

# ***Marx and the Gulag***

*Two Essays*

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Marx and Lenin<sup>1</sup>

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The dispute over the relationship between Marx and Lenin concerns the meaning of Marxism in practice, especially in the Soviet Union. Was the Lenin-led Russian revolution of 1917 a Marxist revolution? And beyond that, is the post-Lenin Soviet Union, including that of Stalin, faithfully executing Marx's vision and testament? Is Soviet communism a political movement guided by a radically revolutionary Western philosophical teaching? Or is it better explained as an outgrowth of a native Russian tradition of violent, bureaucratic despotism? At stake is an adequate understanding of Soviet (and non-Soviet) communism today and the nature of its danger for constitutional democracy.

The two principal lines of interpretation are well settled. On one side, hard-line Soviet communists agree:

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was assisted by a grant from the Earhart Foundation. It was presented at the 1980 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association on a panel sponsored by The Claremont Institute. The heart of the thesis argued here was worked out by my Dallas colleague Leo Paul S. de Alvarez, who generously made available to me his unpublished lectures on Marx and Lenin.

Lenin, and the Soviet Union, are thoroughly Marxist.<sup>2</sup> On the other side, Western liberals like Robert Tucker, the editor of the Marx collection cited in this essay, generally insist that there is a break between Marx and Lenin, and between Lenin and Stalin. (As for Western anticommunists, they are often curiously reluctant to affirm a definite continuity between Marx, Lenin, and the Soviet Union.)<sup>3</sup>

The core of Marx's thought, I will show, was his lifelong dedication to the revolutionary transformation and liberation of humanity. His relative indifference toward the historical-determinist, supposedly scientific side of his own doctrine can be seen most easily in his repudiation of "orthodox Marxism" in the case of Russia. At the end of his life Marx decided that Russia could probably achieve socialism without having to pass through the stage of

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<sup>2</sup> *The Fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), "written by a team of leading Soviet philosophers" according to the dust jacket, concentrates on the "scientific" aspects of Marxist doctrine. *The Basics of Marxist-Leninist Theory*, ed. G. N. Volkov, Progress Guides to the Social Sciences (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), concentrates on the political teaching of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, and the meaning of that teaching for the world today. These books are available through Imported Publications, Chicago.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Johnson, *Modern Times* (New York: Harper, 1983), p. 54; Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Scribner's, 1974); Gerhart Niemeyer, *Between Nothingness and Paradise* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 120; Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution* (4th ed. rev.; New York: Dell Delta, 1964); Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), Introduction. Assuming my argument in this article is right, why do these men hesitate to tie Marx to Lenin? Do they in some way see him as a fellow intellectual who needs to be protected from the taint of his followers' despotism? Or do they simply not detect the enormity of Marx's project? (Consider in this regard the essay of Sander Schaub that follows.)

capitalism. Therefore Lenin's revisions of Marxist dogma, undertaken in order to make possible the radical revolution in Russia, conformed to the essential Marx. And Stalin's extension of Lenin was executed in the same spirit.

## Marx

Marx's fundamental conception of the political mission of philosophy never wavered from the time of its first statement in his 1843 essay, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction."<sup>4</sup> In this early work Marx sets forth the kernel of his revolutionary thesis. Philosophy, he says, has already exposed the false promise of otherworldly salvation put forward by religion, a promise that was meant to conceal the political oppression under which people actually live. The next and final task, initiated by Marx, is to abolish the political conditions for the religious illusion by destroying the existing order of society and liberating men from their dependence on men, just as they have been liberated from their supposed dependence on God and nature. The *spirit* of this revolution is Marx's radicalized Hegelianism; the *matter* must be found in the one class of men in existing society that has nothing of its own, has no stake in maintaining the current order, and has everything to gain from a complete annihilation of it. That class, says Marx, is the proletariat.

The philosophical core of Marx's program lies in the novel account of the relation of theory to practice, of head

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<sup>4</sup> *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (2nd ed.; New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 53-65. Quotations from this essay in the text are my translations from "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961), I, 378-391.

to heart, of reason to passion. Theory and practice, which have hitherto been distinct, will become one through the revolution. Practice, the revolutionary negation of the existing state of things, will be perfectly theoretical, for it will now be informed by the philosophical consciousness that seeks and will attain the liberation of mankind from chains. On the other hand, thought without action is now meaningless. With the successful culmination of the critique of religion in atheism, thinking has gone as far as it can go without becoming politically active. Philosophy is ready to be at once completed and abolished (*aufgehoben*). Matter is ready to be informed by reason: the only barrier to the embodiment of reason in things is some men's passionate attachments to existing conditions. Hence passion, the anger of the revolutionaries, can cancel the reactionary passion of the defenders of the old order, issuing in a future state of affairs that is completely rational. Physical violence in the service of negation of the present is reason, for through violence the long night of men's dependence on God, on other men, and on things external to themselves will finally end.

As a prelude to the incipient union of theory and practice, theory becomes criticism, not for the sake of stating the truth in speech, but to destroy the enemy:

Its [criticism's] essential feeling is *indignation*, its essential task *denunciation*.... It is not a matter of knowing whether the opponent is a noble, equal-born, or interesting opponent; what matters is to *strike* him.

Reason becomes passion; but the passion of the philosophers is not enough. "It is the philosopher in whose brain the revolution begins." But: "The weapon of criticism cannot replace the criticism of weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force, but theory too becomes a material force as soon as it seizes the masses."

The insight of the philosopher, passionately expounded, will become the angry consciousness of the masses. The masses, the material embodiment of philosophy, will then carry out the revolution that will culminate in "universal human emancipation."

In this essay on Hegel (as in "On the Jewish Question," discussed by Sanderson Schaub below), it is evident that Marx has already made up his mind about the nature of the revolution before he ever applies the techniques of so-called empirical social-science analysis to the actual men and women supposedly oppressed in their factories. Instead, the proletariat first comes to sight in Marx's writing as that group in society which is capable of being seized by his theory. Its expected openness to Marxism is attributed to its supposed utter degradation, its "radical chains," its total enslavement in contemporary society. Marx explicitly calls it the "passive" vehicle of the revolutionary consciousness and purpose *discovered by philosophy*. It is this passive capability that defines the proletariat here, not the empirical fact of its being the industrial working class.

It is worth noting that in this Hegel essay Marx speaks of man as essentially free, not as laborer. His later account of man as laborer may be understood as an elaboration on the present statement of man as free, for the meaning of human labor is that man transforms the external world of nature, which in turn appears to him as his mirror. He sees in the products of his labor—especially in the modern, bourgeois world, in which man really has conquered nature by technology—himself: as his own product, he does not depend for what he is on anything outside of himself. He is absolutely free of God, of nature, and of those men (the owners of bourgeois private prop-

erty) who would not permit him to view his products as his own.<sup>5</sup>

From here we turn to the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* for an account of “universal human emancipation” or communism, the goal of the revolution. We do so in order to explain more fully Marx’s theoretical convictions about human nature. Communism is that condition in which no individual man is dependent on any other man. That requires man to be completely in control of his external world as well as of himself. The existence of private property, property held by some to the exclusion of others, not only makes the nonowners dependent on the owners for their subsistence; property also enkindles the artificial passion of avarice in the heart of the owner, a passion that attaches him to something outside himself, his property. By abolishing private property, communism will abolish all desire that people now have to possess things of their own to the exclusion of others (pp. 70-93). Even the bodily senses, which we might have thought were irreducibly private, will change their character. From being narrowly individual, they will become human and social. “Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their egotistical nature.... In the same way, the senses and enjoyments of other men have become my own appropriation” (p. 88). Communism will overcome not only private property but privacy as such. The family too, with private spouses and private children, will be abolished. In such a state of things there will no longer be a distinction between “one’s own” and “the common,” for men will not think of their own as anything apart from the community. Therefore the rule of some men over others for the sake of their own private advantage will disappear. With the only ground of controversy abolished,

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<sup>5</sup> Marx describes man as *homo faber* in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 70-93. Page references to Marx’s writings in the text will be to this edition.

politics will give way to the noncontroversial administration of economic production (p. 193).

Marx’s communist vision rests on the remarkable premise—especially remarkable for a professed materialist—that man’s body, with its seemingly indisputable quality of belonging to each, can become essentially common. The indubitable fact that each dies his own death cannot faze Marx’s deep faith in man’s socialized destiny.<sup>6</sup> It may be that Marx believes that death itself will eventually be conquered: communism means “the casting-off of *all* natural limitations” (p. 192, my emphasis). If man is to be truly free, he must become in every sense “master and owner of nature,” in Descartes’ phrase.<sup>7</sup>

The expectations from communism in Plato’s *Republic*, by contrast, are less extravagant because Socrates is aware that nothing can change the private character of the body. The “community of pleasure and pain,” wherein all together feel the pains and pleasures of each individual, is presented as an unattainable goal. Moreover, this total communization is presented as desirable only to the extent that individual happiness is forgotten, for the philosopher who leaves the cave—the only man called truly happy in the *Republic*—must tear himself away from the illusion of complete oneness with his cave-dwelling fellows.

As Marx grew older he began to realize that the existing working classes were not quite totally dehumanized havens, human prime matter waiting to be formed by Marx’s theory-inspired indignation in the service of revolution. The real-world workers never ceased disappointing Marx

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<sup>6</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1: *The Founders* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 413-414.

<sup>7</sup> *Discourse on Method*, Part 6. The logic of Marx’s (and generally the modern) attitude toward nature and human nature, especially with regard to the conquest of death, is vividly portrayed by C. S. Lewis in his novel, *That Hideous Strength*.

with their contemptible backsliding and gullibility to bourgeois blandishments. In their *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*, Marx and Engels alert their fellow communists to the danger that the liberal democrats will try to "bribe the workers by more or less concealed alms" such as better wages, job security, and welfare payments (p. 505). Therefore Marx gradually developed a doctrine of a party organization of intellectuals who could lead the proletariat into the revolution. A party distinct from the workers themselves is necessary for two reasons. First, as in the Hegel essay, the party is the theoretical arm of the movement, while the workers remain merely practical. They supply the bodies and the anger. But second, to the extent that the workers are *not* the embodiment of pure negation posited in the Hegel essay, the party will be needed to herd them into line. So far as the workers *do* have things of their own—and of course most workers were and are far from the destitute, explosive, pure potentiality Marx had spoken of—they will be afflicted by the very same selfish passions and opinions that move their rulers.

Marx never confronted the reason for proletarian backwardness with the clarity that I have just stated it, but his doctrine of the party is implicitly addressed to this difficulty. The *Communist Manifesto* says that the party has "over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement." In other words, the workers themselves do *not* know where they are going and how to get there. Further, says the *Manifesto*, the Communist party aims at the "formation of the proletariat into a class" (p. 484). Without the party, it would appear from this statement, the workers will not even have what later comes to be called class consciousness. The party, then, is the organizational embodiment of the philosophical truth announced in the Hegel essay, and it mediates between the

isolated philosopher Marx in his study and the ignorant, unformed masses of the workers.

Marx also came to see that a communist revolution would require "the most determined centralization of power in the hands of the state authority," as well as a deliberately "terrorist" policy undertaken by the party in the course of seizing and exercising political power. "Far from opposing so-called excesses—instances of popular revenge against hated individuals or public buildings with hateful associations—these must not only be tolerated but the leadership of them must be taken in hand" (*Address to the League*, pp. 507, 509).

In this connection Marx speaks of "France in 1793" as the model. It is worth mentioning some of the measures undertaken in revolutionary France in that year. This was the time of the Reign of Terror, presided over by a tiny dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security. The judicial heart of the Terror was the Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris. Its "proceedings became mere public pillorying of the already condemned. Death was the only sentence." Similar tribunals were set up around France by the Committee of General Security, and these tribunals were "the real shock troops of the Revolution." They were "entrusted with the pursuit of 'suspects.'"<sup>8</sup> In short, Marx is already looking forward here to a tightly centralized small party transforming a nation by means of the most ruthless terror, administered without scruple against the Revolution's proven enemies as well as against mere "suspects."

It may also be worth mentioning in this connection an all-too-typical example of Western liberal scholarship on Marx. This particular falsehood comes from David McLellan, widely respected as a leading Marx scholar:

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<sup>8</sup> Crane Brinton, *A Decade of Revolution, 1789-1799* (1934; repub. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), pp. 117-128.

[Marx] never (except briefly in 1848 and under Tsarist conditions in Russia) approved of the use of revolutionary terror. He strongly criticized the Jacobins' use of terror in the French Revolution; its use was for him a sign of the weakness and immaturity of that revolution, which had to impose by violence what was not yet inherent in society.<sup>9</sup>

Marx and Engels, of course, wrote the *Address to the Communist League* in 1850.

However, if the authority of such a prestigious scholar as David McLellan still raises doubts for the reader, consider these excerpts from the correspondence of Marx and Engels, assembled by Solzhenitsyn:

There is only one way of shortening, simplifying, and concentrating the blood-thirsty death-throes of the old society and the bloody birth pangs of the new—revolutionary terror....

We are pitiless and we ask no pity from you. When our time comes, we shall not conceal terrorism with hypocritical phrases....

The vengeance of the people will break forth with such ferocity that not even the year 1793 enables us to envisage it....

We shall be constrained to undertake communist experiments and extravagant measures, the untimeliness of which we know better than anyone else.... Until the world is able to form an historical judg-

ment of such events, we shall be considered "beasts," which doesn't matter!

Finally:

Marx and Engels reiterated on many occasions that "once we are at the helm, we shall be obliged to re-enact the year 1793."<sup>10</sup>

Since Marx never faced (except in passing) the degree to which the workers were infected by bourgeois passions or otherwise failed to develop real revolutionary ardor, he never felt the need to conduct an explicit discussion of the gap between the workers and the communist party.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps Marx suppressed the problem for tactical reasons: he might have feared the charge of "Blanquism," of forcing an elitist revolution from the top down onto an unwilling populace. Or perhaps he deceived himself by allowing his fervent hope for revolution to divert him from a cold reckoning with the fact of worker recalcitrance. In any event, Marx also avoided any thematic discussion of the role of the party during and after a revolutionary seizure of power by the proletariat. There is a direct proportion between the strength of lingering bourgeois habits in the workers and the need for a philosophical elite to oversee the transition to communism. Marx's silence on this question provided a legitimate opening for Lenin, who was com-

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Mortal Danger: How Misconceptions about Russia Imperil America* (2nd ed.; New York: Harper Colophon, 1981), pp. 113-114.

<sup>11</sup> Besides the *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League* quoted here, Marx touches on this gap in the circular letter "Der Generalrat an den Foederalrat der romanischen Schweiz" ("The General Council [of the International Workingman's Association] to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland," 1870), Marx and Engels, *Werke*, XVI, 386-387.

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<sup>9</sup> McLellan, *Karl Marx*, Penguin Modern Masters series, general editor Frank Kermode (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 68.

pelled to grapple with the fact, by the year 1900 obvious to everyone, of worker indifference to radical revolution.

The doctrines for which Marx is so famous—dialectical materialism, the internal contradictions of capitalism, the invariable stages of the history of economic development, the historical inevitability of revolution<sup>12</sup>—all these were part of Marx's articulation of the changing structure of material conditions that renders them ripe for revolution. Marx, of course, was convinced that the logic of the historical process points without question to man's ultimate liberation and socialization. But whenever a conflict arose between the details of any of these doctrines and the possibility of achieving the revolution in some other way, the doctrines were always the first to go. Just as Marx's Hegel essay anticipates, the project for the emancipation of man is the essential core, and the material setting for its realization is only the optional periphery.

Evidence for this point goes well beyond the notorious sketchiness and self-contradictions of Marx's written statements on many of his best-known doctrines.<sup>13</sup> It is above all this: during the last several years of his life, Marx explicitly and repeatedly jettisoned the "orthodox Marxism" of his earlier career, and he did so precisely with a view to Russia. Tibor Szamuely has summarized the relevant letters and statements of Marx and Engels on this topic in *The Russian Tradition*.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout most of his life, Marx's opinions on Russia had been governed by this statement in the *Critique of Political Economy*:

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<sup>12</sup> Clear statements of these doctrines may be found in *Critique of Political Economy* (Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 3-6), *The German Ideology* (pp. 148-163), and *Capital* (pp. 294-302).

<sup>13</sup> Kolakowski, pp. 325-334, 363-375.

<sup>14</sup> New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.

No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. (p. 5)

Since Russia was still mired in its feudal stage, no communist revolution could be expected until capitalism had fully developed. Engels' 1875 attack on the Russian "Populist" Tkachev, undertaken at Marx's instigation, was strictly orthodox. He ridiculed Tkachev for believing that Russia's tradition of the village commune (*obshchina*) could provide a unique opportunity for bypassing the ravages of capitalism and proceeding directly to a socialist revolution (Szamuely, pp. 294-300).

But suddenly Marx changed his mind. In an 1881 letter to the Russian Marxist Vera Zasulich, he asserted that "there is no inevitability about a capitalist development in Russia—rather, the contrary." In a draft of the letter, Marx went even further: "If the revolution takes place at the proper time, if it concentrates all its forces on assuring the untrammelled development of the village commune, then this latter would shortly become the basic feature of the rebirth of Russian society and the basic feature of its superiority to the countries that remain under the yoke of capitalism" (Szamuely, pp. 378-379). Kolakowski makes this comment: "Neither Vera Zasulich nor Plekhanov thought fit to publish the letter, as they evidently feared it would give valuable ammunition to the populists; it came to light only after the Revolution." A clear indication of Marx opposing orthodox Marxism! Marx himself was evidently reluctant to announce his new views clearly to the world; no doubt he was aware of their embarrassing contradiction to his earlier pronouncements. Therefore Marx repeated the point somewhat more cautiously in his

1882 preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*. There he says that a Russian commune-based revolution which bypasses the capitalist stage will succeed only "if the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other" (*Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 472).

From then on Marx threw his tactical support to the Russian Narodnaya Volya ("People's Will"), a conspiratorial terrorist organization aiming at a seizure of political power on behalf of the people, and not to the orthodox Russian Marxists. It should be noted that the most radical of the Populist theorists, Tkachev (mentioned above), anticipated the political teaching of Pol Pot and the Cambodian communists, who murdered about three million of their own people in their attempt to institute a pure agrarian communism during their three-year reign after the American defeat in Vietnam. Tkachev called for the compulsory equalization of all on the basis of a strictly peasant-based society without any of the technology developed by capitalism as well as for the abolition of every vestige of the old order. "The perfect society will suppress any possibility of exceptional individuals arising and will create equal conditions of life and education for all its members; a centralized authority of the enlightened *avant-garde* will plan every aspect of public life."<sup>15</sup> Engels had attacked Tkachev earlier, but by the 1880s Marx and Engels assumed as their own much of Tkachev's argument about the special conditions of Russia.

After Marx's death in 1883 Engels carried on this new Marxism that anticipated revolution without a capitalist development and without broad participation by the proletariat or people. Russia, he said, "is one of those exceptional cases where a handful of people can *make* a revolution.... And if ever the Blanquist fantasy of convulsing an

entire society by means of a small conspiracy had any chance of success then the place is undoubtedly Petersburg" (Szamuely, p. 402). In other words, the Blanquist "fantasy"—revolution from the top down by a minority party willing to use force and violence—is not a fantasy at all! Remarkably, this letter was written as a deliberate repudiation of Plekhanov, the founder of orthodox Marxism in Russia, who had been conscientiously attempting to apply the principles of Marxist fundamentalism to the Russian situation.

This revealing episode in the careers of Marx and Engels is typically suppressed or casually dismissed in scholarly as well as Soviet treatments of Marxism. For example, Kolakowski seems unaware of its comprehensive significance for Marx's thought. His laconic comment is: "Altogether it may be said that on this crucial issue in Russian polemics at the time, Marx was much less of a Marxist than his Russian disciples." Tucker does include a few lines (eight) from the 1881 letter to Zasulich in his selections "On Social Relations in Russia" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*. But he obscures their significance by including as well Engels' 1874 attack on Tkachev without mentioning the fact that he and Marx changed their minds on much of the material in this Engels letter by the 1880s. Shlomo Avineri tries to explain the incident away by reference to an 1877 letter in which Marx says that the analysis of *Capital* applies only to Western Europe, not necessarily anywhere else in the world. However, as Kolakowski, again laconically, points out, "there is no hint of this limitation in *Capital* itself." What Kolakowski and Avineri inexplicably do *not* point out is that this casual assertion by Marx in effect undermines the entire edifice of his scientific account of capitalism, which was always

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<sup>15</sup> This is from Kolakowski's summary of Tkachev, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. II: *The Golden Age*, pp. 324-325.



presented as part of a comprehensive account of man's universal historical development.<sup>16</sup>

Marx and Engels' reversal is so striking, and lasted so long, that it cannot be ignored. They were clearly opposing their earlier "scientific" doctrine, which had only apparently been "founded not on conspiracy but on the laws of historical development, encompassing not a small elite but the whole working class, directed not at a coup d'état but a great popular socialist revolution" (Szamuely, p. 388). Engels reports that in Marx's later years he was accustomed to say, with a view to the rapid popularization of orthodox Marxism, "In that case I know only that I am not a Marxist myself!"

For Marx, the core was always the revolution. Everything else in his teaching was subject to revision. When prospects for a European upheaval began to fade, especially after the utter failure of the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx began to lose heart (Szamuely, pp. 373-376). The dramatic successes of the Russian terrorists may have kindled in Marx a new hope, one that was not dependent on the unreliable industrial proletariat. His turn to the avowedly violent, elitist "Populist" movement in Russia is, in an important sense, a return to the original, radical Marx:

The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kolakowski, vol. I, p. 259, and vol. II, pp. 323-324. Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 665-675. Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 151-152. Szamuely refers to Western and Soviet treatments of the topic on pp. 371 and 402.

<sup>17</sup> "Theses on Feuerbach," no. 11, *Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 145.

If there was no present likelihood of revolution in Europe, Russia seemed to offer a new opportunity. If Marx had lived long enough, he might have elaborated the implications of his embracing the "Populists," which certainly could have led to a reassessment of the revolutionary potential of the workers. Instead, after his death, the power of the orthodox doctrines that he had spelled out over so many years overwhelmed the lesser-known (and, as I noted, to some extent deliberately suppressed) cautious steps he had taken more recently in a different direction.

However, the revolutionary heart of Marx, most visible in his earlier writings, but pulsing beneath the surface of all his works, endured. A kindred spirit was needed to revive this Marx from the detritus of his admirers. That spirit was Lenin.

## Lenin

*What Is to Be Done?* (1902), Lenin's most important book, puts forward a renewed revolutionary Marxism that frankly confronts the disappointingly non-revolutionary character of the working class in the late nineteenth century. Lenin argues that the workers are incapable of spontaneously developing true revolutionary consciousness and that a tightly organized, elite, conspiratorial Marxist party must therefore take upon itself the task of leading the workers to revolution.

The background of *What Is to Be Done?* is as follows. Marx's economic predictions had turned out to be totally incorrect. The growing "Industrial Reserve Army" of the unemployed, the declining rate of profit, the impoverishment of the workers, the collapse of the middle class between bourgeoisie and proletariat, the increasing radi-

calization of the workers<sup>18</sup>—none of these things had occurred or appeared likely to occur. Quite the contrary: profits were increasing and so were workers' wages; unemployment was low; the middle class was growing; and workers were increasingly satisfied with their material circumstances. Where had Marx gone wrong?

Eduard Bernstein, whose *Premises of Socialism* appeared in 1899, provided one response. Following Marx's own teaching that Marxism is a workers' movement based on empirical analysis of actual conditions, Bernstein argued that the workers' party should follow the spontaneous desires of the workers for social and economic reforms, postponing indefinitely the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Bernstein's "revisionism" became the ancestor of today's European Socialist parties. Within Russia, Bernstein's views were adopted by a portion of the Marxist Social-Democratic party that became known as "Economists."

Lenin directs most of his fire in *What Is to Be Done?* against this heresy of Economism. By postponing indefinitely the destruction of capitalism, under which men can never be free, he argues, the Economists have abandoned Marxism. Lenin's alternative stresses two points: First, the revolutionary consciousness which the intellectuals already possess will never be attained by the workers through the spontaneous development of working-class anger in the historical dialectic; second, the party is the instrument for the formation, preservation, and dissemination of that consciousness. Lenin explains his first point through the observation that by themselves, spontaneously, the workers can achieve only trade union consciousness (concern with wages, job security, unemployment compensation, and the like) and not revolutionary consciousness (which seeks to destroy capitalism

root and branch). Left to themselves, the workers will be dominated by the regnant bourgeois ideology (Chapter 2). They will become revolutionary only when the intellectuals, armed with Marxist theory, come into active contact with them. Hence the central importance of agitation and propaganda. The vehicle of this activity is the party.

The teaching on the party is Lenin's second point. There is an essential difference, he insists, between an organization of workers and an organization of revolutionaries (Chapter 4). A trade union must be large and open to all workers. But a revolutionary organization must be small, secret, and conspiratorial. It is essential that those in the party know what they are about, and they can only do so if they are thoroughly educated in the tenets of Marxism. Most workers are not. Talent and intelligence are rare qualities, and they are indispensable for effective political action. Only dedicated, educated, full-time professionals can form the proletariat into a revolutionary class, and only they will be immune from the insidious effects of bourgeois ideology. There can therefore be no place for freedom of criticism within the party (Chapter 1): since the party professionals are already in possession of the truth, freedom to criticize amounts to freedom to advocate bourgeois ideology. Nor should the party be democratic; only those who know the truth are qualified to determine its leadership and membership. Finally, the party organization must be tightly centralized so that there will be no confusion about the mission to be accomplished or the means to be adopted.

There is no doubt that Lenin, in *What Is to Be Done?*, goes beyond Marx's explicit statements. But there is also no doubt that he is responding here to a very real problem for orthodox Marxism—namely, worker indifference to the revolution—in the spirit of the young (and old) Marx. The primacy of consciousness over the spontaneous historical process goes back to Marx's initial assertions in the Hegel essay. There he presented himself as a philos-

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<sup>18</sup> These claims are advanced in *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*.

opher whose conclusions compelled him to look for an historical, material vehicle for the realization of his theory. And Lenin's doctrine of the party follows from the discovery of worker recalcitrance. In the face of that recalcitrance, Lenin appropriately turns to an organization that will institutionalize Marx's insight and infuse it into the proletariat. The temporary split between Marxist intellectuals and actual workers had already been alluded to by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League*. Lenin faced that difference squarely and proceeded to think through what kind of party would be needed to close the split. The historical facts at the turn of the century were such that either the core of Marx had to go, or the periphery. Lenin threw out the periphery, Bernstein the core.

Lenin, however, did not want to reject Marx's teaching on capitalism. He tried to preserve it in the face of the manifest continuing strength of the system of private ownership of property by attributing that strength to the export of finance capital to the countries and colonies of what is now called the "Third World." The super-profits gained through this *Imperialism, the Highest State of Capitalism* (as he entitled his 1917 book) enabled the European bourgeoisie to bribe its proletariat into contented submission. His argument contains the germ of the now-familiar Soviet claim of Western exploitation of the Third World, and it even suggests the inference that entire countries can stand to other countries in the relation of bourgeoisie to proletariat.<sup>19</sup> This clever revision certainly cannot claim to represent orthodox Marxism. But again, it modifies obviously false Marxist dogma in the spirit of Marx's teaching that the material conditions are becoming ripe for revolutionary upheaval.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), pp. 251-259.

In *Imperialism*, Lenin followed Marx in his quest for a dialectical-materialist historical process, known by science, that would guarantee the overthrow of capitalism and the transition to socialism. Therefore his overall teaching, like Marx's, suffers from a tension between its philosophical-voluntarist core and its apparently determinist periphery. Also like Marx, Lenin never satisfactorily explained the relation between the two strains in his thought. And finally, both men turned away from determinism when they dealt with the Russian situation, Marx in his support of the "Populists," Lenin during the actual experience of the Russian revolution, as we will now see.

Lenin takes the final step in his extension of Marx to cover the actual condition of the workers in "*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*." Written in 1920, during the third year of Bolshevik rule in Russia, it reflects the harsh lessons of the revolution. Lenin had learned that his earlier account of the workers' consciousness was, if anything, too optimistic. They are not only indifferent to revolution; they oppose it. To some extent the workers are positively reactionary (*Lenin Anthology*, pp. 573-575). Although industrial capitalism has been abolished in Russia and all the landlords, bankers, and factory owners have been killed or driven out, the bourgeoisie is stronger after the revolution than before it (pp. 552-553). The class struggle will continue "for years after the proletariat's conquest of power" (p. 596). The institutions of capitalism were easy to overthrow, but two stubborn obstacles remain: "force of habit," the powerful attachment to "the forces and traditions of the old society," and "small-scale production," which continues "spontaneously and on a mass scale" (pp. 569, 553). Lenin calls "habit" what we referred to earlier, using a Marxian category, as "bourgeois passions," the inclination of people to acquire, love, and defend what is their own to the exclusion of others. Springing from and reinforcing this "force of habit in millions and tens of millions" are

"millions upon millions of petty proprietors" and "small commodity producers" whose private mode of production continues to foster the nonsocialist habits that stand in the way of transition to communism (pp. 569-570). "Small-scale production" presumably includes everything from helping a neighbor mend a fence to raising vegetables in a private garden. Since the workers (and, *a fortiori*, the rest of the people) "can (and must) be remodeled and re-educated only by very prolonged, slow, cautious organizational work," the party must continue to rule dictatorially on behalf of the workers just as it earlier took the lead in making the revolution (p. 569). This process will take "very many years" (p. 574). The "proletarian vanguard," Lenin admits, is not even the party, but only the Politburo of the party, consisting of Lenin and a handful of close colleagues (p. 572).

We may infer that the tenacity and breadth of lingering bourgeois habits, which Lenin apparently did not foresee, led him to this logical restriction of revolutionary authority to the small body of unquestionably trustworthy and enlightened officials at the head of the party. Lenin's unbreakable faith in Marx's vision of emancipated humanity at the end of the struggle permitted him no other solution. He is simply extending the principle of *What Is to Be Done?*, namely, that those who possess the philosophic wisdom concerning what is to be done must exclude others from power to the extent that those others remain unenlightened and tainted by bourgeois ideology. The stronger the bourgeois "force of habit," the smaller and more despotic must be the governing organization of revolutionaries. Against such immense resistance, against the disheartening appearance that human nature remains the same after the revolution as before it, only the wisest and firmest men can be entrusted with the difficult mission—now seen to involve an indefinite period of conflict, terror, and blood—of leading mankind to communism.

With Stalin we reach the end of this road. In the face of such nearly unanimous opposition, both within and without the Soviet Union, even within the party itself, only one man, the wisest and strongest of all, can be entrusted with the task of building socialism. And this man must not flinch from inflicting mass killings, deliberate famines, and torture involving the suffering and deaths of many millions of people. The Wise Man must employ whatever means he deems necessary to root out the millions of enemies of the people so that he can lead men to perpetual peace, happiness, and total comunization.

Lenin is sometimes reproached for vulgarizing Marx, making him crude, blurring his philosophical subtleties because of his own preoccupation with the revolution.<sup>20</sup> This charge is in the most important respect self-refuting: "Marx's philosophy" means nothing if not the union of theory and practice. It is true that Lenin's incessant talk about the tactics and strategy of revolution appears rather crude in contrast with Marx's wide-ranging and sophisticated interests, especially to Western scholars whose belief that all values are equal often leads them to forget that philosophy, even non-Marxist philosophy, is supposed to be a guide to life, not a vehicle for personal self-expression or creativity. But the more insistent practical focus of Lenin's writings may also be taken as a sign that he was a better Marxist than Marx himself, from Marx's own point of view! Nor can Lenin's understanding of the fundamentals of Marxism be faulted. If anything, he correctly drew the conclusions about the role of the party that Marx approached but never fully faced—and which were certainly implicit, at least for the Russian situation,

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<sup>20</sup> Tucker, in the *Lenin Anthology*, p. xlviii; Kolakowski also makes some disparaging remarks on what he calls Lenin's "excursion into philosophy," vol. II, pp. 447-458 (although Kolakowski's general assessment of Lenin's relation to Marx is close to my own: pp. 381-384).

in his post-1877 embrace of the Russian "Populist" movement. The real "vulgarizers" are those scholars who miss the central point of Marx's life when they appeal to the superiority of pristine theory over rude practice. In this opinion they show that they are still unaware under the spell of the view, endlessly derided by Marx, that philosophical insight is not to be sullied in the passionate and rude world of action.

Likewise, it is often asserted that Lenin's real roots are to be found in "the native Russian, non-Marxist revolutionary tradition," and indirectly in the "Russian autocratic tradition" of the Tsars, onto which he supposedly engrafted his own highly idiosyncratic brand of Marxism.<sup>21</sup> In the first place, the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionaries, far from arising spontaneously from native soil, were inspired almost entirely by the French Revolution (whence the name "Russian Jacobinism") and by French and German socialists and communists. And beginning with Tkachev in the 1850s, these revolutionaries were directly influenced by Marx himself.<sup>22</sup> Narodnaya Volya explicitly held Marx in high regard (Szamuely, pp. 381-384).

Second, the supposed Russian tradition of autocracy has been much exaggerated. Religious and political customs restrained the authority of the Tsars, and by the eve of World War I there was a considerable degree of political and private liberty in Russia. Certainly old Russia had its share of cruel monarchs; so did England and France.

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<sup>21</sup> Tucker, in the *Lenin Anthology*, pp. xxvi and xxxii; on Lenin's debt to Tkachev, see also David Shub, *Lenin: A Biography* (rev. ed.; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Szamuely, pp. 194-195, 223, 289. Although Szamuely makes every effort to minimize the connection between the Russian revolutionary tradition and its European antecedents, the evidence he presents rather supports the opposite view, as Solzhenitsyn shows when he goes over the same ground in *The Mortal Danger*.

Peter the Great, who is often singled out as the exemplary Russian autocrat, hated the Russian traditions he inherited, and he tried to destroy them by whatever means he could; he was, in fact, a utopian Western revolutionist. In return, Peter was "probably personally the most hated of the Russian Tsars."<sup>23</sup> Nor can it be said that the Russian people submitted quietly to communist despotism, as might have been expected from the slavish habits they had supposedly acquired under the Tsars. Far from it. When Lenin seized power by force of arms in 1917, he was compelled to employ "organized, systematic mass terror" in order to secure his dictatorship against the opposition and then revolt of "*every stratum of the Russian people*."<sup>24</sup>

We have shown in what sense Lenin was a Marxist. It should now be evident that the government of the Soviet Union, including and especially the reign of Stalin, has remained faithful to the fundamental goal of Marx: the transformation of the human condition through revolutionary action. After 1917, now that the dictatorship of the proletariat, or rather of its vanguard, has become actual, the manifest persistence of what Marxists insist on calling bourgeois habits and ideals must somehow be dealt with. So the violence praised by Marx in the Hegel essay as the embodiment of reason becomes applied not

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<sup>23</sup> The quotation is from Szamuely, p. 93. The evidence cited in his discussion of Peter on pp. 92-110 contradicts his contention that Peter was merely a variant on an older Russian despotic tradition. Solzhenitsyn, in *The Mortal Danger*, makes a thoroughly convincing case that Soviet Marxism is not at all to be understood as a native product. This book is a healthy antidote to the widespread tendency in Western scholarship to attribute the evils of Soviet politics to the Russian heritage rather than to Marxism. That tendency is well represented in the book itself, which includes vituperative responses to Solzhenitsyn from Robert Tucker and other prominent scholars, but also a definitive answer from Solzhenitsyn.

<sup>24</sup> Shub, *Lenin*, pp. 348, 353. My emphasis.

only against former members of the bourgeoisie, but also against those workers (and others) who continue to betray their adherence to the old ways. Even party members, who fervently profess their Marxism, are suspect, for their ranks are shot through with place-seekers and men ambitious for private gain. Hence violence may be used against them as well. In fact, insofar as anyone in the society still partakes of the old, bourgeois passions, the chief of which is the desire to have things of one's own apart from the community—whether one's own thoughts or one's own material possessions—they are all enemies of the people and are legitimately subject to despotic treatment as long as those passions endure.

The despotism and wholesale violence of Marxism in practice arise not in spite of but because of the high ideals of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. The Bernsteinian revisionists and other “soft” Marxists<sup>25</sup> who lowered their sights became good parliamentary democrats. Radical Marxism maintains that what was traditionally called human nature is changeable—“man makes himself”—and that man can and will become a wholly social, communal being, leaving behind forever his private passions and concerns. All can live together in harmony and peace. All can share—what James Madison denied in *Federalist* No. 10—the same opinions, passions, and interests. If Marxism is right—about both the feasibility and the desirability of its goal—mankind should pay any price and bear any burden in order to bring about this millennium. To accept and to accommodate man's selfishness and other present limitations would be a betrayal of humanity. The ignorant, reactionary masses must be compelled for their own good to adopt the ideas and attitudes that will make possible the eventual transition to pure communism. The ruling wise men or man must stop at noth-

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<sup>25</sup> The expression is from Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, p. 157.

ing to eradicate the remaining bourgeois passions and ideology, especially if education and propaganda alone have not yet yielded their expected result.

If the current governments of the Soviet Union and China appear moderate in contrast with the Stalin and Mao periods, that is probably mainly because the party officials have learned that they, like Stalin's and Mao's underlings, might well be caught in the whirlwind—or else because they have tacitly abandoned their Marxist faith. But if the future rulers of those and other communist countries remain faithful to Marx's vision, the time of limitless bloodletting will come again as it did for three million in Pol Pot's Cambodia from 1975 to 1978, when, in the words of the then national anthem:

The red, red blood splatters the cities and plains  
of the Cambodian fatherland,  
The sublime blood of the workers and peasants,  
The blood of revolutionary combatants of both  
sexes.  
That blood spills out into great indignation and  
a resolute urge to fight.  
17 April, that day under the revolutionary flag,  
The blood certainly liberates us from slavery.

But what if Marx's premise is wrong—as it so obviously is for anyone with eyes to see? What if ambition, the desire for private gain, and the preference for one's own are sown in the nature of man? What if the love of immortality and truth, man's deepest longing, can be satisfied only through religious tradition and faith? Or through the activity of philosophizing, which can be fully shared by only a few thoughtful friends—an activity which, when politicized, never escapes the despotism of authoritative opinion from which it seeks to depart? Philosophy and, to no less a degree, religion, will ever be the objects of Marxism's murderous hatred, for both

separate man from man as man seeks union with God and truth. If these things are so, every Marxist-Leninist political regime will always be in a state of cold or hot war against the most powerful as well as the most noble propensities of human nature, and people will forever and perforce be hiding their true concerns from the party's hateful eye. So the continuing chronicle of red, red blood splattering one communist land after another will tell a tedious tale not of liberation from slavery but only of death—death of the body, death of the spirit, and death of the mind.

The supposedly wise rulers of these dreary despotisms will consist partly of a fanatical minority which, like Lenin, places its faith in the illusory promise of the eventual total liberation and total socialization of humanity; partly of a larger group of those giving mouth-loyalty to Marxism for the sake of the private profit or honor that comes from power; and partly—mostly—of those animated by a confused mixture of Marxist faith and private desire.

Marxism-Leninism exercises a tremendous attraction over Westerners disgusted by the crass display of greed and self-indulgence unleashed by modern liberalism, which has increasingly forgotten its roots, particularly in America, in self-restraint and respect for the higher law, divine as well as natural. It also appeals strongly to non-Westerners who, having seen their own traditions corroded by Western skepticism and freedom, and wishing to vent their inchoate resentment fueled by this loss, enviously desire to pull down those who have profited under the post-traditional liberty and gladly embrace a "scientific" excuse for their own despotic passions. Marxism is also impressively backed by the authority and might of the Soviet Union, now emerging as the world's most powerful nation, and that is no mean factor in its influence. Of course, on the other side is the uniformly gloomy experience of slavery, poverty, arbitrary arrests,

concentration camps, death, and suppression of religion and free inquiry in every nation that has experienced a Marxist government at first hand. In light of these facts, the most urgent theoretical question of our time is the question concerning the nature of man. For unless this question is answered rightly, we will not know whether Marxism-Leninism is mankind's best hope or a monstrous injustice.

But we are hardly in the dark about this question. For our own Declaration of Independence epitomizes, according to its author, the thought of a long tradition of political philosophy stretching back to Cicero and Aristotle.<sup>26</sup> That tradition, whatever its internal disagreements, teaches men to respect and to cultivate their reason, yet without forgetting the limits forever imposed on reason by the passions. A return to the classical roots of free government will enable us confidently to oppose the radical prescriptions of Marxism-Leninism in argument and in action.

## Postscript

One might wonder why an essay on "Marx and Lenin" needs to be written, considering that scholars have been writing on the subject for half a century and more. The unfortunate fact is that scholarship on this and other Marxian themes has in general not been satisfactory. For some reason Western scholars have been reluctant to call a spade a spade. The majority of them keep trying to assure us that Marx and Lenin are not such bad fellows after all. Why an entire class of educated people, including many at our most prestigious institutions of higher learning, should want to hide the truth about Marx and com-

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825.

munism from others, perhaps even from themselves, is hard to understand. It may be that only a psychologist of the rank of Nietzsche could fully penetrate the phenomenon—historically unprecedented as far as I know—of the intellectual leadership of a strong and free society making every effort to find reasons not to criticize its main enemy and to denounce those who do criticize it.

At work, no doubt, is the self-loathing that Paul Hollander detected over and over again in his study of the long history of favorable responses to communism by Western scholars and students.<sup>27</sup> But whence arises this self-loathing? Nietzsche said that man would rather will nothingness than not will. People who have lost their faith that life has a purpose may believe, deep down and almost unnoticed, that *their* life is not worth living. Thus

## Marx as Rousseau's Legislator: The Origins of the Gulag

Sanderson Schaub

The most notorious and apparently the most fundamental left-wing critique of liberalism originated with Marx. Perhaps the most helpful writing for understanding the basic conception that animated Marx's thought is his early 1843 essay, "On the Jewish Question."<sup>1</sup> This essay certainly provides, in its essentials, a mature critique of the principles of civil and personal liberty, those principles which we are in the habit of referring to as liberalism.

Now Marx was surely not himself one to mince words. He then not mince words about Marx and Marxism. In the form of a critique of modern political freedom and, in particular, of its fully developed American variety, his essay "On the Jewish Question" is in fact a sustained and scathing attack on Jews and Judaism. This may seem surprising.

We know, of course, that Marx assaulted religion in all forms and, therefore, did not by implication exclude Judaism. We know too, of course, that Marx was himself a Jew. Thus it may seem that if Marx attacked Judaism, he

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*Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (2nd ed.; New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 24-51.