

Eduard Bernstein (1897)

## Karl Marx and Social Reform

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**Source:** *Progressive Review*, no 7, April 1897. Scanned, prepared and annotated for the Marxist Internet Archive by Paul Flewers.

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To the average Englishman Karl Marx is in regard to social politics an ultra- revolutionary State-Socialist, the advocate of violent overthrow of all constituted order in government. Considering the great influence Marx and his school of thought hold upon the Socialist labour movement of today, it may not seem untimely to investigate how far this impression is justified.

What was Marx's position to social reform? In putting the question thus, we have at once to contend with a difficulty. Marx during his life wrote a great deal, and, of course, also learned a great deal. Which of his writings represent the living Marx? The great mass of friends and foes alike treat a quotation from the *Manifesto of the Communists* in the same way as a quotation from *Das Kapital*. They adjudge to them quite the same value, as high or as low as their estimation of Marx may be.

Now it is certainly true that from about 1846 there runs through all writings of Marx an identical line of thought. His conception of social evolution and of the historical mission of the modern proletariat, as laid down in the *Manifesto*,

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until the last underwent no change in principle. But for our purpose it is not only the general principle we have to consider, but also the application given to it by Marx in regard to questions of the day, its relation to time and ways and means. To assume that also in this respect Marx's ideas underwent no change at all, would mean that he was either a god or a madman. Yet of those who admit or proclaim that he was one of the greatest thinkers of our era a great many treat him in a way as only such assumption would justify.

It is curious indeed how sensible people have not hesitated a moment to put into the mouth of a man whose keen intellect they profess to admire, the most idiotic nonsense. In his otherwise praiseworthy book on German Social Democracy, Mr Russell, for example, says of Marx: 'In his views of human nature he generalised the economic motive, so as to cover all departments of social life', and 'there is no question, in Marx, of justice or virtue, no appeal to human sympathy or morality, might alone is right.' (pp 8 and 14) <sup>[1]</sup> If this were true, Marx as a social philosopher would be convicted at the outset. But it is an absolutely mistaken notion of the trend of Marx's theory. Mr Russell could with as much right have said that in Darwin's theory of the struggle for life there was no question of paternal love or tribal cooperation amongst animals.

Marx's social theory is based on what he has called historic materialism, a conception of history worked out by himself and Frederick Engels in the forties of this century. According to it the ultimate forces in the evolution of social life, the ultimate causes that determine the evolution of morals are of an economic nature; they are to be found in the changes of the modes of production of the necessaries of life. To a given

mode of production and exchange of the necessities of life, correspond certain forms of social institutions and moral conceptions, and they will prevail as long as the former continues to exist, though not always in their purity or in absolute sway, as they have to contend with remainders of former institutions and the germs of a slowly evolving new mode of life, factors which call forth a certain variety such as everywhere we observe in nature. But in every period of history we can easily distinguish a prevailing mode of production and exchange, and a corresponding conception of life, and of duties and rights, which also prevail and determine the nature of the social and political institutions of the period. This is quite obvious in the earlier stages of social life. But the more complex society becomes, the more will the objective causes of social evolution recede into the background, and subjective ones appear to determine its course. But, powerful as the subjective factor is in history, it is still under the control of the working of the economic foundations of social life.

It is in this sense that Marx says in the preface to *Das Kapital*:

Even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural law of its evolution, it can neither jump over normal phases of its development, nor can it remove them by decree. But it can shorten and alleviate the pain of child-birth. <sup>[2]</sup>

People have stigmatised the materialistic conception of history as historic fatalism. But they have, as yet, not been able to point out a country where production on commercial lines and feudal law and morals are coexisting in full vigour.

We have seen progressive movements, upheld by most energetic men, entirely collapse for no other reason than because they anticipated a state of social evolution which had not yet set in. On the other hand, wherever the industrial development has reached certain points, it has called forth social movements which, if different in garb, according to special geographical conditions, are in substance alike in all countries. Twenty years ago a whole generation of heroic youth risked freedom and life in Russia to bring about a social revolution. They were sacrificed in vain; the material premises of their idea did not exist. Semi-Asiatic conditions of life prevailed in the greater part of the country. Since then an increasing number of factories has been built, new railways have been constructed, the traffic increased, modern commerce extended all over the country, trade enormously expanded. These economic changes have revolutionised the brains of the people more than all the pamphlets and leaflets written in glowing terms and distributed broadcast by the young heroes who risked freedom and life for a generous ideal. Today it is admitted on all sides that Russia has her own labour movement. The dream, fostered by men like Bakunin, of saving the Russians the period of bourgeois economy is done with for ever; neither can the all-powerful Tsar – to speak with Marx – remove it by decree, nor can the fiery revolutionist make Russia jump over its phases of evolution with the aid of dynamite.

In short, there is what we Germans call *Gesetzmässigkeit* – an order of law – in social evolution. Marx has formulated the main principles of it in his *Criticism of Political Economy*, published in 1859, as follows:

A formation of society will not disappear until all productive forces are evolved for which it is wide enough, and new and higher systems of production will never be installed until the material conditions of their existence are hatched out in the very bosom of the old society. Hence humanity always sets itself only to solve problems it is capable of solving; for if you examine things closer you will always find that the problem arises only where the material premises of its solution exist already, or are at least in the process of being formed. [3]

So much for the objective side of social evolution. The main subjective lever of it is, as long as society is divided into classes, the class antagonism or class war. It has been said that, if such a thing has existed in former ages, it does not exist in advanced modern society, in our enlightened era of liberal or democratic institutions, and facts are extant in this country which indeed seem to disprove the whole theory of the class struggle. Do we not see the great mass of the workers in England appallingly indifferent towards any social reform movement which does not bear upon their individual and immediate interest? Is it not the visible result of the social inertia of the workers that labour questions have taken a back seat in Parliament, and would stand even still more in the background but for the great number of middle-class reformers?

The facts, themselves, cannot be denied, but they do not disprove the class-war theory as put forward by Marx; they only disprove some crude and narrow interpretations of it.

First of all there are different forms of warfare. 'The process of revolution', writes Marx, in the preface to *Das Kapital*, 'will take more brutal or more human forms, according to

the degree of development of the workers.’<sup>[4]</sup> Now a great section of the wage-earners of this country have quite evidently made steady progress in regard to their social conditions. No wonder that they prefer what are called constitutional methods to the more violent forms of warfare. But, safe as this way is, it is not likely to arouse the passionate enthusiasm of the masses. Another reason of the apparent inertia of the workers in England, is perhaps just to be found in the fact that so many middle-class people have taken up social reform. To some extent this daily increase of middle-class reformers may be ascribed to a growing sense of social duty, although the growth itself again is an effect of, in the last instance, economic causes. But a much stronger force than the more or less ideological motives that have induced people in middle-class position to take up the cause of social reform, is the change the franchise reform has brought about in the political life of this country.

It is not a little surprising how indifferent many English Socialists are in regard to questions of the suffrage, so that a very influential labour leader could two or three years ago refuse to take part in an agitation for universal suffrage – not because it was inopportune, but that it was ‘mere radicalism’. In form, of course, it is, but with an adult population consisting in its majority of industrial wage-earners it is in substance more than that. Proudhon saw deeper when he declared that universal suffrage was incompatible with the subordination of labour to capital. And it is known what Lord Palmerston said of the changes Lord John Russell’s Franchise Reform of 1860 would bring about in regard to the House of Commons. ‘I dare say, the actors will be the same, but they will play to the galleries

instead of to the boxes.’<sup>[5]</sup> So far, history has not disproved his fears.

Today the member of Parliament plays for an audience, the majority of which in most cases are workers, and he plays accordingly. There are very few of them who have not taken up at least one question of real or fancied interest to the workers as their speciality, from the legal eight-hours day to ‘England for the English’. Any question which a large section of the workers have at heart is sure to find a great number of advocates in the ranks of the middle-class legislators. All this gives the class struggle another form.

It works today more as a potential than as an active force, more by the knowledge of what it might be than by actual manifestation. Politically as well as economically it is fought by sections or divisions, and often in forms which are the reverse of what they ought to be according to the letter, so that it might appear as if it were not the social classes that contest with one another the control of legislation, but rather the legislators that fight for the satisfaction of the classes. But the class struggle is no less a reality because it has taken the shape of continuous barter and compromise.

Marx’s book *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* appeared in 1859, the same year when Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was first published. Marx has often been compared with Darwin, and, in my opinion, very justly so. That Marx from the beginning took the greatest interest in Darwin’s researches, there is not the slightest doubt. A letter of Lassalle to Marx of the year 1859, shows that Marx had called Lassalle’s attention to the *Origin of Species* as soon as the book had appeared. And, curiously enough, amongst the left

manuscripts of Marx and Engels, I have come across one written not later than 1847, where I found a most remarkable passage pointing out with great vigour the struggle for life in *nature*. Of course, the term is not used, but the thing is clearly presented, and at the end we meet the following striking sentence: ‘Hobbes could have founded his “*bellum omnium contra omnes*” with greater right on nature than on men.’ <sup>[6]</sup>

This, only by the way. But, from all said, so far, it is quite evident that Marx’s theory is eminently evolutionary. Now evolution is, as the *British Review* recently said, ‘a very comfortable word’. You can, indeed, use it in the most Pickwickian sense. You can oppose it to revolution, you can construct an absolute contradiction between evolution and revolution. To Marx, evolution included revolution and *vice versa*; the one was a stage of the other. Not every revolution must be violent or sanguinary. But, besides those brought about by industrial changes alone, we have those phases of social evolution, which take the shape of, or are brought about by, political revolutions. They, too, have their drawbacks, undoubtedly, but they have also their advantages – they clear away in a day the dust and the rubbish that else would take generations to remove – they are, in the words of Marx, the locomotives of history. They are also mostly attended by a great intellectual impulse. Thousands of slumbering intellects are stimulated, wits are sharpened, ranges of sight widened. And when it so comes to violent struggle, then, of course, *might is right* – as it has been in 1648, in 1793, in 1830 and in 1848. By that I do not mean to say that *might was always ‘justice’*.



Marx, then, was, if you like to put it thus, a revolutionary evolutionist. But he was far from revolutionary romanticism. I doubt whether he would have subscribed to the sentence, that in the natural philosophy of Socialism light is a more important factor than heat, but I am sure he would not have subscribed to the contrary, that heat was more important than light. Indeed, in a declaration against a section of the Communistic League, which then cultivated a very heated revolutionism, Marx said in September 1850 – and I think these words ought not to be forgotten:

The minority puts into the place of the critical a dogmatic conception. To them not real existing conditions are the motive force of revolution, but mere *will*. Whilst we tell the workers, you must run through 15, 20, 50 years of civil wars and struggles, not only for changing the conditions, but for altering yourselves and for rendering yourselves capable of political supremacy, you, on the contrary declare: ‘We must at once capture power, or we may go and lay down to sleep.’ Whilst we explain, especially to the German workmen, how undeveloped the proletariat is in Germany, you flatter in the coarsest way the national sentiment and the sectional prejudice of the German handicraftsmen – a process which, true, is more popular. Just as the Democrats have made the word people, so you have made the word proletariat a fetish. Just like the Democrats, you substitute the revolutionary phrase for the revolutionary evolution. <sup>[7]</sup>

Here the question may be raised how this evolutionist conception agrees with the concluding words of the *Communist Manifesto*, that the ends of the Communists ‘can only be attained by the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions’. <sup>[8]</sup> To this the first reply is that the *Manifesto* was

written on the eve of a revolution – the Revolution of 1848 – which, indeed, overthrew forcibly a good deal of the existing social conditions. The comparative youth of the movement, and, I may add, the youth of the writers themselves, as well as the very political situation of the time, explains the accentuation of revolutionary violence. Besides, the *Communist Manifesto* had a polemical purpose – to fight the enervating communism of universal love then flourishing in Germany. It had to educate the workers for the impending political struggle which was sure to take revolutionary form. At the same time as Marx and Engels wrote these lines they, however, strongly opposed all playing with conspiracy. Putting educational propaganda in the place of conspiracy was the condition of their joining the League of the Communists.

But it shall not be denied – Engels himself has it in one of his last publications expressly stated <sup>[9]</sup> – that Marx and he in 1848 greatly overestimated the state of industrial evolution attained. They believed the breakdown of bourgeois civilisation to be within hail, if, however, to be worked out in a prolonged series of revolutions. And in their overestimation of the state of social evolution they were even less sanguine than other Socialists of the time. ‘We all were firmly convinced’, Bakunin later said to Benoit Malon, ‘that we were living the last days of the old society.’ The year 1848 brought the great disappointment. How Marx understood its lesson the speech made in 1850 has shown. In our appreciation of the quickness of social movements we are always subject to error, and may have continuously to correct ourselves, whilst our theory holds good all the time.

If his theory did not always protect Marx from a too sanguine view of the march of events, it, on the other hand, obliged him to propose nothing which was not based on a close study of actual conditions. He strongly resisted temptations to prescribe remedies for the future. To study the given economic conditions of society, to follow closely their march, to ascertain what to do – not from an imaginary perfect Socialist world, but from the very imperfect world we live in and its actual requirements – is therefore the task of the disciples of Marx. People may repeat in eloquent terms the general doctrines of the class war, and speak again and again of the social revolution and the socialisation of all the means of production, exchange, and distribution – they will still be poor Marxists if they refuse to acknowledge changes in the economic evolution which contradict former assumptions, and decline to act accordingly.

But better than all general deductions a rapid survey of Marx's own public life will illustrate the true sense of his social theory.

Marx and Engels had worked out their theory in the years 1845 and 1846. The literary controversies in which they affirmed it form one of the most interesting and most instructive chapters in the history of Socialism. As early as that time both men were in intimate relation with the fighting representatives of advanced Democracy in different countries – Chartists in England, Radical Social Reformers in France, Democrats in Belgium.

In Germany there were then not even great political middle-class parties formed: the whole political struggle was almost exclusively fought in newspapers and other prints. But just

because the fight was a literary one a tremendous amount of Radicalism was displayed. Germans believed themselves much superior to English and French. They imagined they could do without those petty institutions these had to try, just as a generation later the Russians did with respect to the same nations – Germany now included. Marx and Engels very soon overcame this superstition, and strongly opposed those Socialists who imported from England and France the condemnation of Parliamentarianism. They showed that this ultra-Radicalism was in fact reaction: the bourgeois liberties had first to be conquered and then criticised. <sup>[10]</sup> They proclaimed that the Communists had to support the bourgeoisie wherever it acted as a revolutionary progressive class. When, therefore, the Revolution of 1848 broke out, Marx and Engels, instead of preaching Communism in a small private sheet, preached Radical action in a comparatively widely circulated paper they had founded in conjunction with advanced political Democrats – the famous *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.

Fighting on political lines did, however, not mean neglect of economic questions. Just the reverse. In the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, amongst others, the case of the peasants against the feudal classes was advocated most energetically, and there Marx published his lectures on wage-labour and capital, and took in all real struggles the side of the workers.

In May 1849, the paper was suppressed. Marx and Engels first resolved to go to South Germany, where a last battle was fought between the revolution and the reactionary governments. Whilst they in no way shared the political ideas of the South German Democrats, they were for saving

what was to be saved for Democracy. But the battle was lost, and both had to emigrate.

In London they tried to reorganise the Communist League. Like other revolutionaries, they first hoped that a reconquest of their position by the French Radical Democrats would revive the revolutionary movements all over Europe. But soon they recognised that this hope was not well founded, and they opposed all movements amongst the German emigrants of forming leagues for revolutionary attempts. The hatred they drew upon themselves by this was without bounds, and results of the campaign of slander waged against them by men, many of whom afterwards became obedient Bismarckians, can even be traced in our own days. It was then that Marx, because he declined to support an illusion which could only exact useless sacrifices, was declared a cold, calculating scribbler and system-maker, who had not a bit of feeling for the people; no heart, only reason; no heat, only dry – too dry – light.

His reply, or part of it, to such accusations we have given above. In a review then published by him he explained how commercial prosperity had set in, and that, with trade everywhere brisk, no general revolutionary rising was to be expected. ‘Such revolution’, he added, ‘is only possible in times when there exists a conflict between those two factors, the modern forces of production and the bourgeois forms of production.’ Even the reaction did not know how strong the foundations of bourgeois civilisation were. ‘Against this condition of things’, he added, ‘all attempts of reaction which aim at hampering bourgeois evolution will fail as surely as all the moral indignation and enthusiastic proclamations of the Democrats.’ [\[11\]](#)

Instead of devoting himself to emigration politics, Marx, whilst working hard, at a miserable pay, for his livelihood, and studying in the British Museum, supported what was left of the Chartist movement by gratuitous contributions to Ernest Jones' papers, and lectured on social economy and other topics to a small nucleus of German workers. During the American Civil War he took energetically the side of the anti-slavery states, and readers of *Das Kapital* know how severely Marx censures Carlyle's super-criticism of this – to use his own words – 'most imposing historical event'. <sup>[12]</sup>

The 1860s saw the setting on foot of the International Working Men's Association, with Marx as its leading inspirer. When, somewhat later, the English Reform League was founded, an alliance of labour representatives and advanced Radicals for the purpose of pressing the then discussed Electoral Reform, the International, far from denouncing this 'compromise', supported it, and the General Council, in a report to the International Congress of 1867, referred with a certain pride to the fact that some of its members were most active members of the Council of the League.

The inaugural address and the statutes of the International are from the pen of Marx. <sup>[13]</sup> They are proofs of his unsectarian mind. He made them wide enough to be acceptable to all sections of the labour movement, and still precise enough to give the movement a distinct, well-defined class character. The emancipation of the working classes must be accomplished by the workers themselves, but it is no movement for new class monopolies and privileges; it is not a local or national, but a social problem embracing all countries, where modern society exists. Every political

movement is only to be regarded as a means subordinate to the great end of economic emancipation. Truth, justice and morality shall rule the relation of the societies and individuals without regard to colour, creed or nationality – no rights without duties, no duties without rights.

To him who is unable to detect in works like *Das Kapital* appeals to human sympathy and morality, the rules of the International may be a proof that there was even with Marx a question of morality and justice, of duties and of love of man.

The first years of the International went comparatively smoothly enough. The first congresses framed resolutions – most of them drafted or suggested by Marx in favour of technical and intellectual education, factory laws, trade unionism, cooperative societies, nationalisation of the means of transport, of mines and forests, and, later also, of land in general. But you read nothing of conspiracies and similar enterprises. The first international action which the council suggested was – an independent inquiry made by the workers themselves into the conditions of labour.

Then came the Paris Commune. The dissensions amongst the different French groups had already at an early time given a good deal of trouble to the General Council. After the downfall of the Commune they came to such a pitch that they took nearly all its time. Sections first invoked the authority of the Council, and when it was refused accused the Council of autocracy: Bakunin with his Anarchistic agitation aiding, the International broke up. A rival International created by Bakunin and his friends fared no better, in spite of its orthodoxy.

Was the International a failure? Yes, and no. It failed so far as it undervalued the difficulties of international cooperation. But it was nevertheless a most powerful intellectual lever: its propagandist influence was enormous. In one case at least it helped to prevent war; and if it could not prevent the disastrous Franco-German war, it fostered demonstrations against it in France and Germany which afterwards had the most beneficial effect.

The two Manifestoes of the International on the war are both written by Marx. <sup>[14]</sup> Still of greater interest, perhaps, than these is a letter on the war Marx wrote in September 1870 to the Council of the German Social Democratic Party. <sup>[15]</sup> There – three days after the battle of Sedan – he predicted as the necessary consequence of the then proposed forcible annexation of Alsace-Lorraine the Franco-Russian Alliance and Russia's predominance in Europe. Those who in Germany clamorously demanded the annexation were, he says, either knaves or fools. Events have shown that these words were hardly too strong.

In the same letter, however, Marx recognises that by the German victories one result at least was obtained for the German workers. 'Things will develop', he says, 'on a great scale and in a simplified form. If the German working classes, then, will not play an appropriate part, it will be their own fault. *This war has shifted the centre of gravity of Continental labour movements from France to Germany.* Greater responsibility rests, therefore, with the German working classes.'

Marx has often been painted as an embittered and soured emigrant. Little confirmation is given to such assertion by



this letter, written, I repeat, three days after the battle of Sedan. (It was at the time inserted in a proclamation issued by the committee of the German Social Democratic Party.)

Marx's position to *trade unionism* is illustrated by the resolution of the International strongly advocating trade organisation of the workers. As early as 1847 he had, in his book against Proudhon, <sup>[16]</sup> taken sides for trade unionism, at a time when nearly all Continental and many English Socialists were dead against it.

With regard to *cooperation*, Marx shared the general preference of nearly all Socialists for cooperative production against mere distributive societies. And this is not surprising if you consider the narrow, dividend-hunting spirit displayed for a long time by most distributive associations. Still Marx acknowledged their importance, if independent from state and bourgeois direction, as being examples of the superfluity of the exploiting capitalists and useful means of strengthening the position of the workers. But he emphasised their insufficiency, in face of the enormous means of capitalist society, for revolutionising the whole industrial world. It was impossible, according to him, to bring about a whole revolution of society behind the back of that society, so to speak. For this end the very means and weapons of society were to be made use of.

And this leads to the much discussed question of *Socialism and state influence*. Marx has been described alternatively as a hard and fast State Socialist, and as an anarchist opponent to State Socialism; as a rigid centralist, and as an ultra-federalist. In fact he was neither the one nor the other. He neither shared what he mockingly called the belief in

state miracles, nor did he share the superstitious *fear of the state*.<sup>[17]</sup> To Marx the state was an historical product corresponding to a given form of society, altering according to the changes in the composition of this society, and disappearing with it when its day was done. Before, however, this could be arrived at, the state machinery was to be conquered by the workers and used for the purpose of carrying out their emancipation.

This was his *original* theory. Already in the 1860s, we see him in the International oppose state omnipotence in matters of education. (See *Beehive*, 14 and 21 August 1869.) The state was to make education *compulsory*, to ascertain that a fixed minimum of education was given, and to provide means and supervision in regard to *efficiency*. But education itself must be independent of state tutorship, its management must be left to the municipalities or similar popular bodies.

In the famous pamphlet on the Paris Commune, Marx has more fully sketched out his ideas on the coming political organisation of society. There he declares bluntly that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purpose’. On the other hand, nothing would be more against the purpose than to break up the big nations into small independent states. ‘The unity of great nations’, he writes, ‘if originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production.’<sup>[18]</sup> It is not to be abolished. Through democratisation of local and municipal government, by increasing the functions and powers of local elected bodies, through a proper system of devolution and delegation of powers the state was to be changed into a real

commonwealth – not a power above society, but a tool in the hands of an organised democracy.

For details I must refer to the third section of the said pamphlet itself. The whole is rather sketchy, and not all perhaps practicable. But it is also not meant as more than a general outline, to be corrected by experience. One thing, however, is clear. You may call Marx whatever you like, you cannot call him after that a state idoliser and a fanatic for officialism.

And here I may also refer to the famous sentence, ‘Force is the midwife of old society in child-birth with a new society.’ A thousand times it has been quoted, and in 999 cases in the sense of an appeal to brute violence. But if we look to the passage where it is taken from, what examples of force do we find there? The *Colonial systems*, the *funding system*, *modern taxation*, the *system of commercial protection*. ‘Some of these methods’, says Marx, ‘are based on brute force, as the colonial system.’ ‘But all’, he continues, ‘utilise the power of the state, the centralised and organised force of society, to foster the process of evolution with hothouse vigour, and to shorten the transition periods.’ And then follows the sentence: ‘Force is the midwife of society’, etc. <sup>[19]</sup> It is quite evident, then, that it is, before all, the utilisation of the power of organised society Marx emphasises here, and not brute force. In the same spirit he describes (Chapter 15, section 9 of *Das Kapital*) factory legislation as ‘the first conscious and systematic interference of society with the processes of production’. <sup>[20]</sup>

I lay stress on this point, not in order to whitewash Marx in the eyes of the Philistine, but because I think it only just to

disconnect the cult of brute force and the unprovoked use of sanguinary phraseology from the name of Marx. Marx was by passion a revolutionary fighter, but his passion did not blind him to the teaching of experience. He admitted in 1872 that in countries like England it was possible to bring about the emancipation of the workers by peaceful means. <sup>[21]</sup> Today this is certainly still more the case, since the influence of the workers on the legislation has increased more than threefold. Not only societies, but also Socialists, have to learn.

In the *Franco-German Annals*, which Marx, together with the neo-Hegelian Ruge, started in 1844, there is printed a curious correspondence between Marx, Ruge, Bakunin, and some other men on the principles of their projected review. In the concluding letter Marx says:

Nothing prevents us from connecting our criticism with *real* struggles. We, then, don't appear before the world as doctrinaires with a new principle: *Here is truth – here kneel down!* We unfold to the world from its own principles new principles. <sup>[22]</sup>

In the same year Marx became a convert to Socialism. He took it up in this realistic spirit, and overcame at once the then flourishing Utopianism. And in the same spirit he wrote after the downfall of the Commune:

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made Utopias to introduce *pas décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending, by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through

long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. <sup>[23]</sup>

These words alone dispel the idea that Marx expected the realisation of a socialistic society from one great cataclysm.

The term 'social reform' is as equivocal as all political terms. We are all social reformers today: some in order to fortify present society, others in order to prepare the way for an easy and organic growth of a new cooperative society, based on common ownership of land and the means of production. And even amongst reformers in the latter sense some will prefer a more cautious policy, others a more impulsive action. But intentions alone do not decide the course of development, and in a given moment the impulsive reformer may have to choose between destroying the chance of a real step in advance, and thereby delaying the whole movement, or, by supporting people whose ways generally are not his, help the carrying out of such progressive measures. However strong Marx's sympathies were with the impulsive reformer, where an important step in the direction of lifting the social position of the workers was in question he would certainly not have hesitated to part ways with him if he refused to lend a hand.

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## Notes

Notes have been provided by the Marxist Internet Archive, except where noted.

1. Bertrand Russell, *German Social Democracy: Six Lectures* (London, 1896). The actual text reads: 'Thus as, in economic theory, he accepted in their crudest form the

tenets of orthodox English economists, so, in his view of human nature, he generalised their economic motive so as to cover all departments of social life... In this magnificent work [*The Communist Manifesto* – MIA], we have already all the epic force of the materialistic theory of history: its cruel, unsentimental fatality, its disdain of morals and religion, its reduction of all social relations to the blind action of impersonal productive forces. Not a word of blame for the cruel revolutions of the bourgeoisie, not a word of regret for the ironically-pictured idylls of the mediaeval world. There is no question, in Marx, of justice or virtue, no appeal to human sympathy or morality; might alone is right, and communism is justified by its inevitable victory.’ Available at [The Open Library](#).

2. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (Moscow, 1977), p 20 [See M.I.A.](#).

3. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [See M.I.A.](#).

4. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (Moscow, 1977), p 20 [See M.I.A.](#).

5. John Russell, First Earl Russell (1792-1878) was a Liberal politician. An advocate of political reform, he held several key governmental positions, including Prime Minister during 1846-52 and 1865-66. His proposal in the early 1860s to reform and extend the franchise to include some working-class men was frustrated by the Liberal Prime Minister of the day, Henry John Temple, Third Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865), and he was unable to introduce it when he became Prime Minister on Palmerston’s death. The franchise was subsequently extended by a succeeding Conservative government, although full male suffrage was not introduced until 1918.

6. ‘Bellum omnium contra omnes’ – ‘War of all against all’. The following appears in Karl Marx and Friedrich

Engels, *The German Ideology*: ‘Hobbes had much better reasons for invoking nature as a proof of his *bellum omnium contra omnes* and Hegel, on whose construction our true socialist depends, for perceiving in nature the cleavage, the slovenly period of the Absolute Idea, and even calling the animal the concrete anguish of God.’ See M.I.A.

7. Minutes of Central Committee Meeting, 15 September 1850, in Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848* (Harmondsworth, 1978), p 341.

8. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* See M.I.A..

9. See Friedrich Engels, Introduction to Karl Marx,

*The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* See M.I.A.

10. See the section, ‘The German or “True” Socialism’, in the *Manifesto of the Communists* (London, Reeves). This section gives in a condensed form the polemics of Marx and Engels against contemporary Socialists [Author’s note]. [Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* See M.I.A. – MIA.]

11. Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* See M.I.A..

12. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (Moscow, 1977), p 244 See M.I.A..

13. For example, Karl Marx, *General Rules*, October 1864 See M.I.A.; *Inaugural Address of the International Working Men’s Association* See M.I.A..

14. Karl Marx, *On the War* See M.I.A.; *Second Address: On the War* See M.I.A..

15. Karl Marx to Brunswick Committee of the German Social Democratic Party, extract in *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, 1975), pp 231-32 [to be scanned in due course – PF ].
16. Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* See M.I.A..
17. ‘Don’t fear’, says the resolution of the International on factory laws, ‘that you fortify governments if you support them in enforcing such laws. You make them your servants.’ [Author’s note]
18. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* See M.I.A..
19. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (Moscow, 1977), p 703 See M.I.A.
20. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1 (Moscow, 1977), p 451 See M.I.A.
21. This can be construed from Marx’s letter to Ludwig Kugelmann of 12 April 1871: ‘If you look at the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire*, you will find that I declare: the next French Revolution will no longer attempt to transfer the bureaucratic-military apparatus from one hand to another, but *to smash* it, and this is the precondition for every real people’s revolution on the Continent.’ (*Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, 1975), p 247) [to be scanned in due course – PF].
22. Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, September 1843 See M.I.A..
23. Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* See M.I.A..