

# The Significance of Marx

ARL MARX belongs to the ranks of those philosophical and sociological thinkers who throw potent thought-ferment into the world, and set in motion the masses of mankind. They awaken slumbering doubts and contradictions. They proclaim new modes of thought, new social forms. Their systems may sooner or later become obsolete, and the ruthless march of time may finally overthrow their intellectual edifice; meanwhile, however, they stimulate into activity the minds of countless men, inflame countless human hearts, imprinting on them characteristics which are transmitted to coming generations. This is the grandest and finest work to which any human being can be called. Because these thinkers have lived and worked, their contemporaries and successors think more clearly, feel more intensely, and are richer in knowledge and self-consciousness.

The history of philosophy and of social science is comprised in such systems and generalizations. They are the index to the annals of mankind. None of these systems is complete, none comprehends all human motives and capacities, none exhausts all the forces and currents of human society. They all express only fragmentary truths, which, however, become effective and achieve success because they are shining lights amidst the intellectual confusion of the generation which gives them birth, bringing it to a consciousness of the questions of the time, rendering its further development less difficult, and enabling its strongest spirits to stand erect, with a fixity of purpose, in critical periods.

Hegel expresses himself in a similar sense where he remarks: "When the refutation of a philosophy is spoken of, this is usually meant in an abstract negative (completely destructive) sense, so that the confuted philosophy has no longer any validity, whatever, and is set aside and done with. If this be so, the study of the history of philosophy must be regarded as a thoroughly depressing business, seeing that this study teaches that every system of philosophy which has arisen in the course of time has found its refutation. But it is as good as granted that every philosophy has been refuted, yet at the same time it must be also asserted that no philosophy has been refuted, nor ever can be refuted . . . for every philosophical system is to be

considered as the presentation of a particular moment or a particular stage in the evolutionary process of the idea. The history of philosophy . . . is not, in its totality, a gallery of the aberrations of the human intellect, but is rather to be compared to a pantheon of deities."—"Hegel, Encyclopaedia," vol. 1, section 86, note 2).

What Hegel says here about philosophy is true also of systems of social science, and styles and forms in art. The displacement of one system by another reflects the historical sequence of the various stages of social evolution. The characteristic which is common to all these systems is their vitality.

In spite of their defects and difficulties there surges through them a living spirit from the influences of which contemporaries cannot escape. Opponents may put themselves to endless trouble to contradict such systems, and show up their shortcomings and inconsistencies, and yet, with all their pains, they do not succeed in attaining their object; their logical sapping and mining, their passionate attacks break against the vital spirit which the creative genius has breathed into his work. The deep impression made on us by this vitality is one of the main factors in the formation of our judgments upon scientific and artistic achievements. Mere formal perfection and beauty through which the life of the times does not throb can never create this impression.

Walter Scott, who was often reproached with defects and inconsistencies in the construction of his novels, once made answer with the following anecdote: "A French sculptor, who had taken up his abode in Rome, was fond of taking to the Capitol his artistically inclined countrymen who were travelling in Italy, to show them the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, on which occasions he was at pains to demonstrate that the horse was defectively modelled, and did not meet the requirements of anatomy. After one of these criticisms a visitor urged him to prove his case in a concrete form by constructing a horse in correct artistic principles. The critic set to work, and when, after the lapse of a year, his friends were again visiting Rome, exhibited to them his horse. It was anatomically perfect, proudly he had it brought to the Capitol, in order to compare both productions and so celebrate his tri-

umph. Quite absorbed in his critical comparison, the French sculptor after a while gave way to a burst of genuine artistic feeling, which caused him pathetically to exclaim, "Et pourtant cette bete-la est vivante, et la mienne est morte!" (And yet that animal is alive, while mine is dead).

Quite a number of Marxian critics find themselves in the same position as the hypercritical French sculptor. Their formal and logically complete economic doctrines and systems of historical philosophy, provided with pedantically correct details and definitions, remain dead and ineffective. They do not put us into contact with the relations of the time, whereas Marx has bequeathed both to the educated and the uneducated, to his readers and to non-readers, a multitude of ideas and expressions relating to social science, which have become current throughout the whole world.

In Petrograd and in Tokio, in Berlin and in London, in Paris and in Pittsburg, people speak of capital and of the capitalist system, of means of production and of the class struggle; of Reform and Revolution; of the Proletariat and of Socialism. The extent of Marx's influence is shown by the economic explanation of the world-war, which is even accepted by the most decided opponents of the materialist conception of history. A generation after Marx's death, the sovereignty of Capital shrinks visibly, works' committees and shops' stewards interfere with the productive processes, Socialists and Labor men fill the Parliaments, working men and their representatives rise to or take by storm the highest position of political power in States and Empire. Many of their triumphs would scarcely have received Marx's approval. His theory, white-hot with indomitable passion, demanded that the new tables of the Law should be given to men amidst thunder and lightning. But still the essential thing is that the proletariat is loosening its bonds, even if it does not burst them noisily asunder. We find ourselves in the first stages of the evolution of Socialist society. Through whatever forms this evolutionary process may pass in its logical development, this much is certain, that only by active thought on the part of Socialists and by the loyal co-operation of the workers can it be brought to its perfection.

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## WHAT, AND WHENCE, AND WHY THIS INTANGIBILITY.

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market. But not an effective one,—one able to "pay." Her international credit of business was a minus quantity; she was shut off from the means and material of world production, and faced with high and adverse exchanges in consequence. She was compelled, with a beggar's cap in her hand, to buy what little she was able to buy, in whatever market she was permitted to enter, at the high rates of current prices and to pay for them by pledging what meagre resources remained to her. Necessarily that meant more credit, i.e., more debt, and of course more inflation. She was compelled to export in payment of reparations. But that business brought nothing in return; it further depleted her national resources and therefor further impaired her credit standing. So her exchange fell another thousand or two, producing more inflation, which in turn induced another fall in exchange. Internally, labor was busy. But it was busy on the debts of its masters. It was itself denied even the slave's market subsistence. All effort was centred on reparations. Social production for social existence was at a minimum. What little could be obtained from foreign sources was at the cost of further inflation. Germany was literally driven in on herself, forced to sustain herself from her own limited capacities.

With a teeming population, industrially organized and requiring foreign trade to maintain that organization—the experiment failed. The demand for life's necessities increased, prices rose, wages dragged up slowly after them, and under the stimulus of internal demand and external restrictions the process of inflation went merrily on. So the process has reached the giant stature of today, until exchange that was once par at 20 is now quoted in millions; and until the wages that are paid in those millions, today, vanish like a witch's penny in the nothingness of the price magnitudes of tomorrow.

The "tired business man" avers that the devastation and imminent collapse of Germany is due to the "iniquitous" treaty of Versailles; to reparations; sanctions, and the Ruhr invasion. So it is—superficially. And it is all one may expect from business. But behind the treaty is the power that fought for dominance in the world market. Behind reparations is the tribute that accrued to that dominance. At the back of the "sanctions" is the dread of overwhelming ruin. And the advance on the Ruhr indicated the determination to avoid that ruin—and the inspiration to occupy that "place in the sun" which was once the ambition of Germany. And behind them all is the imperious necessity of capitalist business to subjugate the world's resources for the profit and privilege of capitalist private property. Machine production under the incentive of surplus. Production wholly for profit. Production organized entirely for the private benefit of the cap-

italist class. Production controlled and regulated by an overmastering oligarchy of finance. That is the "intangibility" that ruins and consumes, not only Germany and her people, not alone Europe and its bounty, but man and his potentialities. The holocausts of the last eight years; the great war; the agonies of Russia; the degradation of Germany; the exhaustion of Austria; the chaos and disruption of political demarcations,—these events are not "accidents" and disasters. They are the inevitable and natural outcome of the capitalist system of society. They are vivid pictures of the savagery, the destruction and cruelty, unabated and unabashed, of a ruling class for the retention of its property in the social means of life. And they cry from the housetops of the necessity of class conscious understanding of the thing we are—slaves—and of the thing we want—social ownership of social production—to meet and overmatch their duplicity and their power.

The problems of exchange belong exclusively to the owners of private property. With them the working class has neither part nor lot nor concern. Exchange is the problem of the disposal of surplus. Having no share in its possession, we have no interest in its destiny. Our problem lies in the sphere of production. It is one and single; and its issue is clear. The private ownership of the social means of life and living is the prime cause of our economic tribulations; of modern wars and frenzied finance; of insensate speed, and insensate necessity; of cor-

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