



THE MARXIAN DREAM — AND THE REALITY

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PROFIT is a dirty word today, arising out of the industrial exploitation of workers in the last century and still surviving in the current language of socialism under the form of such slogans as production for 'use and not for profit' which perhaps, more than any other form of economic terminology, have misled the human mind.

Karl Marx distinguished roughly four areas of exploitation in the history of civilisation, starting with what he called the Asiatic era of primitive means of cultivation, then the ancient period based on chattel slavery, the feudal based on agriculture and finally the capitalistic which was to be the last era before the onset of communism. In none of these did he ever sharply distinguish land from capital and in any case in the era of primitive production the distinction would not be very significant when nomadic tribes would move from one fertile site to another and land was hardly regarded as property at all. Nor did he observe that in the feudal regime the difference between land and capital was vaguely recognised insofar as a feudal lord was under an obligation to provide armed forces for the Crown in the case of war, and so to that extent was returning some land rental value to the community. These feudal dues, as they were later called, were abolished, oddly enough, by the Long Parliament, no doubt in the name of progress, from which time we can conveniently date the transference of taxation from the rent of land on to production. Karl Marx, suprisingly, even paid a tribute to certain of the eras of oppression, the "magnificence" of good taste in the epoch of Athenian slavery, and despite his attacks on the more recent 'bourgeois' era, he could also go into transports of ecstasy over its technical achievements. "The bourgeoisie," he writes in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) "has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing the Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals—it has created enormous cities—and thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the 'idiocy' of rural life—and during its reign of scarce 100 years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together." Many of Marx's ideas of course were not original, his dialects came from Hegel, as also his belief in "inevitable revolution", others such as the class war came from

St. Simon and Guizot, the belief that "property is theft" from Proudhon, from Sismondi the theory of recurrent booms and slumps. But all this he combined with a Messianic enthusiasm based on a materialistic pantheistic religion which thrilled and inspired millions of people. Yet it all rests on one fundamental thesis that man must eat in order to live and that Robinson Crusoe must somehow have access to the trees on which hang the berries he requires for sustenance. "Man ist was man iszt", said Ludwig Feuerbach rather sententiously, followed by Brecht in more concise terms and more recently "Erst das Fressen dann die Moral." "First grub, then ethics."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his famous essay on the *Origin of Inequality among Men* (1762) made this famous statement "the first man who having enclosed a piece of land, took into his head to say 'this is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society." Unfortunately Rousseau failed to enlarge upon this striking statement and to draw its consequences and we can only lament that the world of economists and particularly Karl Marx did not perceive the full import of this remark. Had they done so just as the industrial revolution was beginning there is a small possibility that we might have had a capitalist society which worked well and in which not only all sides earned a profit by trading freely, but also in production itself both worker and capitalist would have made a profit. It is however not the errors of the past which concern us at this point, but the results of these errors.

Now, since Marx has no belief in capitalism and the free market, what does he believe in and what does he think will be the organisation of society when the "state" has "withered away"? Unfortunately he has very little to say about it. According to one well publicised slogan, when the proletariat has destroyed the State, goods will be distributed on the principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" although who is to estimate the ability and who is to define the needs we are not told. Further, in 1874 Engels declared that the State, as a result of the social revolution, would vanish "because all public functions would simply be changed from political into administrative ones," which is a very abstract and vague statement indeed. In 1877 Engels writes that by converting the means of production into State property the proletariat would abolish the State as State, a statement that to most of us means almost nothing. In 1889 he adds that when the State seizes the means of production this

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will lead to the "leap of humanity out of the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom" whatever that may mean. In 1884 we learn further that the "Whole machinery of the State will be relegated to



the museum of antiquities, along with the bronze age and the spinning wheel." We must understand further that there will be a considerable period of socialism before the full ideal of communism is realised, a period to be known as the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Again in 1891 Engels speaks of the victorious proletariat paring down the worst aspects of the State, until a new generation, grown up in the new, free, social conditions, is capable of putting aside the whole paraphernalia of State. All this sounds terribly inadequate to explain what is wanted. Better perhaps to listen to the Messianic utterances of the Hebrew prophet himself. "Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation; exploitation; but with this grows too a revolt of the working class, a class increasing in numbers and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capitalism depends on the mode of production which has sprung up and flourished along with it and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach such a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist husk. This bursts asunder. The *knell* of capitalist private property sounds. The *expropriators* are *expropriated*."

This is a remarkable piece of rhetoric and renders very expressively the revolutionary fervour of Karl Marx. But what in fact has been its effect on the world at large? First we must emphasise that there has never been a genuine Marxist revolution on the lines the prophet laid down. The Marxist revolution was to come when an advanced working class, or proletariat, organised by its revolutionary leaders (mainly bourgeois), performing its historical predestined role of antithesis to the thesis of a decadent bourgeois capitalistic regime, would rise in revolt and establish the synthesis of the communist republic. Now in fact this has never happened. Both the "bourgeois" revolution of February 1917 which overthrew the "feudal" Tsarist regime, and the October revolution led by Lenin, were the outcome of the determined efforts of a minority of men who, working on the background of a war which had discredited

the prevailing regime, knew what they wanted and got it. The structure of their revolution in no way reflected the prophecies of Marx, who had constantly maintained that the Communist revolution could only take place in an advanced industrial society. If this be so true of the October revolution, *a fortiori*, it will be true of later revolutions, even less convincing in their ideological aspect, in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other Iron Curtain countries after the second World War, not to mention the Chinese revolution headed by the indomitable Mao-Tse-Tung. In fact what Lenin and Trotsky and Stalin and their successors brought about was a situation in which in very truth the expropriators were expropriated, but in their place rose, not so much the oppressed workers and peasants, but a bureaucracy of the most narrow and repressive kind, maintained in power by a secret police inherited from the Tsarist regime. When I say it was a new power structure not of a Marxist kind, I mean that it had nothing to do with the Hegelian dialectic transformed into Marxist language, nothing to do with class warfare, nothing to do with the proletariat rising to power, but on the other hand everything to do with a denial of natural law, with a refusal to believe that economic laws exist and again everything to do with the fact that once you leave entirely the free market with its free enterprise, the only alternative is State control and what is fundamentally and will always be by the nature of things, State capitalism.

The initial mistake (as regards modern times) was made at the time of the Reformation when the potential wealth below the surface of the earth, at a period too when land was mainly vested in public institutions such as monasteries, was allowed to fall into the hands of private individuals.

Whatever we attribute to feudal conceptions of land tenure (which at least under the law of primogeniture preserved the rights to land of the clan as such, including serfs) and it is easy to overestimate the value, the fact remains that land values became private property from the Reformation onwards and the desperate protests of the landless peasants, reflected in the various peasant revolts, could not avail to stop it. With the final enclosures came the totally



helpless proletariat of Marxist doctrine, with nothing to bargain with except its labour which has been such a convincing element in the Marxist ideology.