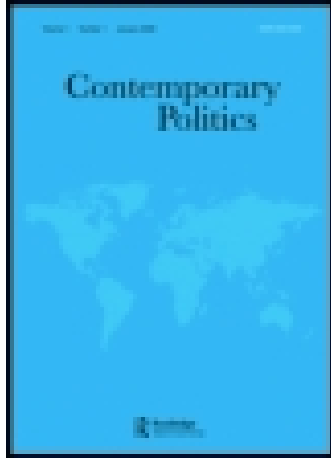


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## Has marxist politics a future?

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The question now firmly placed on the historical agenda is whether the passionate political debates between marxists, spanning a century from the founding of the Second International in 1889 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, will fall silent. Will there be no more chapters to write on the history of marxist politics, because 'history' itself has arrived at its ultimate destination in the form of liberal capitalism? Is marxism not merely hugely overdrawn but a bankrupt political force in the modern world, destined to continue 'only in the academic playgrounds of the West'? Has the collapse of the self-styled marxist regimes of eastern Europe, the persistent failure of the western working class to carry out its revolutionary role according to the marxist script, the rise of new social movements that owe little to marxism, and the postmodernist onslaught against all 'grand narratives' rendered the current crisis of marxism terminal?

Obviously any speculation on this question has to be made in a muted register. Historical prediction is notoriously difficult, as confirmed by the unforeseen historical circumstances prompting the debates within the marxist tradition itself, from the rise of working class reformism, fascism and feminism, to the growth of nationalism and stalinism. Or take the politics of the post-war period: few in the mid-1980s would have foretold the rapid demise of the totalitarian regimes of eastern Europe. Similarly, few in the 1960s would have predicted the ascendancy of right-wing neo-liberalism in the United States and Britain in the 1980s, when at the time it was confined to a lunatic fringe. Indeed, this demonstrates just how rapidly marginal ideologies can fill political vacuums in periods of social, economic and political instability. Thus, just as predication is problematic, historic possibilities cannot be eliminated either. Moreover, the difficulty of foretelling the future of ideologies is compounded by the fact that no necessary relation exists between an ideology and its institutional embodiment. For example, the British Liberal Party as a hegemonic force collapsed during the First World War. Yet, liberalism as an ideology in its 'new' liberal form continued, arguably, in the Labour Party, and in its 'old' liberal configuration was reincarnated in the 1980s Tory Party. In a slightly different

way, the relationship between Marx's original vision and the political movements he spawned could be conceived of as problematic, with, to put the matter crudely, the bureaucratic, reformist marxism of the Second International, the bureaucratic, Soviet-centred marxism of the Third, and the anti-bureaucratic, internationalist, messianic marxism of the Fourth.

### Responses to the crisis of marxism

Before looking directly the question of marxism's political future, various responses to the crisis will be examined. The fall of communism in eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union in particular, has concentrated the marxist mind. It has prompted marxists to demonstrate marxism's continued relevance as a political creed; this collapse moreover compelled them to reflect upon the meaning of the Soviet 'experiment'; they have also considered socialist alternatives to centralized planning (an intellectual project started before the collapse); in addition, various strategic possibilities have been contemplated; finally, they have meditated upon various theoretical revisions. In effect, they have had to react to the 'end of history' thesis advanced by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man*<sup>2</sup> and the rise of postmodernism often associated with the rise of the new, non-class based social movements.<sup>3</sup>

### The fall of communism

Some marxists have claimed that the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states had little to do with marxism, because they were not truly marxist. The demise marked the 'end of an experiment, socialism in one zone, which had nothing to do with the Marxism of Marx'<sup>4</sup>; or it was the death of 'really inexisting socialism'<sup>5</sup>; or it signified 'a step sideways, from one form of capitalism to another, from the state capitalism of the early twentieth century to the multinational capitalism of our *fin de siècle*'.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet style regimes had little in common with Marx's vision of proletarian self-emancipation.<sup>7</sup> The regimes were also characterized as class regimes, which were neither capitalist nor socialist.<sup>8</sup> Such marxists also held that a marxist explanation could be deployed to understand the debacle. The Soviet Union could be seen as quickly ceasing to be socialist after its inception in 1917, as a result of its isolation and material scarcity.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet system of bureaucratic planning could be viewed as a fetter holding back the productive forces, as demand became more heterogeneous.<sup>10</sup> Equally the Soviet Union was perceived as being unable to adapt to the increased globalization of capital since the 1970s, which rendered states less able to control their internal economies.<sup>11</sup> These marxists thus claimed that the failure of these regimes signalled not the death of marxism, but its liberation from stalinism.<sup>12</sup>

However, other marxists have insisted that the Soviet experience could not be so easily discarded. The Soviet state had been run by people who thought they were marxists, and it implemented some key aspects of a marxist political programme, such as public ownership, and popular welfare and employment measures. The practice of the regime also revealed 'blindspots' in marxist thought, for example: the 'rule of law, or the rights of the individual, or the need for checks and balances in political structures, or the abolition of commodity-money relations.'<sup>13</sup> In addition, the marxism of Lenin required a re-evaluation.<sup>14</sup>

### Marxism's continuing relevance

Marxists have insisted their case for socialism is still as relevant as ever, as an explanation of capitalism's problems, which cannot be 'reformed' away, thereby proving the need for an alternative political, economic and social system. Problems include: the economic difficulties within the former Soviet bloc now that it is firmly locked within the international capitalist system; third world austerity programmes stemming from international indebtedness; famines; ecological limits to growth and international economic inequality; international migration.<sup>15</sup> Further, the increased movements of international capital were generating problems of global dimensions.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the ending of the cold war had ushered in a new era of global political instability, a 'back to the future' of pre-1914 multi-polar inter-state conflict.<sup>17</sup> This manifested itself in nationalist rivalries in eastern Europe, greater Russian nationalism, German expansionism and various conflicts in the Middle East. Hence, the stark choice of socialism or barbarism clearly presented itself.<sup>18</sup> All this pointed to the need for an international socialist movement and organization capable of dealing with such problems.

### Economic and political alternatives capitalism

For some marxists the Soviet 'experiment' was an object lesson in what-is-not-to-be-done. They agreed that centralized planning on a command basis became increasingly inefficient. In contemplating an alternative economic system, they defined themselves in relation to Alec Nove's ground-breaking work, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*.<sup>19</sup> As a result of his analysis of the Soviet economy Nove came to the conclusion that effective, detailed central planning was impossible, owing to the inherent lack of total knowledge and foresight entailed in such a process. He proposed a dual economy. There was to be a state sector concerned with some state planning, which related to major investments and the need to avoid duplication and waste. This sector would also be responsible for the administration of natural monopolies, the restriction of income differentials, the control of inflation, the

regulation of unemployment and the administration of social services. The other sector would consist of co-operatives and small capitalist firms, which would survive through making profits and would have to bear the costs of their own mistakes.

Marxists have responded to Nove in a number of ways, some rejecting his views outright. In doing so, they have pointed out the waste and inefficiency of the market<sup>20</sup> and the existence of much planning under capitalism within large firms.<sup>21</sup> They have also rejected market socialism on moral grounds as promoting inequality and sustaining the motives of greed and fear.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it lacked the transformatory potential to develop people's sense of social responsibility and was unable to eliminate alienation.<sup>23</sup> Differences of opinion clearly emerged over the role of the market in a socialist society. Some saw it as having either a minimal role<sup>24</sup>, or a temporary one in the transition to socialism.<sup>25</sup> They emphasized the virtues of democratic planning by self-managing enterprises, which have inputs from consumers and other interest groups.<sup>26</sup> The notion of democratic planning has been most comprehensively dealt with by Pat Devine in *Democracy and Democratic Planning*.<sup>27</sup> It is based upon the principle of 'negotiated co-ordination', and rests on a distinction between market exchange and market forces.<sup>28</sup> Others, however, have stressed the importance of the market as a planning tool, rather than as the decisive regulator of output and consumption. The market would be 'socialized' through 'Price and Wage Commissions', using information technology and involving various interest groups. A public sector would exist, accountable to a 'Regulator of Public Enterprises'.<sup>29</sup>

As for alternative socialist political systems, all assumed that socialist society had to be more democratic than either liberal capitalism or the former communist regimes. Some, such as Callinicos, have championed the model of soviet democracy celebrated in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*. This form of socialist democracy, based upon the workplace, was superior to formal, liberal democracy. The key to preventing degeneration was the existence of a large working class and a revolution of international dimensions.<sup>30</sup> Anderson, arguing against this position, has warned against 'too close an imaginative adherence to the paradigm of the October Revolution, made against the husk of a feudal monarchy, and too distant a theoretical concern with the contours of a capitalist democracy the Bolsheviks never had to confront.'<sup>31</sup> And Miliband remarked that, historically, soviets have not proved a viable alternative to bourgeois democracy. The idea of council communism has had only marginal support amongst the west European working class, and in eastern Europe, since 1989 and in Latin America there has been the spread of liberal democracy.<sup>32</sup> A fundamental consideration could not be ignored: 'habit and tradition, deeply encrusted beliefs and ancient prejudices, inherited patterns of thought and behaviour'

formed part of a 'stubborn reality, with a remarkable capacity to endure'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, socialists had to participate in electoral struggles, whilst simultaneously exposing the limitations of parliamentary democracy.<sup>34</sup> Socialist democracy represented 'both an extension of capitalist democracy and a transcendence of it'.<sup>35</sup>

### Agency and strategy

The current crisis of marxism has been associated with the crisis of human agency, or the 'crisis of the identification of the revolutionary subject', that is, the inability of the proletariat to play its historical part.<sup>36</sup> Some commentators have suggested that the working class could behave as traditionally conceived by marxists in the semi-peripheral areas of world capitalism, such as South Korea, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico and Poland.<sup>37</sup> Class movements in the third world have also been seen as playing a key strategic role.<sup>38</sup> The feminist and green 'New Left' in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Turkey and the Netherlands and working class opposition to capitalist restructuring in eastern Europe have also been cited as significant.<sup>39</sup>

In their search for socialist agency some marxists have argued that alliances are crucial. Adam Przeworski has commented that in electoral terms, the working class parties, because the proletariat usually constitutes a minority of the electorate, have had to woo allies from other classes, albeit at the risk of watering down their socialist programmes.<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Wilde has advocated a uniting of 'old' labour movements and 'new' social movements through 'pluralist negotiation' against global capitalism.<sup>41</sup> Erik Olin Wright has suggested that an analysis of conditions and the devising of a strategy is necessary in order to unite the middle class and the underclass around the working class in the struggle for socialism.<sup>42</sup> Goran Therborn has advocated the building of a movement through alliances on the basis of 'life politics', a programme concerned with the environment and human rights in the broadest sense of the term.<sup>43</sup>

Strategic rethinking has also involved questioning the validity of the distinction between reform and revolution within marxism, and the preference of the latter over the former. First, reformist themes existed in Marx's own writings, for example, with reference to factory legislation in *Capital*.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, a tension existed in Marx's writings between evolutionary and revolutionary transformation. He acknowledged that capitalism had taken centuries to develop, yet assumed that it would quickly disappear. If capitalism's longevity was unpredictable, then reforms could play a useful part in laying the basis for a future socialist society. For example, the reform of state education could help culturally prepare workers for industrial democracy.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the preference for either reform or revolution should not be held as a strategic

dogma. It depended upon the situation in which mass movements found themselves - whether institutions could accede to their demands. If they could not, the choice had to be revolution, but if they could then reforms were beneficial in promoting societal change by, for instance, transforming workers' perceptions of themselves and promoting class awareness and new sets of demands.<sup>46</sup>

### Revising marxism

The major theoretical element that some marxists have sought to amend has been the teleological assumption that history has a 'purpose', inevitably culminating in the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of communism, as described in the *Communist Manifesto*, or *Capital*. Marxism had to be liberated from its 'teleological shackles'.<sup>47</sup> History had to be interpreted in a less deterministic, open-ended fashion, even seen in Marx as the 'activity of men in pursuit of their ends'.<sup>48</sup>

A number of implications followed from this rejection of teleology. First, historical presuppositions had to be made in terms of possibilities, rather than trajectories.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, Marx's simplifying assumptions concerning social developments (as in the *Communist Manifesto* but not in *Capital*) had to be abandoned, and the recognition of social complexity embraced.<sup>50</sup>

However, the main reason for jettisoning the teleological perspective lay in the working class's failure to fulfil its historical mission. This necessitated broadening socialism's appeal, beyond the boundaries of the working class. One such form was campaigning around the demand for free time, which capitalism is unable to provide in any meaningful or universal sense.<sup>51</sup> This could be associated with a 'socialist ethic', involving the 'creation of formal and substantive conditions that expand the arena wherein individuals can freely determine their lives and make their choices responsibly'.<sup>52</sup> This implied a 'new logic of accumulation', so that everyone was treated as self-determining ends, rather than as an alienated means of capital accumulation. Another option lay in developing an ethic embracing a 'radical-democratic universalisation of interests' from a 'normative point of view', through raising issues that do not merely affect minorities, such as nuclear power, urban decay and poverty, and global ecological problems.<sup>53</sup> Any socialist ethic had to be grounded upon a naturalistic theory of human nature.<sup>54</sup>

Another approach to the theoretical and political crisis of marxism has been to make the opposite move: the 'true' marxism of Marx needed to be re-stated, not revised. Theoretically, Marx's materialist dialectic could be deployed in order to carry out this unfinished programme, which was becoming increasingly realizable. Capitalism's

contradictions were only now being fully played out on the scale of the world market.<sup>55</sup> Or the epistemological status of marxism as an inherently practice-oriented theory had to be re-affirmed, and was essentially 'open', because it had to accept the inherently provisional and historically limited nature of the conclusions derived from practice, situated in a specific time and place.<sup>56</sup>

### The adequacy of the responses

Some of the issues raised by various reactions to the crisis of marxism will be dealt with in the next section. On the question of the type of regimes that 'fell' in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, arguably these regimes were neither capitalist nor socialist - not capitalist owing to the lack of commodified production, and not socialist because an identifiable class had a monopoly of economic and political power. Yet, clearly the imperatives of the international political and economic environment were major factors in shaping domestic economic, social and political processes.<sup>57</sup> As for the value of marxism being demonstrated by its ability to explain the collapse, grist is not necessarily added to the marxist mill. A difficulty exists in distinguishing such an explanation from non-marxist ones, which, focus on the failure of such regimes to compete economically with the west. Clearly the view that few lessons can be learnt from the debacle is questionable: the former communist regimes exposed certain lacunae in Marx's original thought in connection with individual rights and centralized economic planning. Moreover, the question of whether Lenin can be fully absolved from stalinism, whatever his personal hopes and inclinations may have been, requires careful treatment. This will be considered in more detail in the next section.

To insist that marxism is relevant to the modern world after communism's collapse is a perfectly reasonable position for marxists to adopt, given the demonstrable inability of capitalism to deal with war, poverty, famine, 'ecocide' and the like. Yet, the real difficulty lies in being able to offer a convincing practical economic and political alternative to liberal capitalism. Which of the post-capitalist economic structures would prove both viable and able to satisfy socialist values is at least in part an empirical question, to be decided by those working within such developing structures, involving a whole host of potentially competing preferences: from job satisfaction and ecologically 'sound' production to maximization of output, from the maximization of democratic participation to the right to be apathetic and from the global to the internal distribution of resources regulated by some principle of justice - to mention just a few. Thus, to be categorical in the 'plan versus market' debate is difficult. Nevertheless, the process of thinking about such structures and



different forms of social ownership is far from 'utopian' and helps to demonstrate the potential relevance of marxism in the sense that some form of initiative, deriving from a 'plan' would be crucial if capitalism fell into deep and protracted crisis. Indeed, Lenin in 1917 found himself having to rapidly provide a political blue-print, *The State and Revolution*, relying heavily on quotations from Marx and Engels, rather than on his own sustained thinking.

Here we come to the question of political alternatives, the soviet model based upon a dual power scenario, as proposed by Callinicos, or a parliamentary model, as commended by Miliband, that undergoes various democratic mutations. What tends to be omitted when debating these alternatives are two crucial analytic distinctions, first between the process of revolutionary transition and the desired end-state, and between the form and content of socio-political power. Thus, possibly in a revolutionary situation the issue of dual power might arise, but the best future form of state may require some modified form of parliamentary system, based on a distinction between legislature and executive and geographical and individual forms of representation, but with a 'producer' input and far greater executive accountability than at present. A soviet system, based upon workplace representation, could easily fail to represent adequately all non-workplace interests and may not have a mechanism to mediate between differences of interest between workplaces, especially between larger and smaller, and between work-places and the rest of 'society'. In other words, a parliamentary form of political decision-making and representation does not necessarily have to be bound up with minority class power as tends to occur under capitalism. This could be put another way: what if by differences in the timing of the elections in Russia in 1917, the Bolsheviks had had a majority in the Constituent Assembly and a minority in the soviets? Would the latter have been disbanded in January 1918, because its form was 'bourgeois'? Moreover, a revolutionary strategy is determined by circumstances; a future revolutionary situation cannot be 'read-off' from October 1917. A whole series of complex parliamentary and extra-parliamentary manoeuvres may be required, and even this scenario begs the question relating to the degree of resistance that a capitalist class might put up against a powerful working class, which had widespread support in society and within the state apparatus.

The question is made more complex because the economic and political alternatives considered have to be related to the social forces likely to achieve these ends. For example, women concerned with reproductive issues may not be too enthusiastic about a system of democracy grounded on workplace representation. And if a socialist movement was more united in its anti-capitalism than in its working class

identity, then quite possibly complex, 'pluralistic' forms of representation would be needed. This question of social agency and the reform/revolution dichotomy will be more fully explored in the next section.

Again, the question of theoretical revision has to be linked to the problem of agency. Once the notion of teleology, and its simple grounding in working class self-interest, is abandoned and the issue of human volition more fully embraced, the scope for moral argument becomes greater. Yet whilst the anger and unity derived from such argument may be important, so is the role of interests in understanding political action. But the universalization of such interests in some normative fashion as argued by Habermas, in relation, say to ecology, may be harder than appears at first sight. Even on ecological issues differences of interest and/or values could arise in a world without capitalists, between those who wanted growth and those who wished to preserve nature in some form or other. In this one example we can see that people may want to abolish capitalism for different reasons. Moreover, just as moral argument may be made difficult in the world of politics through interest-dependency, it may also be condition-dependent. Saving nature may be technically and economically more feasible in certain periods than others, just as Marx suggested in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* that the principles regulating work and distribution were dependent on the level of the development of the productive forces. Finally, for those marxists who call for a re-statement, rather than a revision of Marx, the question of concreteness arises. Proposing an 'open', practice-oriented marxism, or the development of a materialist dialectic within the context of a global capitalist framework, are worthy theoretical aims. However, specific matters of social and political agency, strategy and objectives also warrant consideration.

### Conjecturing the future

So far various partial attempts to deal with marxism's crisis have been evaluated. To couch marxism's political future in a more comprehensive - if tentative - fashion, it depends among other things on the possibility for growth of explicitly or potentially anti-capitalist movements. This would seem a reasonable assumption to make since many of the problems created by capitalism, already mentioned by commentators considered above, appear irremedial within the system itself. They include the growing ecological crisis, whether in terms of resources, or devastation of the environment, the international debt crisis, global inequality, trade wars and many other forms of international and domestic conflict generated by difficulties within the accumulation process, which involve attacks on working class living standards and moves towards more authoritarian state structures. Furthermore, the greater

the globalization of capital the greater the possibilities of an international socialist movement through the creation of a 'world' culture, meant in the broadest sense of the term, and increased contradictions, which are obviously global and require global solutions. In addition, there has been an actual growth, at least in absolute terms of the industrial working class on a global scale. The possibilities of growth of a genuine international socialist movement may in the long term be enhanced by the demise of the Soviet Union in the sense that such a movement would not be the tool of the foreign policy of a single state, as was the Third International. Thus, it would be more difficult for the employing class to combine nationalism with anti-socialism, as occurred during the cold war, in order to foster international divisions between workers. Secondly, international capitalism is now becoming truly international may help in the long term to unify the world working class.

Thus, if capitalism is unable to resolve its basic, internal contradictions, then the 'end of history' scenario posited by Fukuyama can be questioned. The fundamental flaw in his argument that there is no historical alternative to liberal capitalism, as demonstrated by the west's victory in the cold war, stems from his Hegelian idealism, which assumed that history consisted of the conflict of ideas in which the more rational won. Such a view ignores the whole process leading to the perversion of the marxist ideal in the Soviet Union soon after 1917, and later elsewhere. As a result of capitalism's political resilience and material strength, the Soviet Union, isolated and economically backward, could only survive by jettisoning its most fundamental principle, grounded on highly rational premises: proletarian self-emancipation. Secondly, is liberal capitalism rational? Can it 'truly' satisfy the twin needs of material contentment and the desire for recognition, as suggested by Fukuyama. Marx's starting point was his 'immanent' critique of liberalism and capitalism; what was promised could not be delivered. Limits existed to capitalism's expansion, and liberalism could only offer the 'political' emancipation of abstract citizenship, and not the 'human' emancipation of a socialized humanity, arguably basic in meeting the desire for recognition. Thus, Marx's case was that these two needs would be better satisfied in a communist society. The problems in liberal democratic society referred to by Fukuyama - unemployment, drugs and crime - could be perceived of as symptomatic of its underlying irrationality, rather than as contingent phenomena.<sup>58</sup>

The bringing together of means and ends also requires a re-evaluation of the marxist political tradition, involving an honest, if painful, accounting of its past. The 'either/ors' of yesterday, demanded by political calculation and often involving choices between imperfect truths for the sake of action, are not the same as those of today. Even the lessons of history change. Vitally, this entails a re-examination of the Soviet

experience. The Bolshevik revolution and its failure to achieve its international objectives wrought a double schism within marxism, between the Second and Third Internationals and between the Third and Fourth.<sup>60</sup> This twin polarization did not allow the 'true' Marx to prevail in all his complexity. In terms of his original perspective and project, each side was the loser. Moreover, these polarizations obscured some of the problems lying at the heart of the marxian project. In the Second/Third International polarity Kautsky, with his commitment to electoralism and belief in the ultimate neutrality of the state, lost Marx's anti-bureaucratic and class-based political radicalism. On Lenin's side the relation between ends and means was precarious. The principles of *The State and Revolution* were not put into practice and the question of transforming the working class into a ruling class was ignored. So was the strength of parliamentary democracy in the west and the complexities of the modern state stemming from the division of labour, recognised by Kautsky, but not fully acknowledged by Marx.<sup>61</sup> In the process of socialist transition in *The State and Revolution* Lenin relied on the principle of simplification, vis-a-vis the state (it was a parasitic phenomenon) and workers' self-administration of the economy.<sup>62</sup> In any case, the impact of this split was the Third International's failure - with Gramsci as the notable exception - to bring parliamentary democracy in the west fully within its strategic frame of reference.

On the reform/revolution issue in the Bernstein/Luxemburg debate over revisionism<sup>63</sup>, which was a dress-rehearsal for the Lenin/Kautsky conflict, Bernstein's argument did not entertain the possibility of root-and-branch capitalist resistance to socialist change, of the precariousness of reforms, because they were gained through struggle and could be lost through struggle, and of the state as a capitalist state. What Luxemburg did not consider was the possibility that reforms were crucial not merely in heightening working class awareness and organization, but also in having an objective impact on the workings of capital and in promoting its cultural advance in the process of becoming a ruling class.

The second schism between the Third and Fourth Internationals, between Stalin and Trotsky and their followers, again blurred some of the features of Marx's perspective and project. Elements of internationalism became obscured as the Third International became an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, as Trotsky had argued. Yet Marx has insisted that strategic calculation was condition-dependent. Stalin and his followers, as well as Gramsci, had to confront the fact that in the absence of any signs of permanent revolution, a more evolutionary strategy had to be adopted. Trotsky and his followers instead clung to the theory and practice of the October Revolution. That Stalin's pursuit of a more evolutionary strategy - taking into account

in the strength of the bourgeoisies in the west - stemmed necessarily from some wish to 'betray' the world proletariat is questionable. Such an interpretation assumes that proletarian revolutions in the west, if they had occurred, would not have been in Stalin's interest. Indeed, Trotsky,<sup>64</sup> had not advocated a strategy of permanent revolution in relation to China before his split with Stalin. The outcome of this split was two distorted forms of marxist strategy; one abstract and politically ineffectual, the other concrete and excessively pragmatic.

Bound up with the Stalin/Trotsky schism is the question of Lenin, or more precisely; the relationship between Lenin and Stalinism. Was Stalin a true heir or a gross betrayer of Lenin's theory and practice? This 'either/or' has led to exaggeration. Clear connections between Lenin and Stalin existed; their interpretations of historical materialism as a certain kind of 'science' was potentially elitist, especially in its teleological form, and gave the development of the productive forces priority over production relations. This 'productivism' could be used to justify the Five Year Plans with all the human misery that this entailed. Furthermore, Lenin's notion that the dictatorship could be exercised by the party rather than the soviets was crucial to the justification of a one-party state. And in practice, Lenin supported the banning of opposition parties from the soviets in 1918 and of factions within the Communist Party in 1921. There is little evidence that he discussed the need to restore soviets and factions. This is not to suggest that Lenin was as 'bad' as Stalin, but rather to note a connection between both men. This connection, whilst partly ideological, stemmed from the adverse circumstances in which they found themselves in attempting to construct socialism: economic dislocation, material poverty, cultural 'backwardness', a small and organizationally ineffective working class, and western encirclement. Hence, the fleeting unity of marxist theory and proletarian practice - of proletarian self-emancipation - achieved in October 1917, was rapidly fractured by circumstance.

On the other hand the similarities between Lenin and Stalin can be over-blown. Lenin clearly disliked Stalin's approach to the national question as evidenced by his handling of Georgia in 1922, and in his 'Testament', written in December 1922, Lenin made it clear that he disliked Stalin's rudeness and wanted him dismissed from his post as party secretary. Moreover, towards the end of his life - he died in 1924 - he clearly became worried by the growth of party bureaucracy.<sup>65</sup> Lastly, he was clearly opposed to any cult of the personality, and whatever his own sense of political certainty, he was far more willing to engage in open debate than to use assassination as a means of settling a political argument.

The upshot of this discussion is that Lenin's theory and practice has to be contextualized, rather than fetishized or demonized, understood as the application of marxism to specifically Russian and existing global political and economic conditions. In other words, the marxist materialist method has been applied to marxism itself, as Korsch suggested in an earlier period.<sup>66</sup> Lenin's marxism entailed a good deal of practical and theoretical improvisation. Marxism had to be adapted to circumstances not of Lenin's own choosing, but 'directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'<sup>67</sup> His undoubted strength lay in his capacity to make theoretical adjustments in the light of existing and changing circumstances. Yet such adjustments led him to equate the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the party.<sup>68</sup> He provides us with a cautionary tale; the need to distinguish between the explanatory and analytical power of marxism from the ideological marxism of power.

Equally crucial, the need to contextualize Lenin also points to the danger of attempting to generalize a theory and practice that derived from a specific situation. Indeed, the need to take specificity seriously (this was Lenin's strength, even if he was not always consistent in applying this method) lay at the heart of Gramsci's marxism and was his fundamental strategic insight: the contrast between the 'east' and the 'west'. Whilst the desire for proletarian revolution was as intense for Gramsci as for Lenin, he fully acknowledged the fact that the terrain of political combat in the west, with its strong and dense 'civil society', involved far more complex political manoeuvres than in Russia.

This brings us to consider present global circumstances. An October 1917 scenario may be possible in such countries as Brazil, South Korea and south Africa, which possess well-developed proletarian movements and where parliamentary traditions are not firmly rooted. But there remains the rest of the world, with different types of working class and different state-forms. Any attempt to construct an international socialist movement would involve acknowledging these differences. Strategically in the west, where parliamentary traditions are strong and social structures complex, this may entail, as Miliband has suggested, working within parliament while exposing its limitations. The question of a dual power scenario, as already indicated, is an empirical one. Obviously, in moments of extreme class contestation fostering illusions in parliament as a vehicle for socialist transition can be disastrous, as in Chile in 1973. Yet, the most effective form of transition may be articulated, first, by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces working in tandem and, secondly, by a pluralistic, alliance orientation, combining unity and difference, which allows for situational differences stemming from job occupation, race, sex and gender.

Indeed, the question of how marxism ought to relate to the new social movements cannot be avoided. The postmodernist inspired critique of Laclau and Mouffe suggests that marxism, due to its 'essentialism', 'reductionism' and 'economism', is incapable of addressing the needs of such movements.<sup>69</sup> They certainly pinpoint marxism's deficiencies in analyzing satisfactorily the development of individual and group identities, especially in non-class based forms. Yet their notion that personal identities are necessarily 'precarious', a product of the 'continuous movement of differences'<sup>70</sup> is one-sided in rejecting all determinations of social structure and the interaction between these 'necessary' relations and 'contingency'. Secondly, in their desire to avoid any taint of authoritarianism, the struggles of all oppressed groups are viewed as 'equivalent' in order to avoid any 'privileging' of some struggles over others. However, the term 'privileging' is not without ambiguity. There is a world of difference between strategic privileging, and doing so in a normative fashion. In the overthrow of capitalist power relations, the working class is clearly more strategically privileged than various oppressed minorities, although the latter may be normatively more significant because they suffer more. Thus, the problem of means and ends arises vis-a-vis alliances needed to overthrow capitalism, although the different components of such alliances may have different objectives. Marxists have to demonstrate the relevance of socialism to new social movements. In the domestic labour debate<sup>71</sup> whilst they were unable to capture fully the specificity of women's oppression, they were at least able to identify structural features that had to be transformed in order to achieve women's emancipation in the reproductive sphere. Nevertheless, male and 'extra-economic' forms of oppression may not be too readily amenable to marxist explanation. Hence, marxists have to articulate clearly the relation between means and ends, always recognizing the diversity of goals within socialism, and the fact that socialism is no cure-all, as well as the need for strategic privileging, given capitalist power structures.

This points towards re-thinking the relations between ends and means, or goal and process, within marxism, so that the pursuit of power is not separated from its objectives: the maximization of social, economic and political equality for all the exploited and oppressed. The practical linking of ends and means could imply breaking with some of the primary taboos in Marx's own work: his denial of moralism and 'blue-printism' stemming from his overly materialist teleological assumption. Such an assumption enabled him to avoid moral prescription and 'recipes for the cookshops of the future', because he assumed that an historical process was already in train. However, a self-denying ordinance on the provision of any 'recipe', however broad and tentative, in a revolutionary situation could be viewed as an abnegation of

'leadership'. Indeed, Marx himself could not resist the temptation to speculate about the nature of communism in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Similarly, as Geras has noted a 'repressed' theory of justice existed in his work.<sup>72</sup> Again, some form of normative theory, grounded in self-interest and practical, material possibilities would be crucial to any agenda of transition. Whilst Gramsci in discussing the party's role in the process of 'moral reform'<sup>73</sup> did not specify what this entailed, such a programme would have to appeal not merely to the industrial proletariat, but to other wage earners, and potential allies from other social strata who were either in 'contradictory class locations', to use Erik Olin Wright's term, or oppressed minorities. The refusal to consider the importance and validity of moral argument by orthodox marxists is based upon an inconsistency. Moral outrage against capitalism prompts them to make the self-sacrifices involved in revolutionary activity. To alter the meaning of one of Marx's criticisms of the utopian socialists, they divide 'society into two parts, of which one is superior to society'.<sup>74</sup> In other words they see the working class as interest-driven, whilst they themselves are morally motivated. And usually collectivities engaged in social transformation are prompted by anger deriving from a sense of injustice.

The weakness of Marx's discussion also in part derives from the parallels and contrasts made between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. There is the question of class capacities. Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* saw the bourgeoisie as first attaining economic and then political power. In other words, its ruling class capacities were developed over time, whereas the working class was expected generally to develop these capacities in the revolutionary process itself. Any realistic theory of socialist transformation needs an expanded notion of the working class and possibly the winning over of sections of the middle class, recognizing that a socialist society, although its ultimate objective is the increase of free time, will be built on a complex division of labour and on sophisticated technical expertise.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, the implications of Marx's contrast between the previous ruling classes (including the bourgeoisie) which subjected the rest of society to their 'conditions of appropriation' and the proletariat which, when coming to power would abolish their 'own previous mode of appropriation'<sup>76</sup> warrants closer examination. The former task merely entails extending what exists, whilst the second demands some conception of what forms of collective control of the productive forces and distribution may be established after class exploitation has been abolished.

Whether such revisions still allow the appellation 'marxist' to be applied to the resultant theory and practice is a difficult question, since the problem of definition has to be resolved. Marxism is a house with many mansions, with Bernstein, Kautsky,



Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot all claiming to be marxist. If we reject their claims on the grounds that they were not 'true' marxists, then a definition of 'true' marxism has to be offered. Certainly, if marxism is taken to be the 'theory and practice of proletarian revolution'<sup>77</sup> necessarily involving a process of 'critical-practical activity', then the revisions could be viewed as operating within, rather than against the marxist tradition, which allows for theoretical modification in the light of new knowledge derived from working class experience, new forms of social struggle, changing state forms and processes of capital accumulation, from attempting to resolve the tensions and omissions in marx's own thought, and indeed from 'bourgeois' sources.

Yet even this line of reasoning begs an important question: how valuable is the attempt to maintain a theoretical and practical fidelity with Marx? Should not Marx be viewed as a major pioneer within the socialist tradition, rather than its prophet? Is it not better to follow the example, rather than the letter of Marx? As a child of the Enlightenment he had an intense passion for freedom and knowledge in equal measure; he pursued knowledge in the name of freedom. This involved the destruction of any form of mystifying consciousness that sustained humanity's self oppression, and the development of ideas that would be of practical use to the struggles of the oppressed and exploited. He would not have enjoyed the prospect of future generations looking to him, not for inspiration, but legitimation. Marx and the movement he created offer all those struggling for freedom and equality a treasure house of practical and theoretical wisdom - negative as well as positive. This movement is a constant reminder that the theory and practice of human freedom is always unfinished business.<sup>78</sup> As long as capitalism remains in business, marxism as movement and doctrine in whatever form is likely to remain obstinately relevant.

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- <sup>1</sup> K.Minogue, 'Ideology After the Collapse of Communism', in A.Shtromas (ed), *The End of 'Isms'?*, Oxford, 1994, p.11.
- <sup>2</sup> Published in New York, 1992.
- <sup>3</sup> Fukuyama's arguments are considered in my *The Politics of Marxism*, chapter 15, and the postmodernist critique, in part, in chapter 14; also in A.Callinicos, *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*, Cambridge, 1989, and counter-critiques of postmodernism have been mounted. See C.Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: critical theory and the ends of philosophy*, Hemel Hempstead, 1990; N.Geras, *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind: The Ungroundable Liberalism of Richard Rorty*, London,

1995. Interestingly, one of the leading lights in the postmodernist firmament, Jacques Derrida, has proclaimed his wish to be associated with a 'certain spirit of Marxism', namely, its capacity to criticize itself and the 'multiple logics of capital'; *Specters of Marx*, New York, 1994, p.88, p.94.
- <sup>4</sup> L.Wilde, 'Farewell to Marxism?', *Red Letters*, no.26, 1990, p.7.
- <sup>5</sup> D.Singer, 'Prometheus Rebound?', in W.K.Tabb (ed), *The Future of Socialism: Perspectives From The Left*, New York, 1990, p.19.
- <sup>6</sup> A.Callinicos, 'Stalinism Falls In Line With Theory', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 12 July 1991, p.14.
- <sup>7</sup> A.Callinicos, *The Revenge of History*, Cambridge, 1991, p.17 (hereafter RH).
- <sup>8</sup> P.Sweezy, 'Postscript on Post-Revolutionary Society', in Tabb, op.cit., p.292.
- <sup>9</sup> Callinicos, RH, p.19.
- <sup>10</sup> M.Burawoy, 'Marxism Is Dead! Long Live Marxism!', in Tabb, op.cit., p.161; Wilde, op.cit., p.7.
- <sup>11</sup> Callinicos, RH, pp.45-50.
- <sup>12</sup> Callinicos, RH, p.3; Burawoy, op.cit., p.161.
- <sup>13</sup> R.Blackburn, 'Fin de Siecle: Socialism after the Crash', in R.Blackburn (ed), *After the Fall*, London, 1991, p.178. See also Sweezy, 'Postscript on Post-Revolutionary Society', in Tabb, op.cit., p.292.
- <sup>14</sup> I.Silbur, *Socialism: What Went Wrong?*, London, 1994, p.246-66.
- <sup>15</sup> Tabb, op.cit., p.2, p.8; Callinicos, RH, p.106; G.Therborn, 'The Life and Times of Socialism', *New Left Review*, no.194, 1992, p.32; E.Hobsbawm, 'The Crisis of Today's Ideologies', *New Left Review*, no.192, 1992, p.64.
- <sup>16</sup> C.Chase-Dunn, 'Socialism and Capitalism on a World Scale', in Tabb, op.cit., p.68.
- <sup>17</sup> Callinicos, RH p.81.
- <sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.62; S.Amin, 'The Future of Socialism', in Tabb, op.cit., p.106.
- <sup>19</sup> Published in London, 1983.
- <sup>20</sup> C.Harman, 'The Myth of Market Socialism', *International Socialism*, second series, no.42, 1989, pp.10-34.
- <sup>21</sup> E.Mandel, 'In Defence of Socialist Planning', *New Left Review*, no.159, 1986, p.11.
- <sup>22</sup> G.A.Cohen, 'The Future of a Disillusion', *New Left Review*, no.190, 1991, pp.18-19.
- <sup>23</sup> P.Devine, 'Self-Governing Socialism', in Tabb, op.cit., p.197.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.
- <sup>25</sup> Harman, op.cit., p.39; Mandel, op.cit., p.32.
- <sup>26</sup> Mandel, op.cit., p.26-8; Devine, op.cit., p.198.
- <sup>27</sup> Published in Cambridge, 1988.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22, pp.235-58.
- <sup>29</sup> D.Elson, 'Market Socialism or the Socialisation of the Market?', *New Left Review*, 1988, pp.30-5. See also R.Blackburn, 'Fin de Siecle: Socialism after the Crash', p.218. For a clear and balanced discussion of the issues see H.Breitenbach, T.Burden and D.Coates, *Features of a Viable Socialism*, Hemel Hempstead, 1990.
- <sup>30</sup> Callinicos, RH, p.118.
- <sup>31</sup> P.Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, London, 1983, p.79.
- <sup>32</sup> R.Miliband, 'Reflections on the Crisis of Communist regimes', in Blackburn, op.cit., pp.12-13.

- <sup>33</sup> R.Miliband, 'The Plausibility of Socialism', *New Left Review*, no.206, 1994, p.13.
- <sup>34</sup> Miliband, 'Reflections', p.13.
- <sup>35</sup> Miliband, 'The Plausibility of Socialism', p.13.
- <sup>36</sup> J.McCarney, *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*, London, 1990, p.163.
- <sup>37</sup> G.Arrighi, 'Marxist Century, American Century', in Blackburn, op.cit., p.238; Chase-Dunn, 'Socialism and Capitalism on a World Scale', in Tabb, op.cit., p.10.
- <sup>38</sup> McCarney, op.cit., p.192.
- <sup>39</sup> Blackburn, 'Fin de Siecle', pp.238-9.
- <sup>40</sup> See for example A.Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge, 1986, chapter 1 passim.
- <sup>41</sup> L.Wilde, *Modern European Socialism*, Aldershot, 1994, p.113.
- <sup>42</sup> E.Olin Wright, 'Class Analysis, History and Emancipation', *New Left Review*, no.202, 1993, p.35.
- <sup>43</sup> G.Therborn, 'Vorsprung durch Rethink', in Blackburn (ed), op.cit., pp.306-8.
- <sup>44</sup> B.Kagarlitsky, *The Dialectic of Change*, London, 1990, p.8.
- <sup>45</sup> P.Auerbach, 'On Socialist Optimism', *New Left Review*, no.192, 1992, p.10.
- <sup>46</sup> S.E.Bronner, *Socialism Unbound*, New York, 1990, pp.178-80.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.147. See also J.Larrain, *A Reconstruction of Historical Materialism*, London, 1986, p.124.
- <sup>48</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, Moscow, 1975, p.110. See also R.Gottlieb, *Marxism, 1844-1990; Origins, Betrayal, Rebirth*, New York, 1992, p.40.
- <sup>49</sup> Olin Wright, 'Class Analysis, History and Emancipation', p.24.
- <sup>50</sup> J.Habermas, 'What Does Socialism Mean Today? The Revolutions of Recuperation and the Need for New Thinking', in Blackburn (ed) op.cit., p.34; Blackburn, 'Fin de Siecle....', in Blackburn (ed.) op.cit., p.239.
- <sup>51</sup> A.Przeworski, 'Material interests, class compromise, and the transition to socialism', in *Analytical Marxism*, J.Roemer (ed), Cambridge, 1986, pp.181-8; and A.Gorz, 'The New Agenda', in Blackburn (ed.), op.cit., p.295.
- <sup>52</sup> Bronner, *Socialism Unbound*, p.155.
- <sup>53</sup> Habermas, 'What Does Socialism...?', p.43.
- <sup>54</sup> Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, p.82. See also E.Olin Wright, A.Levine, and E.Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism*, London, 1992, p.100 on the moral corollary of a 'weak historical materialism'.
- <sup>55</sup> McCarney, *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*, p.184.
- <sup>56</sup> See for example J.Fracchia and C.Ryan, 'Historical Materialist Science, Crisis and Commitment' in W.Bonefeld, R.Gunn and K.Psychopedis (eds) *Open Marxism*, vol.11, London, 1992, pp.56-61.
- <sup>57</sup> See Townshend, *The Politics of Marxism*, chapter 10.
- <sup>58</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, p.288.
- <sup>59</sup> D.McLellan, *Karl Marx, His Life and Thought*, London, 1973, pp.172-3.
- <sup>60</sup> Perry Anderson calls for the need 'to come to terms with the historical experience of the Second and Third Internationals', in *A Zone of Engagement*, p. 362.
- <sup>61</sup> K.Kautsky, *The Social Revolution*, Chicago, 1913, p.29.
- <sup>62</sup> See Blackburn, 'Fin de siecle', pp. 180-2 for a discussion of simple/complex tension in Marx's work.

- <sup>63</sup> See Townshend, chapter 2.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., chapter 8.
- <sup>65</sup> M.Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, London, 1975, chapter 6, passim.
- <sup>66</sup> K.Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, London, 1970, first published 1923.
- <sup>67</sup> K.Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire', *Selected Works*, vol.1, p.247.
- <sup>68</sup> See Townshend, chapter 6.
- <sup>69</sup> *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London, 1985.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.122.
- <sup>71</sup> See Townshend, chapter 13.
- <sup>72</sup> N.Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', *New Left Review*, no.150, 1985.
- <sup>73</sup> Q.Hoare and G.Nowell Smith (eds), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London, 1971, p.132.
- <sup>74</sup> 'Theses on Feuerbach', Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol.2, Moscow, 1962, p.404.
- <sup>75</sup> See P.Meiksins, 'Beyond the Boundary Question', *New Left Review*, no.157, 1986, pp.116-20, for a discussion of the problems of class identification and alliance strategies.
- <sup>76</sup> Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, F.C.Bender (ed), New York, 1988, p.65.
- <sup>77</sup> See H.Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol.2, New York, 1978, p.27.
- <sup>78</sup> A.M.Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Brighton, 1983, p.6.