

BBC visits Karl Marx, but what is he?

At the end of 1999, Karl Marx was voted the “Greatest Thinker of the Millennium” in a BBC online poll. Then in mid-July 2005, he was voted the “Greatest Philosopher” in the BBC Radio 4 In Our Time’s poll of listeners.

On the eve of Greatest Philosopher vote there appeared the BBC profile: Karl Marx (1818-1883) advocated by Francis Wheen. In proposing Marx, Wheen made the following claims.

“Marx set down his ideas in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and *Das Kapital* (3 vol., 1861, 1885, 1894) arguing that economic relations determined all other features of a society, including its ideas.”

No economic determinism

Here Wheen’s claim about Marx’s view is fatalistic making mankind a puppet in the hands of economic relations. This was never Marx’s view. At the very outset of his life-long collaboration with Engels he analysed how and when consciousness originated, developed and ultimately “emancipate[d] itself from the world” as follows:

“The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life ... the first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history [is] that men must be able in a position to live in order to ‘make history’. But life involves before everything else eating, and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.” “Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product” as immanent in the real process of history. It began “merely as consciousness concerning the *immediate* sensuous environment and consciousness of the limited connection with other persons and things outside the individual who is growing self-conscious ... This beginning is as animal as social life itself at this stage. This herd-consciousness or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increased needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these there develops the division of labour” ... eventually giving rise to “a division of material and mental labour ... From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of ‘pure’ theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc. But even this theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc., come into contradiction with existing social relations, this can occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing productive forces.”¹

In the *Communist Manifesto*, they argued: “Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in a word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social

relations and in his social life?"²

This conception, the Materialist Conception of History – the product of collective experience of the working class and the collective reflection of organized socialists – arises out of the use of the dialectical-materialist method in political economy. It is materialist as it recognizes the primacy of matter in the surrounding world. It is dialectical because it recognizes the universal interconnection of complex and dynamic objects and events within a single form-and-content totality.

It regards motion and development as the result of both the unity and the struggle of opposites.. It explains change, reveals causes and analyses effects by locating the source of the motion of the processes within which contradictions are embodied. It shows how these contradictions determine the level of development of these processes, and it brings out the conditions for their solution.

This method is not a dogma. It too develops in dynamic fashion, is subject to change within its own framework, and is able to understand and review its own basis. In contradistinction to idealist theories, this universal scientific understanding of the world develops upon the premise that it is not our consciousness that determines our life but our life that determines our consciousness and that consciousness, in turn, influences our life³. In other words, being determines thinking and thinking influences being.

This understanding of history is not derived from any philosophical or contemplative premises, or from any better insight into eternal truth and justice, but from production.. In two senses, production of the life of the species itself and its needs together with production of the means to meet those needs.

Progress is ultimately determined by the changing character of human productive powers giving rise to more improved modes of production and resultant social structures, such as primitive communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and capitalism, the later three being forms of class society.

The origin of class society dates back several thousand years to when private property and the state and social relationships with their array of economic categories such as rent, interest, exchange, barter, simple commodity production, buying and selling, market, money, capital, commodity, value and price, profit *vis-à-vis* wages.

Marxian economics regards relations of production as manifestations of levels of technological progress. Nevertheless, within a given mode of production, developing productive powers eventually come into conflict with the existing relations of production, which from forms of their development turn into their fetters.

This conflict expresses itself in the struggle between two opposing classes, with the owning and exploiting minority class having a vested interest in maintaining the existing relations and a new propertyless exploited class working towards the further development of the productive forces; this requires a revolutionary replacement of antiquated relations with new ones. Resolution of the conflict is obtained with seizure of political power by the new class in order to use it to usher in the new mode of production.

Marxists are no ideologues who invent social systems. For us social systems are the necessary outcome of history. Ideas, in all epochs, are basically the products of production. This is not to uphold economic determinism. Ideas do develop also in realm of “pure” thoughts and fantasy. But, however they originated, their seed-bed is the economic soil of society, wherein only some take root and spread because they correspond to reality.

In a class society, the ideas⁴ of the ruling class rule over the ideas of the ruled. Thus, the social selection of ideas applicable to a given mode of production depends on the class that is in position to select and on the method it applies.

Even today, immense majority of the working class has not adopted the Marxist Method to select its own revolutionary ideas, which exist, but anachronistic capitalist ideas are ruling over them.

To arrive at the revolutionary position the working class must “criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil over and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Here is the rose, here dance!*”⁵

And how is history made?

“Men make their own history,” said Marx, “but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”⁶

Finally, Engels stood by their method clarifying the interconnection: “We make our history ourselves, but in the first place under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these, the economic ones are ultimately decisive, but the political etc. ones and even the traditions that haunt men’s minds also play a part, though not the decisive one.” And again, “in the second place, however, history is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflict between many individual wills of which each in turn has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life.” Thus attaching the due importance to “conflict between many individual wills” he gets round to an overemphasis: “Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle *vis-à-vis* our adversaries who denied it, and we had not always the time or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction.”⁷

All this explains how individuals receiving such theories can take on family, group or class ideas, which may lead them against their own interest, but which, owing to the individuals’ “dual character ... (1) subjective and (2) objective”, acquire “historically

differing shapes as the result of mixture and conflict with others.”⁸

It is now, therefore, evidently clear that Francis Wheen’s case in point as cross-examined above is an inadequately considered, hence partly committed uncritical view.

No ready-made utopias

“He also outlined the goal of Marxism – the creation of social and economic utopia by the revolution of the proletariat which would centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state.

“All class boundaries would be destroyed and each individual would find personal fulfillment, having no need for the bourgeois institutions of religion or family. Marx himself was an atheist, coining the phrase, ‘Religion is the opium of the people’”, profiles Wheen.

First, “the creation of social and economic utopia by the revolution of the proletariat”. On the contrary Marx’s “outlined ... goal of Marxism” was that the working class has “*no ready-made utopias* [emphasis added] to introduce *par 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 economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.”⁹

As early as 1844 Marx was outlining that “Communism is the position as the negation of negation, and is hence the *actual* phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and rehabilitation.. *Communism* is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development, the form of human society.”¹⁰

And in 1845, he with Engels put it: “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise ... a practical movement ... a question of overthrowing the existing state of things.”¹¹

In summary, their theory of Communism or Socialism¹² is: “the negation of the negation”^a – “abolition of private property ... abolition of bourgeois property”^b – “abolition of the wages system altogether”^c – as “the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie..”^d

This knowledge grows out of the “immediate natural” life principle of the working class. All knowledge starts from facts. It is the concrete totality of knowledge that governs reality. Marx’s method cannot be separated from reality. This method provides us with the necessary foundation to settle accounts with all utopians and utopias.

Second, the revolution of the proletariat, which would "centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state". Apparently, Wheen reads this from the ten points Marx and Engels had listed at the end of Section II of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. But he misses the joint declaration of Marx and Engels in its *Preface to the German Edition of 1872* quoted again by Engels in the *Preface to the English Edition of 1888* wherein he could read: "In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organization of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the French revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details become *antiquated*. [emphasis added] One thing especially was proved by the Commune, *viz.* that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the readymade state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'".

How would the working class then wield the state machinery for its own purposes? If the working class "centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state" these would turn into what Marx and Engels called: "a collective capitalist" ... "social capital" ... "state capital" ... "the associated capitalist, the national capitalist".

From 1844 on Marx recognized that "*industrial capital* is the accomplished objective form of private property"¹³; and that the relation of appropriation of surplus labour as surplus value relates workers with the capitalist, "whether he be an isolated, or as in joint stock companies, a collective capitalist"¹⁴; and also "that the social capital is equal to the sum of the individual capitals (including the joint-stock capital or the state capital, so far as governments employ productive wage-labour in mines, railways, etc., perform the function of individual capitalists) and that the aggregate movement of social capital is equal to the algebraic sum of the movements of the individual capitals"¹⁵; "capitalist enterprise ... being essentially private even if the associated capitalist takes the place of the individual capitalist"¹⁶

In addition, in 1878 Engels cautioned:

"The transformation, either into joint-stock companies [and trusts], or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces. ... The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalistic machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of the productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizen does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers – proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with."¹⁷

The point of the fact is that state ownership of the productive forces too *formally* reveals a relation of property whereby production has been socialized, but conceals another relation of property, which remains *essentially* private in appropriation via exchange on the market. Thus, under state ownership capital functions as another "accomplished objective form of private property," and certainly, capitalist private property of the state functionaries.

How would then the capitalist relations be done away with – by immediate "abolition of the state" or "gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance of the state"?

To answer the question you have to go to the cause. The state is a product of the division of society into antagonistic economic classes. It emerges out of society but gradually raises itself above society. Moreover, the functionaries of the modern state or the government are “but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”¹⁸ So, once the division of society into antagonistic economic classes is abolished through conversion of the state’s coercive features into agents of emancipation and merging its useful administrative functions into the democratic structure of classless society based on universal ownership of productive and distributive resources, the state with its government becomes redundant.¹⁹

As Engels wrote to Philip van Patten in 1883:

"Marx and I, ever since 1845, have held the view that *one* of the final results of the future proletarian revolution will be the gradual dissolution and ultimate disappearance of that political organisation called *the State*; an organisation the main object of which has ever been to secure, by armed force, the economical subjection of the working majority to the wealthy minority. With the disappearance of a wealthy minority the necessity for an armed repressive state-force disappears also. At the same time we have always held that in order to arrive at this and the other, far more important ends of social revolution of the future, the proletarian class will first have to possess itself of the organised political force of the state and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the capitalist class and re-organise society. This is stated already in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1847, end of Chapter II. The Anarchists reverse the matter. They say that the proletarian revolution has to *begin* by abolishing the political organization of the state. But after the victory of the proletariat, the only organization the victorious working class finds ready-made for use is that of the state. It may require adaptation to the new functions. But to destroy that at such a moment, would be to destroy the only organism by means of which the victorious working class can exert its newly conquered power, keep down its capitalist enemies and carry out that economic revolution of society without which the whole victory must end in a defeat and in a massacre of the working class like that after the Paris Commune."²⁰

Further lessons, experience of the 20th century has taught us, show that this clarification is of paramount importance for discussions within the working class milieu of the world striving to organize today towards Socialism.

Thus, Wheen’s statement – the revolution of the proletariat would “centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the state” – as Marx’s outlined goal of Marxism – does in no way “strip away the Marxist-Leninism” (see “The Talk” below) and its view that state ownership has something to do with Socialism. For Marxism, however, state ownership is another objective form of capitalist private property, which Communism or Socialism has to negate with “a society based upon communal ownership”²¹ or “the co-operative society based on *common ownership* [emphasis added] of the means of production.”²²

Third, “All class boundaries would be destroyed and each individual would find personal fulfillment...” Here we hear Wheen’s on another “goal of Marxism”. Well. However, how would it occur? In *The Communist Manifesto* we read: “In place of old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an

association, in which free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” Therefore, we shall have *an association*, not the ready-made state apparatus anyway.

Clearly Wheen’s readings into Marxism are not quite adequate. Possibly he could ask himself with a wide-angled view how to champion Karl Marx, distinguishing between the young and the mature – capturing on his canvas the whole – young Marx and Engels studying, discussing, learning, writing, researching, collating, criticizing, organizing and progressing, and mature Marx and Engels setting aside their past mistakes and incorporating new findings into the dynamics of Marxism as the science, the guiding principle of self-emancipation of the working class. Only by so doing could he bring home Marx’s revolutionary message to his listeners that “the point, however, is to *change*” the world.

The depth of this “guiding principle” to action which animates Marxism is shown by its dynamism – the critical world view wherein “circumstances make men just as men make circumstances”²³

The Talk

With the announcement of the result on 13 July the BBC programmed a talk on 14 July 2005 with Presenter, Melvin Bragg (supporter of the Labour Party) and Guest Contributors: Anthony Grayling, Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London; Francis Wheen, journalist and author of a biography of Karl Marx; Gareth Stedman Jones, Professor of Political Science at Cambridge University. The programme was presented as:

“Workers of the World Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains”, “Religion is the opium of the people”, and “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs”. That should be enough for most of you to work out whom Radio 4 listeners have voted as their favourite philosopher: the winner of the In Our Time Greatest Philosopher Vote, chosen from 20 philosophers nominated by listeners and carried through on an electoral tidal wave of 28% of our 'first-past-the-post' vote is the communist theoretician, Karl Marx. So, when you strip away the Marxist-Leninism, the Soviet era and later Marxist theory, who was Karl Marx? Where does he stand in the history of philosophy? He wrote in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however, is to change it” - which begs the question, is he really a philosopher at all?

True, a philosopher he had been, a critical philosopher he became, a socialist he remained.

A *philosopher* he had been as Dr. Marx doing a thesis on two ancient Greek philosophers, Democritus and Epicurus, and contributing on many a philosophical question until early 1840s when he was distancing himself from his Young Hegelian fellow radicals who were criticizing religion, opposing Hegel for his defence of the despotic State of Prussia, and arguing for a democratic state of Germany, but were unable to explore deeper into “the *reality* of the true human being”.

In 1843, Marx wrote to Arnold Ruge:

“Hitherto philosophers have had the solution of all riddles lying in their writing-desks, and the stupid, exotic world had only to open its mouth for the roast pigeons of absolute knowledge to fly into it. Now philosophy has become mundane, and the most striking proof of this is that philosophical consciousness itself has been drawn into the torment of the struggle, not only externally but also internally. But, if constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair, it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to *ruthless criticism of all that exists*, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be. ... Therefore I am not in favour of raising any dogmatic banner. On the contrary, we must try to help the dogmatists to clarify their propositions for themselves... And the whole socialist principle in its turn is only one aspect that concerns the *reality* of the true human being. ... Reason has always existed, but not in a reasonable form. The critic can therefore start out from any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and from the forms *peculiar* to the existing reality develop the true reality as its obligation and its final goal. ...we do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way ... We develop new principles for the world out of the world’s own principles... We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it *has to* acquire, even if it does not want to ... explaining to it the meaning of its own action. Our whole object can be – as is also the case in Feuerbach’s criticism of religion – to give religious and philosophical questions the form corresponding to man who has become conscious of himself. ... we can formulate the trend of our journal as being: self-clarification (critical philosophy) to be gained by the present time of its struggles and desires.”²⁴

A critical philosopher he became to find in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law*:

“The basis of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man. ... The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against the world of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*. ... Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of the spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people. ...

“To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real* happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand *to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore *in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears*, the *halo* of which is religion. ...

“The *task of history*, therefore, once the *world beyond the truth* has disappeared, is to establish the *truth of this world*. The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask the self-estrangement in its *unholy forms*. Thus, the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*. ...

“Criticism appears no longer as an *end in itself*, but only as a *means*. Its essential sentiment is *indignation*; its essential activity is *denunciation*. ...

“The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; ... The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with categorical imperative to

overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being.”²⁵

In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx recognized Feuerbach as the beginner of “*positive, humanistic and naturalistic criticism*,” completed “the *necessary* task of settling accounts between *criticism* and its point of origin – Hegelian *dialectic* and German philosophy as a whole.” Hence his declaration: “the negative dissolution of philosophy, i.e., the process of its decay – this historical nemesis.”²⁶ At the same time his study of the French, English and German socialist works was leading him to “a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy” to outline his theory of Communism as “the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. ...

“The positive transcendence of *private property*, as appropriation of *human life*, is ... the positive transcendence of all estrangement – that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state etc., to his *human*, i.e., *social* existence. Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man’s inner life, but economic estrangement is that of *real life*, its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects.”²⁷

If that is not enough, with Engels he wrote in the *German Ideology*: “Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty phrases about consciousness end, and real knowledge has to take their place. When the reality is described, a self-sufficient philosophy [*die selbständige Philosophie*] loses its medium of existence.”²⁸

However, a critical philosopher, properly so-called, was not the end point of his life. Marx proceeded to accomplish a *revolution* of theory, a revolution of history and, indeed, a revolution of practice, with his discovery of what he called the *Materialist Conception of History* which navigated him through class struggles to discover the *theory of surplus value* in order to reveal “all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, forsaken despicable being” and to overthrow them with the “imperative” remaining to *change* the world, but by the working class abolishing capitalism to end “the pre-history” and to usher human society in the era of making history themselves.

This theory departs from production of real life, and not from any metaphysical premises and frameworks such as society-in-itself. It is a class science *per se* – the science of the working class – which shows the world the way to *change* it. And “science was for Marx a historically dynamic revolutionary force”²⁹ which harmonizes revolution in theory with revolution in methodology. It is the science of evolution of society, no matter when some people use philosophy and science alternately in a broader sense of the terms. In simple words, it is “a method of assessing what is in the best interests of the working class, and what can be done to hasten the establishment of Socialism”³⁰

Anyway, the encouraging point of the talk was that the presenter asked the contributors how to reconcile their favourable views of Marx with the 20th century

atrocities such as in Russia, China, Cuba, Cambodia, Zimbabwe etc. They all unanimously agreed in saying most emphatically that all this had absolutely nothing to do with what Marx had advocated and that Marx would have been utterly opposed to all that stuff since he was, in fact, one of the most conscious supporters of freedom.

Undoubtedly, as he wrote in 1843: “The self-confidence of the human being, freedom, has first of all to be aroused again in the hearts of these people. Only this feeling ... can again transform society into a community of human beings united for their highest aims”³¹ and many times again. For him “there can be no other advance than the abandonment of the basis of this world and transition to *the human world of democracy*”.

And more evidently, in the [Trial Number] *Communist Journal* No.1, September 1847, Marx and Engels declared:

“We are not among those communists who are out to destroy personal liberty, who wish to turn the world into one huge barrack or into a gigantic workhouse. There certainly are some communists who, with an easy conscience, refuse to countenance personal liberty and would like to shuffle it out of the world because they consider that it is a hindrance to complete harmony. But we have no desire to exchange freedom for equality. We are convinced, and we intend to return to the matter in subsequent issues, that in no social order will personal freedom be so assured as in a society based upon communal ownership.”³²

This BBC event was a pointer to a socialist insistence against the greatest lie of the past century: that revolution’s epicentre had sifted towards the East. Marx was right; the epicentre exists in the heartland of capitalism, in his day in Great Britain since “Materialism is the natural born son of Great Britain”³³.

Reply to Marx critics

Francis Wheen, the biographer of Karl Marx in 1999 capturing “Marx’s humanity, critically yet sympathetically” (*Observer*), went on to defend Marx’s against those who took umbrage at his winning the ‘Greatest Philosopher’ vote:

WHY MARX IS THE MAN OF THE MOMENT, HE HAD GLOBALISATION SUSSED 150 YEARS AGO

“The bourgeoisie has not died. But nor has Marx: his errors or unfulfilled prophecies about capitalism are eclipsed and transcended by the piercing accuracy with which he revealed the nature of the beast. 'Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones,' he wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*.

“Until quite recently, most people in this country seemed to stay in the same job or institution throughout their working lives - but who does so now? As Marx put it: 'All that is solid melts into air.'

“In his other great masterpiece, *Das Kapital*, he showed how all that is truly

human becomes congealed into inanimate objects - commodities - which then acquire tremendous power and vigour, tyrannising the people who produce them.

“The result of this week's BBC poll suggests that Marx's portrayal of the forces that govern our lives - and of the instability, alienation and exploitation they produce - still resonates, and can still bring the world into focus. Far from being buried under the rubble of the Berlin Wall, he may only now be emerging in his true significance. For all the anguished, uncomprehending howls from the right-wing press, Karl Marx could yet become the most influential thinker of the 21st century.” (*Observer*, Sunday, 17 July 2005)

That is right, so a little more detail about “the nature of the beast” “The nature of capital remains the same in its developed as in its undeveloped form.”³⁴

Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* with “the ultimate aim ... to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society – it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs ... In the domain of Political Economy, free scientific enquiry meets not merely the same enemy as in all other domains. The peculiar nature of the material it deals with, summons as foes into the field of battle the most violent, mean and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest.”³⁴

Obviously, the “Furies of private interest” everywhere and everyday, despite their own internecine conflicts, have hardly missed any chance to mutually line up in their spleen-bursting chorus against Marx and Marxism – the ones on the Right as foes and the others on the Left as friends of many a vulgar ‘Marxism’.

In Marx’s days, there was the conspiracy of silence. After his death, there were a great many misrepresentations, distortions and vilification. Otherwise, how could one attack him when no one could prove him wrong? And, after over a century of Right/Left saga of vulgar ‘Marxism’, the irony of the matter is that nature of capital – growing concentration and centralization of capital into fewer and fewer hands; proportion of capital invested in plant, machinery, equipment and raw and auxiliary materials growing more and more in relation to that spent on living labour, constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production; the unceasing improvement of machinery, capital accumulation proceeding in cycles with periods of rapid growth followed by periods of slump; excess issue by governments of paper currency beyond that required by additional value production causing inflation; giving rise to a gigantic credit-based financial apparatus which day by day becomes growingly isolated from the realities of the wealth production process on which it depends; making the rich richer and turning more and more of the old middle classes into employees; declining peasantry, proportion of wage and salary earners in the working population going up; the divide between the richest and the poorest becoming the widest in human history; declining relative wage i.e., the world working class’s share in the growing global wealth production proportionately falling in relation to the galloping rises in the share of the capitalist class; spreading money-commodity relations more and more into all aspects of life and universal interdependence of nations in the world market making the economy more and more global, so on and so forth – as Marx “sussed 150 years ago” – has now brought his *Das Kapital* into focus of the media owned and controlled

by the capital itself.

“Karl Marx could yet become the most influential thinker of the 21st century”. Yes, for: “Consciousness can sometimes appear further advanced than the contemporary empirical conditions, so that in the struggles of a latter epoch one can refer to earlier theoreticians as authorities.”³⁶ The Marxian theory of Socialist Revolution remains yet to be realized. “For revolutions require a *passive* element, a *material* basis. Theory can be realized in a people only insofar as it is the realization of the needs of that people. ... It is not enough for thought to strive for realization; reality must itself strive towards thought. ... Only a revolution of radical needs can be a radical revolution.”³⁷

Our aspiration can only yield the possibility, while accomplishment can only be the fruit of *class-conscious action* of the immense majority of workers organized as *the class-for-itself*, “which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them.”³⁸ “Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.”³⁹ and “No equation can be solved unless its terms contain the elements of its solution.”⁴⁰

The terms of Socialist Revolution must contain two elements: the *objective* wherein “all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly”⁴¹ and the *subjective* which unites workers of the world in their own *independent organization for self-emancipation*. Both the elements could have matured since about the beginning of the past century, yet the Revolution remains eluded so far with the ruling ideas of society everywhere upheld by the leaders and preached and propagated by “the importunate super-clever intellectuals who always think they know everything so much the better, the less they understand it.”⁴² The ‘intellectuals’ teach what they have not learnt.

Hopefully, however, the BBC event has entangled the think-tank academics and ‘intellectuals’ of the British Press in a whirlpool – some speaking sense against much nonsense about the real Marx. But, the slyboots of the Indian Press, as usual, veil tears in silence to conceal the news, hardly missing any chance to cry wolf against Marx over every atrocity perpetrated by anybody using the name ‘Marxist’. One thing is evident: that the ‘intellectuals’ – no matter right-wing or left-wing – write their pieces on Marx having read little or nothing by him. With so much slavish misrepresentation, distortion, abuse and vilification of Marx around us it is very difficult to select which nonsense to address when.

Nevertheless, this change in the climate forecasts that their rope of sand will someday be washed down by a global tsunami in-the-making. When? It depends on the capital’s would-be gravediggers’ ability via acquisition of total knowledge from their “immediate natural” life principle to elucidate and solve the problem with which history confronts them.

“The bourgeoisie has not died. But nor has Marx”. Yes, yet workers of the world will have to unite. Since the point, however, is to change the world.

Of course, Marx is living both in theory and in practice but through “*ruthless criticism*

of everything that exists”, through decantation and development by a century long perseverance of the one revolutionary organization, the *Socialist Party of Great Britain* with its *Object and Declaration of Principles* ultimately solving the riddle of Reform and/or Revolution accomplishing the path-finder separation between Reform and Revolution “as the one made by Marx between labour and labour-power to solve the enigma of surplus value. While Marx’s separation accomplished the task at the economic basis, the SPGB’s did at the crest of the political superstructure”.⁴³ This organization is slowly but steadily spreading globally with new and new companion parties in other countries. “One nation can and should learn from others,” advised Marx.⁴⁴

As Engels saw through: “The final victory remains certain, but the detours, the temporary and local mistakes – which are unavoidable in any case – will now occur much more often. We must see it through; what else we are here for? And we are far from losing courage because of it.”⁴⁵

Notes:

- ¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, pp.36-45
- ² Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.57
- ³ “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” – Marx, *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface, p.21
- ⁴ “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force ... The existence of revolutionary ideas in a particular period presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class” – Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, pp.59-60
 - “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.” – Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.57
- ⁵ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, SW 1, p.401
 - “So far as such criticism represents a class, it can only represent the class whose vocation in history is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes – the proletariat.” – Marx, *Afterword to the Second German Edition*, 1873, *Capital I*, pp.25-26
- ⁶ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852, SW 1, p. 398
- ⁷ Engels to Joseph Bloch, 21st September 1890, *Selected Correspondence*, p.396
- ⁸ Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, International Publishers, New York, p.87
- ⁹ Marx, *The Civil War in France*, SW 2, p.224
- ¹⁰ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, CW 3, p.306
- ¹¹ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, pp.49, 53, 58
- ¹² ^a “The capitalist mode of appropriation, which springs from the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of its proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation.” – Marx, *Capital*, I, Vintage Books Edition, New York, p.929
^b Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, pp.50, 54
^c Engels, *Trade Unions*, The Wages System, pp.16, 20
^d “Socialism was no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie” – Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, CW 24, p. 304
- ¹³ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, CW 3, p.293
- ¹⁴ Marx, *Capital I*, p.316
- ¹⁵ Marx, *Capital II*, p.100
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.248
- ¹⁷ Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp. 330-31
- ¹⁸ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.38
- ¹⁹ “But the struggle of class against class is a political struggle. ... The condition of emancipation of

- the working class is the abolition of classes. ... There will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society” – Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, CW 6, pp.211-12
- “... the future conversion of political rule over men into an administration of things and a direction of processes of production – that is to say, the ‘abolition of the state,’” about which recently there has been so much noise.” – Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, SW 3, p.129
- The proletariat “abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the State as State. ... State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of the process of production. The State is not “abolished”. *It dies out.*” – Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, CW 24, pp.320-21
- 20 Marx - Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pp.340-41
- 21 See the quotation at p.6 of this text as cited by D. Ryazanoff, cf. footnote 32 below
- 22 Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Peking, p.14
- 23 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, p.54
- 24 Marx to Ruge, Written according to the journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, CW 3, pp.142-44
- 25 Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law. Introduction*, CW 3, pp. 175, 176-182
- 26 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, CW 3, pp. 232-234
- 27 *Ibid.* pp.231, 297
- 28 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, p.37
- 29 Engels, *Karl Marx’s Funeral*, CW 24, p.468
- 30 Wally Preston wrote these words with his hand shivering due to old age at the last page of a pamphlet “*Manchester City of Class*” he presented me with some literatures in Manchester in the morning of 12 July 1996 while guiding me to places where Engels lived and worked and held discussions with Marx.
- 31 Marx to Ruge, May 1843, CW 3, p.137
- 32 Quoted by D. Ryazanoff, *The Communist Manifesto Of Karl Marx And Frederick Engels*, With An Introduction And Explanatory Notes, Moscow, 1922, Appendix, p.239
- 33 Quoted by Engels, *Special Introduction to the English edition of 1892*, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, SW 3, p.104
- 34 Marx, *Capital I*, p.272, footnote 3
- 35 *Ibid.*, Preface to the First German Edition, pp.20-21
- 36 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, p.83
- 37 Marx, *Contribution to the critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law, Introduction*, CW 3, p.183
- 38 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, CW 5, p.49
- 39 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Preface, p.21
- 40 Marx to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, February 22, 1881, *Selected Correspondence*, p.318
- 41 Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Peking, p.17
- 42 Engels to Otto Von Boenigk in Breslau, Folkestone, August 21, 1890, SW 3, p.512
- 43 B. Sarkar, *Marxism and Asia*, Speech at the SPGB 1996 Summer School, Birmingham Fircroft College
- 44 Marx, *Capital I*, p.20
- 45 Engels to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, March 15, 1883, *Selected Correspondence*, p.340