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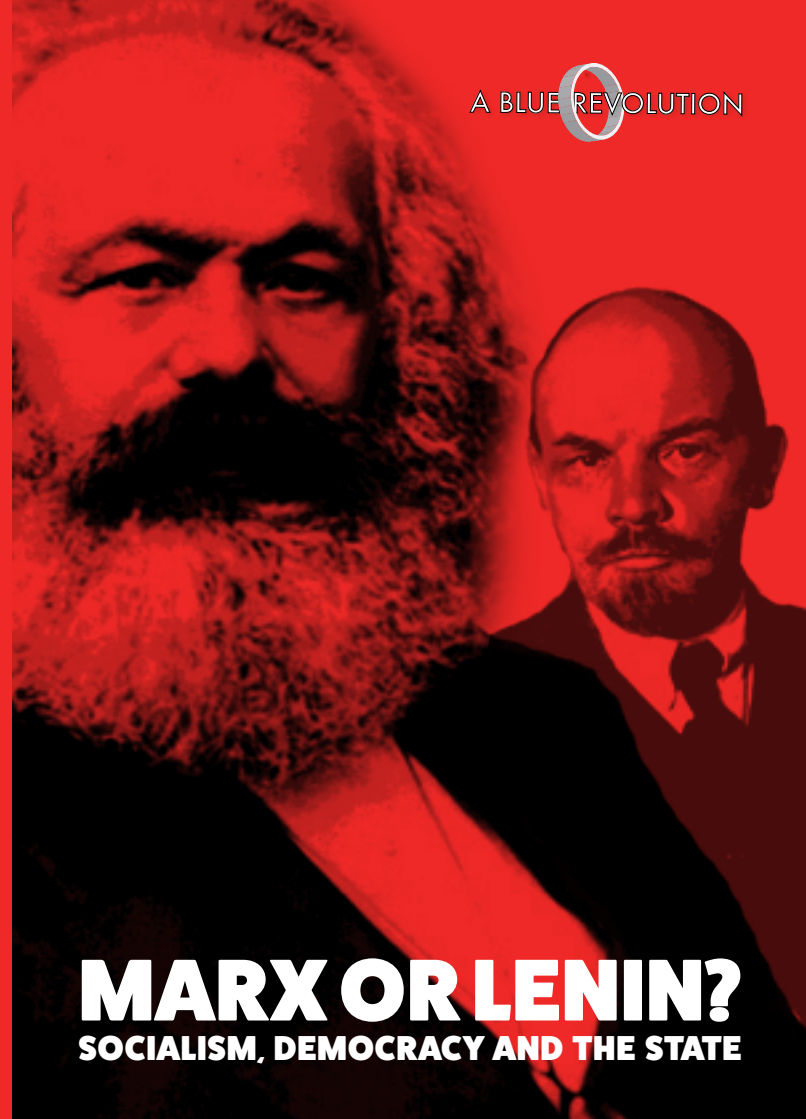
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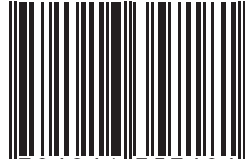
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MARX OR LENIN?

SOCIALISM, DEMOCRACY AND THE STATE

In Memory of Stephen Gilbert
Born 1963 in Chelmsford Essex



Died 2020 in Gorleston Norfolk
'Leadership without power is called cooperation'

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Blue Revolution
Marx or Lenin?
Socialism, Democracy and the State

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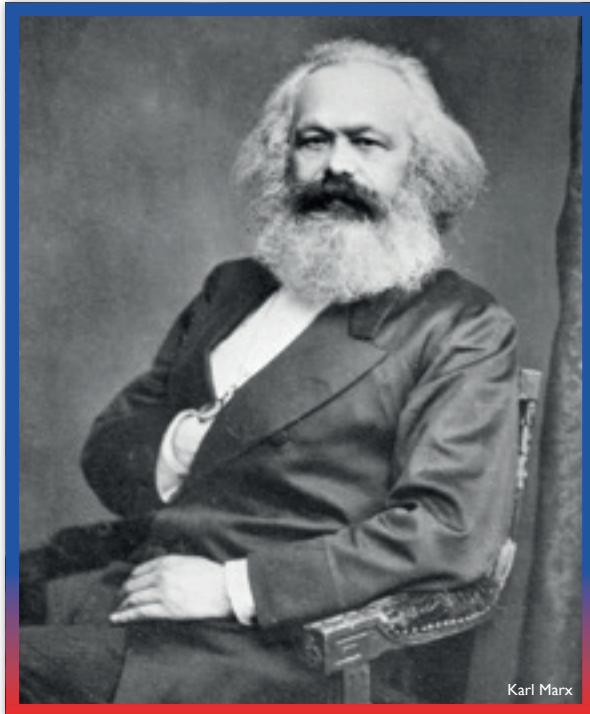


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INTRODUCTION

Marxism has evolved, not only because of a fashion for different interpretations but because of changing material realities, making large parts irrelevant or requiring radical reinterpretation. Marx was writing in the



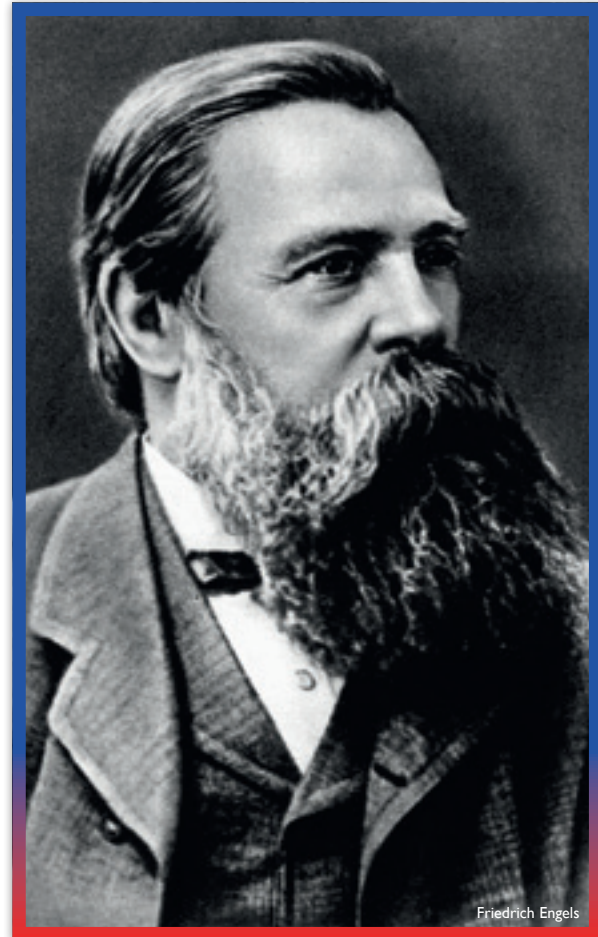
mid to late nineteenth-century a world quite different from the western world of today.

Within that nineteenth-century world, Marx saw growing economic and social injustice and whilst at times his analysis could be obscure or overly complicated the general theme of all his work is to promote four fundamental revolutionary ideas, the easiest to understand are the liberation of the working class from 'exploitation' by capitalists, equalising the distribution of wealth and time, and the withering away of the state. The fourth the collective ownership of the means of production is far more complicated but is relevant to how the 'socialist' experiments in Russia and China were framed. I will deal with this fourth Marxist aim separately when examining Lenin's legacy of authoritarianism. I will conclude by describing what the first three of Marx and Engels aims might look like today as capitalism goes into, yet another crisis and this time the working people must be empowered to help save freedom and by extending democracy bring about the socialism of Marx as opposed to the authoritarian socialism of Lenin.

WHO WAS MARX?

Karl Marx was a German polymath, revolutionary, philosopher, economist, and linguist. He was middle class, which meant he understood the values of other middle-class people whom he later termed the bourgeoisie. Marx's family would have been petty or small bourgeoisie as they were not directly involved in the 'exploitation' of the working class. His father was a lawyer. The petty bourgeoisie, however, adopts the attitudes, values and vanities of the 'big' bourgeoisie who were the industrialists, banking families and business people who grew rich on the back of employing and exploiting workers.

Marx having married young and abandoned legal studies for journalism would have become very aware of how exposed and precarious the life of the worker was. Having left legal studies, he became little more than an itinerant worker himself. He and his wife eventually had six children and no regular income so the reality of life with economic uncertainty, no healthcare or welfare would have defined his and his families 'lived reality'. He was poor and dependent on the kindness of his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels.



WHAT DID MARX THINK?

Marx and his friend Fredrich Engels believed that there were many types of 'socialism'. You can read about these in the Manifesto of the Communist Party 1848. They dismissed these 'socialisms' as either idealist, utopian or romantic. The idea that socialism was about being kind, generous with other people's money or harking back to an earlier pre-industrial age struck them as too simplistic. Marx and Engels wanted socialism to have some rigorous and broad ideological thinking behind it. Moreover, it had to build on the legacy of capitalism, rather than merely destroy capitalism, this they thought was essential. Socialism was a progression from capitalism. They called their socialism 'scientific' socialism. Scientific meaning rigorously argued and properly evidenced. They studied human evolution from a social as opposed to biological perspective and argued that humanity was on a path towards 'communism', a return to cooperation and collaboration by all peoples the world over based on either the absence or curtailment of top-down political power. Marxist socialism was the last stop before 'communism' was achieved. It is worth noting

here that 'communism' is never described by either Marx or Engels. How could it be, it was created by the collective interests and power of the working class, not by nineteenth-century socialist thinkers and intellectuals.

WHAT IS MARXIST SOCIALISM?

Scientific socialism begins by looking at the evolution of economies and how these economies fall into 'types' and how they then shape people's lives and political realities. So, fifty thousand years ago humanity was tribal across the surface of the planet. Food was scarce and individual lives would be brutal and short. However, argued Marx and Engels there would be general equality with the only differentiation being based on sex. Even between the sexes, there would be little in the way of power differences as males needed females and females needed males. Both required each other to survive the reality of their harsh lives. This brutal but largely egalitarian way of life slowly changed, beginning in the Middle East around ten thousand years ago. Things changed because humanity invented ways to produce more food

than was needed. Thus, populations grew and what should have been a time of plenty for all, became the beginning of the period that according to Marx gave rise to the modern age of greed and selfishness, known to classical Marxists as the ages of exploitation.

Because there was more food, strong powerful men could control access to it. They could create wealth by feeding people and getting them to work as slaves to do things other than hunt or scavenge, for example, mine gold, make artefacts and build monuments. Wealth was born and with it the ability of some people to have more than others. Therefore, with a small class having more than the majority, ideas would be created, called myths, to justify the situation. These myths later became religions or became ideas within religion.

Moving on from the ancient world and over time the way wealth is created and who owned it has changed. But at the centre of the process is still greed, selfishness, and exploitation. These in turn give rise to inequality, unfairness, and elitism.

WHO WAS LENIN?

Lenin enters the story in the late nineteenth century. He was a Russian lawyer who came from a petty-bourgeois family too. His early life was influenced by the fact that Russia was still a country governed by a King, the Czar who had absolute power. In the nineteenth century, Europe was emerging into a continent dominated by capitalism and so had minimised or abolished altogether the power of their monarchs.

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

Capitalism was not a system of relationships based on inherited power and status like monarchies, it was a legal framework within which contract, choice and consent were the only principles that governed the economy. Within society, there may have been other rules and prohibitions, such as a ban on poor people having the vote or discrimination against certain religions, but the capitalist economic system was indifferent to that. Anyone could become wealthy if they played within the rules of contract, choice, and consent and in doing so found a way



to exploit workers to make a profit. It was thus possible for the Jewish community to be active economically, something they could not be in politics, due to centuries of discrimination.

With such a minimal framework of rules governing the economy, exploitation of workers became grotesque and poverty, starvation, illiteracy, and poor health blighted the lives of workers across Europe.

WHAT DID LENIN THINK?

In Russia Lenin and his brother, Alexander had been battling feudalism, capitalism was barely relevant to the majority of Russian's. What the revolutionaries in Russia wanted was the end of the monarchy. Alexander, was executed for trying to kill the czar. What they sought was the kind of revolution that Britain had gone through in the seventeenth century when we killed our King Charles I, and France had gone through in the eighteenth century when they killed their king Louis XIV. Russia was late to the game of destroying feudalism and whilst in Britain and France capitalism was then introduced,

this was not something that Lenin or his Bolshevik's wanted. And this is the basic problem for modern socialism and modern socialists.

The principles of modern socialism are not Marxist principles. Their ideas are not based on evolving from capitalism to socialism and then beyond that, to freeing people from top-down political control thus promoting the withering away the state itself. Their ideas are about the state exercising power and control in the name of the people and destroying capitalism and everything capitalism stood for both good and bad.

As Marx argued, in Britain and much of Europe capitalism had already destroyed feudalism, but Lenin wanted to use an almost feudal like power, state socialism, to destroy Russian feudalism and then to prevent capitalism getting established in Russia. They succeeded in destroying Russian feudalism in the twentieth century when they killed the Czar Nicholas Romanov and his whole family in July 1918.

Because of Lenin and the Russian revolution, modern socialism is not based on the idea of

revolutionary change taking place within a failing capitalist system, a failing capitalist system which leaves a legacy of freedom based on contract, choice, and consent, but on what you need to do to destroy feudalism and then prevent capitalism happening.

WHAT WAS LENIN'S LEGACY?

Britain and France had done what Marx had suggested. The capitalists had destroyed feudalism and imposed capitalism, creating modern legal principles of contract, choice and consent but had been guilty of exploiting workers in the process. Russian socialists had, in the twentieth century, destroyed feudalism and replaced it with state socialism. This was because capitalism was seen as so awful with no redeeming characteristics, they were not going to let it get established in post-feudal Russia. So throughout most of the twentieth century, the Russian economy was not based on contract, choice, and consent, but as it always had been, on the power of the state to tell people what to do and how to do it. That was the model for Russian industrialisation. Not

a free market based on contract, choice, and consent but on a centralised bureaucracy controlled by the Bolsheviks.

This model of the state telling people what to do and how to do it, created by Lenin to avoid capitalism getting properly established in Russia is what modern socialism is all about. It was justified, not on the grounds of overt authoritarianism, of course not, but for the 'collective good'. This was a misinterpretation by Lenin of Marx and Engels view that the means of production should be 'collectively' owned by the working class. The state was not of course 'the working class' it remained and remains implacably 'the state'. But in Russia control of the economy and the means of production was described as 'collectivist' by the state and it was the way the Bolsheviks controlled society. The Russian state was an authority remote from the very people who were of course the real workers.

Thanks to Lenin's legacy authoritarianism too often defines the attitude of all those who call themselves socialist from The UK Labour Party's Momentum, to Antifa, the 'woke', the no platformers' to the trans radicals and



Black Lives Matter. All believe they have the right to tell people what to do or what to think without any need to consider people have, in the western world, acquired from capitalism basic rights based on contract, choice, and consent. Rights like free speech, free association, freedom of thought and freedom of conscience. Contract, choice, and consent are without doubt capitalism's most valuable contribution to humanities long and conflicted journey back to an unenforced and self-imposed near equality.

WHAT MIGHT THE SOCIALISM OF MARX AND ENGELS LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Within a socialist society that comes after capitalism, and which is based on Classical Marxism as opposed to Leninism we can ask what would the liberation of the working class from 'exploitation' by capitalists, equalising the distribution of wealth and time, and the withering away of the state look like?

We have all but achieved the former with the exception that big corporations' 'offshore' profits to avoid tax. Big global corporations (and despots and dictators) are the only bodies currently exploiting the worlds working class by not paying profits via taxation into our welfare, health care and education systems. This is a global scandal and needs multi-national agreement perhaps via the United Nations or World Trade Organisation to correct it. The second issue relates to wealth and time. This can be easily extended by giving working people more scope to develop talent by making education or training free at any point in life and by

limiting the wages through taxation of 'talent' who come to dominate or monopolise the mainstream media TV and radio channels. Doing things that you enjoy like acting should not cast some into poverty and others onto the Hollywood 'A' list. Soccer has the same problem. It all just looks so stupidly unfair.

Finally, the withering away of the state. Marx and Engels say this as a progressive process, not a cliff edge revolution. It begins by allowing ordinary workers to both speak to and stand up for themselves within a democracy that places political influence right down at the lowest political level. Scrapping the House of Lords and creating a new 'peoples' lower chamber comprised of the democratically elected councillors who are elected at no cost to themselves, to local government, could be the beginning. They would scrutinise national government policy based on their real worker's experience and bring the expertise of teachers and small businessmen and businesswomen and health care workers to the national debate. It would be an easy way to get the ball rolling.

So, in conclusion, when most people think of Marx they are thinking about the reality of Lenin's Russia or Mao's China not the scientific socialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels who between them created the people's, not the state's socialism.



Statues of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

NOTES

