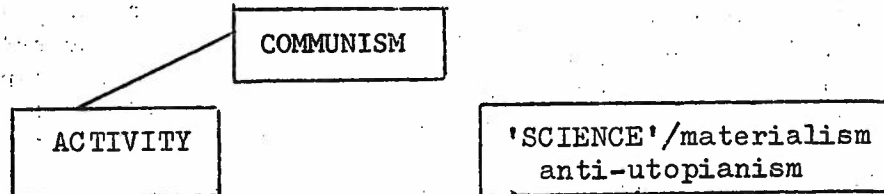
of socialism and so on may abound in Marx and Engels' works but they belong to those sections of their writings where they were dealing with more or less abstract socialist theory. Whenever Marx and Engels got down to suggesting concrete solutions to the problems of the capitalist revolution they were involved in, it was an entirely different story. Socialist terminology was still employed by them, even on these occasions, but the socialist content of their ideas was then eclipsed by state capitalism in their desire to be 'realistic' or 'scientific'. This is what provides the theoretical continuity between Marx and Lenin. When we compare the Critique of the Gotha Programme with State and Revolution, the most we can accuse Lenin of is having said openly and honestly what Marx himself had merely implied.

* * *

By way of summing up, I would like to restate what I have already said, in a slightly different way. The dilemma which Marx found himself in was very much the same as that which still confronts communists today. Marx yearned for communism at a time when only capitalist struggles offered any chances of success in the reasonably near future. Like most present-day communists he was frustrated by inactivity too. The third source of tension was that he wanted to have done with utopianism and to be 'scientific'. We can thus represent Marx's dilemma graphically by a diagram which shows Marx occupying the middle ground between "communism", "activity" and "science" (we could just as well call this last factor "materialism" or "anti-utopianism").

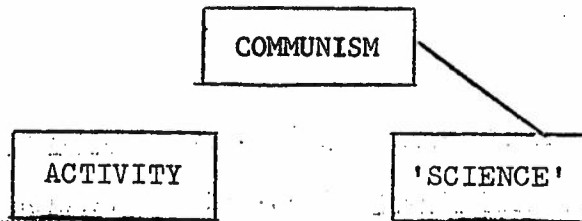


Marx wanted to close the three sides of this triangle but, in the conditions of his day, it was impossible to do this. Try as one might, only one side of the triangle could be closed. One could try to be an active communist i.e.:-

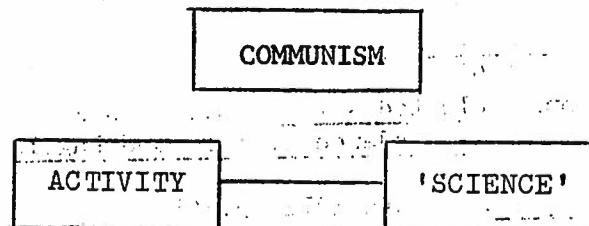


but this left one open to the charge of being utopian, since one's 'activity'

was like thrashing about in a vacuum. One could be a scientific communist i.e.:-



but, since science demanded that one recognise that communism offered no prospects of anything but the very longest-term success, one was bound to be accused of inactivity, or at least of standing aside from the mass struggles that were in process. Finally, one could be active and "materialist" (or 'scientific' in the sense of engaging in what Engels called "the already existing" movement) i.e.:-



but - as we have seen - this could only put one's commitment to communism at risk.

The answer to this riddle is of course that only the working class as a whole, rather than individual revolutionaries, can bridge the three sides of this triangle. Until workers do close this triangle, all we more or less isolated revolutionaries are stuck with this dilemma. What makes it particularly painful is precisely that there is no solution at the level of the isolated individual revolutionary (or revolutionary group). However distasteful it might be, in the absence of communist consciousness among the mass of the working class, the individual revolutionary has to give up something. The only choice we have is to decide which one of the three factors we have represented in our diagram ("communism", "activity" or "science"/"materialism"/"anti-utopianism") we choose to abandon. Without becoming sentimental, this is the tragedy of anyone who desires to be a revolutionary socialist under present conditions - and Marx demonstrates that tragedy particularly well.

John Crump, Tokyo. August 27, 1975.

Notes:

1. The Impending Catastrophe And How To Combat It, V.I.Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.XXV, Moscow 1964, p.358.
2. The Immediate Tasks of The Soviet Government, V.I.Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. XXVII, p.268.
3. What Is To Be Done?, V.I.Lenin, Moscow 1964.
4. Quoted by Engels in the Preface to the 1890 German Edition of The Communist Manifesto, Selected Works, Vol. 1, Moscow 1964, p.104
5. Lenin speaking on 21 November 1917 as recorded in Ten Days That Shook The World, John Reed, London 1966, p.233.
6. Engels' Preface to the 1888 Edition of The Communist Manifesto, London 1948, p.54.
7. The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government, p.258.
8. Capital, Vol. 1, Karl Marx, Moscow 1961, p.553.
9. Value, Price and Profit, Karl Marx, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p.275
10. Marx to Sorge, 27 September 1877, Correspondence of Marx and Engels, London 1941, p.348.
11. On James Mill, Karl Marx, Early Texts, Oxford 1972, p.198.
12. The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p.130.
13. On James Mill, p.202.
14. Ibid.
15. Marx And The Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol. II, p.31.
16. The King Of Prussia And Social Reform, Karl Marx, Early Texts, p.217.
17. The Communist Manifesto, p.142.
18. Marx And The Neue Rheinische Zeitung, p.30.
19. Preface to the German Edition of The Communist Manifesto, 1872, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 1, p.98.
20. Ibid., p.97.
21. Critique Of The Gotha Programme, Karl Marx, Selected Works, Vol.II, p.563.
22. Ibid., pp.565, 563.
23. Ibid., p.563.
24. Ibid..
25. The State And Revolution, V.I.Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. XXV, p.470.
26. Ibid., p.471.