



# TWENTIETH CENTURY MARXISM

A Global Introduction

Edited by **Daryl** Glaser and **David** M. Walker

# Twentieth-Century Marxism

*Twentieth-Century Marxism* outlines and assesses the Marxist tradition as it developed in the twentieth century, and considers its place and standing as we move into the twenty-first century.

The book is divided into three parts examining Marxism historically, geographically and thematically.

- *Part I* analyses early Marxism in Russia and Europe as it developed after the death of Marx. Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Bernstein and the schools of thought associated with them are all examined.
- *Part II* deals with thinkers, debates and movements that followed the early Marxism focused on in Part I. It includes chapters on Marxism in Europe, the Soviet Union, Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- *Part III* is concerned with more contemporary debates in relation to Marxism and its standing and role today. The chapters in this section consider various themes including the relationship between theory and practice in Marxism, democratic procedure and liberties, Marxism as an economic critique of capitalism and Marxist methodology.

This book provides a thoughtful and stimulating contribution to debates about the role of Marxism today and its future direction.

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# Introduction

*David Walker*

## **The century of Marxism**

The twentieth century was the century of Marxism. Regimes claiming the name covered much of the globe: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Benin, Bulgaria, China, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Hungary, Kampuchea, Laos, Mongolia, Mozambique, North Korea, Poland, Romania, Somalia, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Yemen and Yugoslavia all boasted Marxist governments for periods in the twentieth century. Hundreds of political organizations and parties proclaimed themselves to be Marxist or Marxist inspired, including, to name but a few, the British Communist Party, the Communist Party of the United States of America, the South African Communist Party, International Workers of the World, the Fourth International, the Khmer Rouge and Sendero Luminoso.

The twentieth century also saw Marx's original ideas inspire the creation of a lexicon of terms denoting Marxist ideological variants such as Bolshevism, Menshevism, Leninism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Castroism, Austro-Marxism, analytical Marxism, structuralist Marxism and Marxist humanism, to note just some of the more prominent ones. In addition, the use of Marxist ideas extended well beyond the field of politics to not just the more predictable areas of sociology, economics, history and philosophy – areas in which Marx himself wrote significant works – but also such diverse fields as psychology, anthropology, ecology and geography. Corresponding to this spread and development of Marxist ideas and influence there was a spectacular growth in the literature on Marxism, Marxists, Marxist organizations, movements and regimes, and Marxist perspectives on almost everything within the fields of social science, natural science and the arts. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of Marxism on the world in the twentieth century. Arguably, it contributed more than any other political ideology to the shape of the political and intellectual landscape of the last century, with the possible exception of liberalism.

## **Marxism in the nineteenth century**

The origins of Marxism are found, though, in the century before last. In the nineteenth century Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels produced the body of works that were to provide the basis for the Marxist movement and ideology. In his writings Marx outlined what became known as his theory of historical materialism, an approach to the study of history and society that focuses on the productive or economic sphere of society as the key to understanding the nature, development and trajectory of the society as a whole. According to orthodox interpretations of Marx's theory, the manner of production in a society shapes the character of the political and legal institutions, the morality and the prevailing ideas. Production, in this reading of Marx's model, is basic to society, and changes in the way a society produces alter the nature of that society. For example, the change from manual labour and simple tools as the means of production to the use of machinery and steam power saw society transform from feudalism to capitalism. This in turn saw a change in the political and legal institutions, and the religious, moral and social attitudes of society. Hence, religion no longer insisted on the divine right of kings, and all the ideas of classical liberalism concerning liberty of the individual, freedom of conscience, freedom of contract, the free market and competition came to dominate society as feudalism gave way to capitalism.

Marx also gave a trenchant analysis of the society of his time, capitalism, which he characterized in terms of commodity production, private ownership of the means of production, and the free market. Marx identified contradictory tendencies within capitalism that would inevitably lead to its collapse. The pursuit of profit that drove capitalism forwards would also ultimately destroy it by making the rate of profit steadily decline over time, with economic crises recurring, each time more acute, until a catastrophic collapse brought the entire capitalist structure crashing down. At the same time as these underlying economic forces were at work a struggle between rulers and ruled was taking place. Capitalists, the ruling class, and workers, the oppressed masses, were in constant conflict, their interests irreconcilable. Ultimately, Marx expected the victory of the workers over the capitalists and of socialism over capitalism in a process of revolutionary change.

In the course of and alongside the development of his theory of historical materialism and his analysis of capitalism, Marx, in a profound but unsystematic way, developed distinctive conceptions and theories of the state, class, revolution, human nature, alienation and ideology. He mounted penetrating critiques of capitalism, classical economics, liberalism, anarchism, non-Marxian socialism, religion and the thought of contemporary European philosophers, notably the Hegelian idealists.

This very brief, and, hence, necessarily simplified, account of the main thrust and themes of Marx's thought indicates something of the nineteenth-century foundations of the twentieth-century Marxist ideological developments described and discussed in this book. Underdeveloped or outdated aspects of Marx's thought in particular attracted the attention of twentieth-century thinkers and activists inspired by Marx, with topics such as imperialism, the Third World, women's

emancipation, and culture prompting great outpourings of theorizing and writing. But even the most central of Marx's ideas, such as historical materialism and class, have not been immune to the efforts of twentieth-century Marxists to update them, revise them and improve them.

In the nineteenth century, both as an ideology and a political movement, Marxism was far from dominant or pre-eminent on the European stage, let alone globally. For example, the League of Communists for which Marx and Engels produced the *Communist Manifesto* was a small group of German émigrés living in London, which fell apart after 1850. The *Manifesto* itself made virtually no impact at all when it was published in 1848. As for the other political organization with which Marx is most closely associated, the First International (The International Working Men's Association, to give it its full name) only lasted from 1864 to 1876 and, despite Marx's increasing influence within it, was never a Marxist organization as such. It contained a broad range of groups including followers of Bakunin, Mazzini, Proudhon and Blanqui, and political perspectives ranging from Mazzinian nationalism to Anglo-French positivism, with varieties of anarchism, socialism and even freemasonry also stirred into the pot. The Paris Commune of 1871 drew the attention of a wider audience to Marx as a result of his strong defence of the Commune in writings and speeches. He was identified by newspapers and commentators as a leading and dangerous radical, closely associated with the Paris Commune despite having had nothing to do with its instigation and organization. However, even after this publicity, Marx's death in 1883 passed all but unnoticed, except for a brief paragraph in *The Times*. Only with the German Social Democratic Party adopting a Marxist outlook in 1891 and the steady growth of the largely Marxist Second International in the last decade of the nineteenth century did Marxism as an ideology and as a movement begin to gain significance.

In the nineteenth century, then, Marxism was a marginal ideology struggling for ascendancy within the radical organizations and currents of the time. A fledgling movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it took the German Social Democratic Party and, above all, the Bolsheviks in Russia to instigate the transformation of Marxism from a sect to a mass, and ultimately a global, movement in the twentieth century.

### **The death of Marxism?**

Born in the nineteenth century, Marxism came of age in the twentieth, and, according to some, the last century also saw its death. In 1989 the Berlin Wall was breached, marking the end of the Marxist regime in East Germany. In the same year Zbigniew Brzezinski's book *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (1989) was published, in which he argued that communism had failed and its demise was inevitable. Seemingly fulfilling Brzezinski's prediction, in 1991 the Marxist regime in the Soviet Union collapsed, its communist empire in Europe already fallen. By the 1990s the Afro-Marxist regimes had largely fallen or capitulated to outside pressure to abandon their ideological commitment. In 1992 Francis Fukuyama published a book, *The*



*End of History and the Last Man* (1992), in which he argued that Marxism was defeated and that capitalism had triumphed over its ideological adversary. Fukuyama described Marxist doctrine as 'discredited' and 'totally exhausted'. In 1999 Andrew Gamble began a book on Marxism with a chapter titled 'Why Bother with Marxism?' in which he wrote, 'Marxism is widely perceived to be in crisis, and many believe the crisis is terminal. Marxism it is said had had a long run and now its energies are spent and its usefulness is long past. It is time to return Marx to the nineteenth century where he belongs' (Gamble *et al.*, 1999: 1).

The 'death of Marxism thesis' suggests that the story of Marxism has come to an end and that any lingering doubts about the futility and falsity of Marxism have now been dispelled. Marxist theory and practice have been discredited. Furthermore, Marx died well over 100 years ago, and he wrote the *Communist Manifesto* more than 150 years ago. The world of Marx was very different from the world of today, politically, economically and socially, so there can be little of interest or relevance in Marxism now. The *Communist Manifesto* must be seen for what it is, simply a historical document, and any truth there may have been in Marx's ideas no longer applies in the twenty-first century.

Proponents of this death of Marxism argument overlook several points. First, self-proclaimed Marxist governments continue to exist, most notably, at the time of writing, in China and Cuba. Also, Marxist parties and Marxist-inspired organizations have continued to be active into the twenty-first century, the Zapatistas in Mexico to name but one significant example of a group with Marxist influences. In addition, in a number of former communist countries there is anecdotal, electoral and opinion poll evidence of a growing nostalgia for the 'good old days' of communism and of significant support for communist parties and policies.<sup>1</sup> Second, Marxism is a living tradition that has changed and spread in different directions, so that although nineteenth- and even twentieth-century Marxism may be dated, just as nineteenth- and twentieth-century liberalism is, twenty-first-century Marxism is not so easily dismissed as irrelevant. Third, the influence of Marxist ideas in a vast range of fields should not be underestimated, and the impact of Marxism even in areas seemingly some distance from politics, areas such as geography and the arts, has already been noted. Finally, there is the issue of the discrediting of Marxism by reference to the practice of communist regimes. That is to say, those pronouncing the death of Marxism argue that the failings and ultimate fall of the Soviet Union show the falsity of Marxism. At the very least, proponents of this view need to show that Marxist theory entails the practice seen in the Soviet Union, and also that the failings and collapse of the Soviet Union were due to its Marxism and not to other factors.

However, it is fair to say that contemporary Marxists in one sense at least face a greater challenge than that faced by their predecessors. For now they are confronted with either defending or explaining the deeds done in the name of Marxism: the 'Great Terror' of Stalin's purges, the brutalities of Mao's 'Cultural Revolution', and the 'Killing Fields' of Pol Pot. Now, also, the absence of a successful and sustained Marxist revolution and the persistence of capitalism must be accounted for.

## Marxism: a twenty-first-century perspective

The beginning of the twenty-first century is an appropriate time to make an audit of Marxism, and, in particular, to review the ideas and theories that have built on Marx's thought in the course of the twentieth century. In looking at a variety of schools of Marxism it is implicitly accepted that Marxism is no monolith; there is an irreducible plurality of Marxisms. This book is not an attempt to identify an authentic Marxist tradition, but, rather, it is a bid to explain and assess the range of important strands of Marxist thought that emerged in the twentieth century.

Although representing a range of viewpoints and being far from uncritical of Marxism, the contributors to this book share a sense that Marxism as a body of thought and as a political movement is profound and important. In general there is a sense that, far from having died, Marxism is alive and at least tolerably well. At the very least it contains ideas and insights worthy of consideration. The failures of communism and the flaws in Marxist theorizing should not mask the fact that Marxist thought still has something to offer to contemporary politics and scholarship, and is likely to remain an important political and intellectual reference point well into this century also. Marxism remains a developing tradition, and what the various authors show, in writing about the different Marxisms that have emerged, is that Marxism is tremendously adaptable. For an ideology that has been criticized for being dogmatic, it is remarkable how flexible and varied it has proved to be. As early as 1899 it was 'revised' by Eduard Bernstein. It was then 'Russified' in Russia, 'Sinified' in China, and adapted to local conditions wherever it spread, by Che Guevara and José Carlos Mariátegui in Latin America, by Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh in Asia, and by Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon in Africa to highlight but a few examples. This range and variability of Marxisms is reflected in the book, and it is an important feature of this work that a truly global picture of Marxist thought is presented, avoiding the tendency in much literature on Marxism published in the English-speaking world to be too Eurocentric or 'Americocentric'.

The structure of the book falls into three parts mixing chronological, geographical and thematic approaches. Part I deals with early Marxism and looks specifically at Lenin and Leninism, the 'right-wing' Marxism of the Mensheviks, Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein, and the 'left-wing' Marxism of Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg.

Chapter 1 provides a robust defence of Lenin and Leninism by Alan Shandro, who argues that criticisms of Lenin have been based on misreadings and misunderstandings of him, failing to take into account the contexts in which he wrote his various works. The collapse of Soviet communism has meant a facile dismissal of Leninism and the reduction of Lenin to little more than a caricature, with a serious consideration of his ideas being avoided. Focusing particularly on three of Lenin's major works, his *What is to be Done?*, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and *State and Revolution*, Shandro seeks to give Lenin's ideas the serious consideration they deserve. He defends Lenin's ideas on spontaneity and the vanguard party, on imperialism, and on constitutional order and democratic rights. He rejects the criticism that *What is to be Done?* lays the theoretical foundation

for the subordination of workers to an intellectual elite, arguing instead that Lenin was committed to a dialectical interplay between the masses and the leadership, and that his views on the need for a vanguard party have to be considered in the context of the absence of proletarian hegemony. Shandro also asserts the continued relevance of Lenin's views on imperialism, and suggests that the logic of Lenin's argument requires a political stance open to criticism. Throughout, Shandro emphasizes Lenin's insistence that 'concrete situations be analyzed concretely'. Far from suffering from the 'sin of intellectual pride', as his critics suggest, Lenin did not lay claim to absolute knowledge or a philosophy of certainty; he was not dogmatic, but saw the fluidity of reality as necessitating constant re-examination of circumstances and the assumptions governing his analyses.

Ian Thatcher provides a historical comparison of Trotsky and Luxemburg. Left communism as a whole he characterizes as revolutionary, libertarian, councilist, anti-Stalinist and anti-parliamentarian. Luxemburg he finds more libertarian than Trotsky and ultimately more patient and principled, believing principles without power to be better than power without principles. In particular, Luxemburg will not sacrifice her commitment to democracy in order to achieve socialism, and consistently opposes the substitution of a vanguard party for the full involvement of the masses in revolution. Trotsky, on the other hand, while having a more lasting influence within Marxism and despite his writings being of great importance in the project of constructing a non-Stalinist Marxism, suffers from his closeness to Lenin. Thatcher suggests that Trotsky 'could never be truthful about how Stalin and Stalinism emerged from Lenin and Leninism.'

Jules Townshend offers a qualified defence of right-wing Marxism, a school which he notes has been widely criticized and condemned from within the Marxist tradition. Cautious, unheroic and history's losers, right-wing Marxists such as the Mensheviks, Kautsky and Bernstein nevertheless made significant contributions to Marxism. For Townshend, right-wing Marxism, unlike other strands of Marxism, never lost sight of the crucial link between democracy and socialism through which workers' self-emancipation was to be achieved. They also brought a realism to the Marxist project, attempting to adapt Marxism to new conditions and to respond to the impact of modernity. Bernstein, in particular, upheld the critical spirit of Marxism and opened up space for moral advocacy in his bold revisions of Marxism. 'The twenty-first century may prove a little kinder to right-wing Marxist reputations than the twentieth,' suggests Townshend.

The thinkers and debates considered in Part II are in the main chronologically after those discussed in Part I, but Part II follows a more geographical structure. It contains chapters on Soviet and Eastern bloc Marxism, Eurocommunism, Western Marxism, African Marxisms, Asian Marxisms and Latin American Marxisms.

In his chapter on Soviet and Eastern bloc Marxism, Mark Sandle focuses on 'the development, consolidation, crisis and eventual collapse of "official" Marxism in the Soviet bloc.' He notes that as an official belief system Soviet Marxism-Leninism held a monopoly position with all divergent views censored. Cut off from all criticism and meaningful debate, intellectual ossification was inevitable. Soviet Marxism, because of the dominant political position of the Soviet Union, was

enormously influential, but because it became 'a dogmatic, stylized set of empty formulae bearing no relation to reality,' and was 'little more than a thinly veiled rationalization of the monopoly of power of the [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]' it failed to endure past the collapse of the Soviet system in 1991. But this is not the whole story, according to Sandle. There were innovations in such areas as ethics, logic and philosophy of history, and there were developments of Marxist theory of the transition from capitalism to communism and the nature of the transitional (socialist) and end (communist) societies. In addition, the contributions in the post-Stalin era, particularly in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (most notably the Praxis school), should not be overlooked.

The path of Eurocommunism is traced by Rick Simon, who notes its attempt to find a 'third way' between Soviet-style communism and Western European social democracy. Simon characterizes Eurocommunism in terms of its critical stance towards Soviet Marxism, an emphasis on different national roads to socialism, an acceptance of the need for democracy and human and civil rights, and a commitment to using liberal democratic institutions to achieve socialism. He criticizes the failure of Eurocommunists to generate an enduring theoretical framework, suggesting this was a product of their over-emphasis on strategy, alliances and national peculiarities. The very term 'Eurocommunism' implies a coherence and identity that was apparent rather than real, and Eurocommunism is essentially a phenomenon representing a phase in the crisis of world communism. Simon concludes, 'Ultimately socialism can only be constructed on a global scale. By emphasizing national distinctiveness to the detriment of the global dimension, Eurocommunism could only follow a reformist path.'

In a wide-ranging chapter covering such heavyweight thinkers as Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser, Joseph Femia adopts a largely critical approach to Western Marxism. Femia acknowledges the achievements of Western Marxism as a varied body of theory, particularly in its critique of scientific philosophy and positivist social science. However, Femia questions the coherence of Western Marxist thought, arguing that the attempts of its exponents to introduce non-Marxist elements into Marxism amounted to an implicit critique of the Marxist project, and, hence, we should not be surprised to see the trajectory of Western Marxists, such as Habermas, from Marxism to post-Marxism. In a damning conclusion he writes, 'If the point of revolutionary theory is to change the world, then Western Marxism must be judged a failure.'

Daryl Glaser in his account and analysis of African Marxism begins by looking at African socialism and its links and overlaps with African Marxism. He moves on to provide an informative exposition of Marxist theory on Africa, and of the development of Marxism in African countries (ironically one key means of transmission being imperialism). The diversity of forms of Marxism is highlighted, reflecting the very different conditions operating in different African countries, most notably the developed capitalist and feudal class systems found in South Africa and Ethiopia respectively. Glaser argues that, while a standard formula based on Leninist and Soviet teaching was applied by African Marxist governments, there

were also some distinctive contributions made by Africa's Marxist movements and regimes, for example General Mohammed Siad Barre's synthesis of Marxism and Islam, Ben Bella's 'arabo-Islamic' socialism, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and Tigray People's Liberation Front's views on secession, Sékou Touré's experiments with mass-party forms, and the Madagascan Marxists' partial electoral pluralism.

In discussing the decline and fall of Afro-Marxism Glaser notes the relatively brief lifespan of most of the Marxist regimes in Africa (from the 1970s to the 1990s), which has led the overwhelming majority of both participants and observers to judge the Marxist project in Africa a failure. Glaser notes the difficulty in diagnosing this failure given that it is not easy 'to separate out the effects of Marxism's inadequacies and of Africa's malaise.' Nevertheless, Glaser identifies such problems as resource scarcity, hostile countries surrounding the Marxist regimes, over-ambition, impatience and political ineptness on the part of their leaders, and, above all, the limitations of their Leninist-style democratic theory and practice as key factors in the failure of Afro-Marxism. For Glaser the shortcomings of Afro-Marxism do not mean that Africa must embrace neo-liberal capitalism or that Marxism has no place in the future of the continent. In the socialist project of generating sustainable economic growth, deepening democracy and limiting social inequality, it may yet be necessary 'to consult Marxism, if not to devise a new political order, then at least to provide a clear-sighted analysis of the new pattern of class inequality that has formed on the ruins of discarded socialisms.'

Nick Knight writes, 'it is one of the great ironies in the history of the Marxist tradition that Marxism has had a greater political impact in Asia than any other region of the globe.' He lists Russia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan and the Philippines as countries that have had Marxist governments or important Marxist movements. Although Marx was a 'quintessentially European intellectual' his thought contains universal elements, most importantly a method based on a material perspective focusing on production, and a critique of capitalism, a system that has spread to every pocket of the world. These universal elements appealed to Asian Marxists. Marx's specific writings on Asia have largely been ignored by Asian Marxists, who have preferred to draw inspiration from Lenin's works that suggested that national, anti-colonial revolutions were a key part of the struggle for world revolution. Knight focuses on the thought of Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh as the most significant Asian Marxists. He notes how they both sought to adapt Marxism to local conditions, and combined nationalism or patriotism with Marxism. Ultimately, Mao and Ho were successful revolutionaries, but rather less successful in building socialism, and this points to Knight's overall assessment of the impact of Marxism on Asia: Marxism worked as a theory of revolution, but not as one of socialist construction. It is noteworthy that since the deaths of Mao and Ho both China and Vietnam have pursued policies more accommodating to capitalism.

There are some parallels in Marx's views on Latin America and his views on Asia. In both instances he displays an extremely Eurocentric viewpoint and this is brought out strongly by Ronaldo Munck in his chapter. To give one quotation

from Marx highlighted by Munck: 'We have witnessed the conquest of Mexico and have rejoiced at it . . . It is to the interests of its own development that Mexico will in future be placed under the tutelage of the United States.' Munck provides an account of the contributions of thinkers probably less well known in Europe, including Juan Justo and José Carlos Mariátegui, both of whom attempted to 'Latin Americanize' Marxism, with the latter becoming known as the continent's Gramsci. He also discusses Cuba, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the Renovadores in Chile and the Zapatistas in Mexico. Suggesting that Latin American Marxism is 'consumed' in the developed countries as a series of icons – think of Che Guevara as little more than a poster image – Munck argues that its intellectual contribution is overlooked. In particular, theories of radical democracy, the 'national-popular', and dependency theory have all been developed within the Latin American Marxist tradition. Looking to the future, Munck notes the possibilities for the creative development of Marxism freed up by the collapse of Soviet communism, but remains sceptical about the value of Marxism as a guide to action in Latin America.

The contributors in Part III endeavour to engage with recent issues and debates in Marxist thought. Howard Chodos discusses the relationship between Marxism as theory and Marxist-inspired practice, and picking up on related themes Daryl Glaser reflects on the theory and practice of Marxism, and in particular issues of epistemology and democratic procedure. Yahya Madra and Fikret Adaman stress economics more in their consideration of Marxist analyses of capitalism, and Daniel Little looks at the key area of Marxism and method, and the extent to which Marxism has something methodologically distinctive and useful to offer.

In looking at the experience of attempts to put the Marxist vision of socialism into practice, Chodos notes the failure of historical communism to survive the twentieth century intact. Either it collapsed, as in the case of the Soviet Union, or it was drastically changed, almost out of recognition, as in the case of China. He also notes the economic failings and widespread human rights violations of communist regimes. Whilst acknowledging that there is no straightforward relationship between theory and practice, Chodos suggests that the historical record 'can legitimately be said to call into question the validity of the Marxist project itself.' Focusing on the Soviet Union, Chodos examines the record of historical communism and draws up an historical balance sheet. The massive loss of life, both intended and unintended, the economic waste and inefficiency, and the environmental devastation all lead Chodos to conclude that 'the Soviet experiment constitutes a massive failure.'

Probing further into the nature of historical communism and its link with Marxist theory, Chodos develops his own characterization of historical communist regimes and identifies the role of the party and the fusion of the economic and social spheres as key in creating the structure of social accumulation of communist regimes. The link between the practice of historical communism and Marxist theory, and Chodos does claim a link, lies in the combination of specific elements of Marxist theory. For Chodos it is a Marxist teleology, a belief in the scientific character of Marxism, and a Manichean view of both the world and historical



struggle, all allied to the concentration of enormous political and economic power in the hands of a ruling elite that led to the disastrous record of historical communism.

However, according to Chodos, the fate of historical communism is not inevitable and its defects can be avoided by taking certain steps. First, Marxist regimes must not allow what he terms 'refeudalization', that is the fusion of economy and polity, to take place. Second, there must be genuine democracy with real political competition (multiple parties and free expression). Third, the socialist project must in principle be reversible through democratic means; the legitimacy of socialism depends on it being freely chosen and the people must be allowed the option of rejecting it. Fourth, human rights and freedoms must be inviolable. Fifth, whereas the core dynamics of capitalism must be changed, not everything capitalist has to be altered. Finally, and perhaps from a Marxist perspective most controversially of all, socialism must no longer be defined in terms of the rule of the working class. As Chodos concludes, 'if there is to be a future for Marxist-inspired socialism, a way must be found to initiate the transition to classlessness without the intermediate phase of working-class power.'

Glaser in his chapter focuses 'on the metatheoretical background of Marxist theory and action rather than on the content of a viable Marxist theory, methodology, analysis or programme.' He notes the poor economic performance, the democratic deficit and the appalling human rights record of Marxist states, an overall history that should concern adherents to an ideology that stresses the link between theory and practice. After rejecting the view that it is Marxism's self-proclaimed scientific approach and epistemology that is the root of the totalitarianism displayed by Marxist states, Glaser puts forward two rules for Marxists translating Marxist theory into practice: first, knowledge must be viewed as provisional; second, binding decisions must be consent-based. In order to avoid the failings of twentieth-century Marxist practice and to ensure that Marxism does no harm, but rather is of benefit in the future, Marxists must be committed to the tenet that all knowledge is provisional and democratic procedures must be followed. In acknowledging that knowledge is provisional Marxists must accept that there is no warrant to 'force people to be free' – what is being forced upon people may turn out to be mistaken. In committing to procedural democracy Marxists achieve legitimacy and give expression to the provisionality of knowledge rule. Glaser goes on to discuss the three roles of Marxism, as interpreter, 'politico' and Legislator, roles that again show the need for Marxists to be procedural democrats. For Glaser, Marxism must follow democracy-friendly rules of conduct and can 'contribute to democracy construction and other socially desirable projects.' A socialist radicalism coupled with principled proceduralism points to a twenty-first-century Marxism.

In looking at Marxist economics and analyses of capitalism, Madra and Adaman stress that there is no one, homogenous critique of political economy, but instead there is a multiplicity of Marxist theories. They focus on two of the principal Marxist approaches or projects, each with very different implications: capital accumulation theories and class exploitation theories. 'Whereas the former project

is committed to the analysis of capitalism as a crises-ridden process of wealth accumulation, the latter can be described as the institutionally specific analyses of different class structures (capitalist, feudal, slave, independent, or communal) and their articulation,' write Madra and Adaman. In addition to discussing these two approaches they provide an introduction to basic concepts of Marxian economics and a discussion of colonialism and imperialism from the viewpoint of Marxian economics. Madra and Adaman emphasize the political implications of different Marxist theories of capitalism, arguing that 'the way in which we theorize the economy affects the ways in which we devise political strategies of social transformation.' Accumulationist theories point to the state and capitalist corporations as key locations for struggle, whereas class exploitation theories direct attention to 'the multiplicity of forms of exploitation and domination within contemporary social formations,' and also suggest possibilities of 'imagining and enacting communal (and maybe even independent) class structures and democratic forms of governance today – as opposed to waiting for the terminal collapse of capitalism.' A key insight suggested is that the economy, whether of the world as a whole or of a specific country or region, even in the age of capitalism is not wholly capitalist. Non-capitalism exists in parts of the Third World, but also in the informal sector, households and some local communities where local public goods are provided by communal labour. For Madra and Adaman the richness, relevance and possibilities for further development are the most salient features of Marxian economic theories. The class exploitation approach in particular has opened up new avenues for constructive political action, which, when combined with the insights of the more orthodox Marxist accumulationist approach, gives a Marxian economics for the twenty-first century.

In the final chapter of the book Little looks at the contributions to social scientific methodology of both Marx and later Marxists, including Althusser, Poulantzas, Gramsci, the critical theorists and materialist historians, and finishing with the school of analytical Marxism. Summarizing Marx's influence on twentieth-century social science, Little usefully provides lists of themes and substantive methodological maxims for social research that constitute Marx's contribution. These include emphasizing and focusing on class, production, technology, property, alienation and exploitation. Overall, Little sees Marx as offering not a tight prescriptive body of methodological tenets, but, rather, a loose set of prescriptions, a heuristic that directs us to be flexible in applying materialism, to look at material institutions, class, power, exploitation and domination, to be aware of 'contradictions' in social formations and to seek underlying causes and structures. In short, Marx provides 'a loose research programme, inspired by a congeries of hypotheses, insights, and salient powerful interpretations.' For Little this 'style' (rather than method) of inquiry is eclectic and plural, and still has much to offer.

In the course of the book contributors describe the record of Marxist thinkers and schools of thought in the twentieth century and put forward criticisms and defences of various aspects of Marxist thought. For some, such as Femia and Munck, there is much to criticize and reject, whereas others, Shandro and Townshend for example, offer more sympathetic accounts of Marxism, or at least



of aspects of it. This critical survey leads into a discussion of aspects of recent Marxist theory, where the contemporary relevance of Marxism is most directly broached. Chodos, Glaser, Madra and Adaman, and Little all point to a role for Marxism in the twenty-first century. Mindful of its history, failings and lacunae, they all suggest directions for development and ways in which Marxist theory might still prove fruitful. The century of Marxism has not quite given way to the century of post-Marxism.

## Note

- 1 To give just a few examples of electoral support for communism: the Party of Democratic Socialism, the successor to the East German Communist Party, secured close to 9 per cent of the vote in the 2005 general election, including over 25 per cent of East German votes cast; in the Czech Republic the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia polled 18.5 per cent of the vote in the 2002 parliamentary elections; in Russia the Communist Party of the Russian Federation polled 12.6 per cent of the vote in Duma elections in 2003; in Moldova the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldova holds power, having polled 46 per cent of the vote in 2005. In a poll of over 2000 Russians in 2004 by the reputable Yuri Levada Analytical Center, 67 per cent 'regretted the fall of the Soviet Union'. In another survey 71 per cent of Russians 'strongly' or 'somewhat' approved of the former communist regime with 41 per cent responding either 'somewhat agree' or 'strongly agree' to the statement 'We should return to communist rule' (Rose, 2005).

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**Part I**



# 1 Lenin and Marxism

## Class struggle, the theory of politics and the politics of theory

*Alan Shandro*

Berlin 1989: the wall dividing East and West is broken down and the props of 'actually existing socialism' will crumble in surprisingly rapid succession. As the icons of Marx and Lenin come tumbling down across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Western cartoonists vie with each other in producing variants of one image: gangs of workers and peasants, armed with hammers and sickles, angrily chasing after the two startled and bewildered communist thinkers.

What was their transgression that it should call forth such retribution? There are those for whom the Bolshevik revolution and the social order to which it gave rise are to be understood as the poisoned fruit of a criminal will to power. The story suggested by the cartoons, however, is probably more influential and certainly more interesting. The communists are caught unawares, victims of misguided confidence in the truth of their theory, despite all evidence to the contrary. So overweening was this confidence that, not only were they willing to reconstruct entire societies upon the promise of a theory, they would impose their blueprint with massive violence, violating the aspirations and the experience of the very people in whose name the promise had been proffered. The anger of the workers and peasants was directed, then, at the betrayal of a promise but also, through this, at the theoretical arrogance that stood behind the promise. The offence of Marx, and especially of Lenin, was the original sin of intellectual pride.

Something like this story also runs through the academic literature on Marx and Lenin, evident in the current practice of attributing to Lenin a claim to 'absolute knowledge', a 'philosophy of certainty' (see, for example, Harding, 1996: 219–42). It is a story with some rhetorical force; it can appeal to the virtues, grounded in plebeian experience, of modesty and tolerance. Its intellectual power, however, is dubious; in it Marxist and Leninist ideas are criticized only by implication, or rather by insinuation. What matters about those ideas is that they were imposed with arrogant disregard for popular aspiration and experience; from the anger of the workers and peasants we can infer the falsity of the ideas. No need, then, to investigate the ideas themselves; we already know, from the experience of their victims, the truth about them. And should the contradictions of our own quotidian experience tempt us to test its limits, we already know what might lie beyond and can prudently resist the temptation. Never mind that empathy for the