# Marxism

## by Allan Megill and Monica Black

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## Introduction

One of the most striking features of twentieth-century history was the tremendous collective effort that people in various parts of the world devoted to trying to construct new societies on the basis of Marxist-Leninist "scientific socialism." The first spearhead of this effort was the Soviet Union (full name: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, abbreviated as USSR). Officially founded in 1922, the Soviet Union arose from the Russian October Revolution of 1917 and from the long, bloody, and destructive civil war that followed. Later, the People's Republic of China, established in 1949 after years of war and civil strife, also became influential among actual or would-be revolutionaries throughout the world. During the period of the Cold War (1946–1989), more than a third of the world's population came to live under Communist regimes. But late in 1989 the government of the USSR, under President Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931), made it clear that it would not use military force to prop up the satellite Communist regimes of eastern and central Europe, and those regimes quickly collapsed. Then in 1991 the Soviet Union itself broke up, and the Communist system was abandoned in its successor states (of which Russia was by far the largest and most powerful). In 2003 the People's Republic of China remained under Chinese Communist Party control, but its economic system was no longer socialist. Only Cuba and North Korea continued to follow the Soviet Marxist model, with its two distinctive features: (a) political control by a Communist party and (b) a command, rather than a market-based, economy.

The great Communist experiment of the twentieth century was inspired by the work of two nineteenth-century social and economic theorists and activists: Karl Marx (1818–1883) and his friend, collaborator, and popularizer Friedrich Engels (1820–1895). Indeed, it should be noted that Marx, besides being an inspirer of revolutionary communism, was also a philosopher, economist, and social scientist, whose writings have had a deep, and not always acknowledged, impact on the way that social scientists and historians, among others, look at the human world.

Marx's father, a lawyer and civil servant in Trier, in the Rhineland in western Germany, was originally Jewish, but had to convert to Christianity in order to keep

his civil service job. Marx's mother was the daughter of a well-to-do Dutch-Jewish businessman. Engels came from a committed Protestant background. His father was part-owner of textile factories (cotton) in western Germany and in Manchester, England, a major center of the early industrial revolution. Engels himself also became a partner in the business and for years helped to run its Manchester office. Without the substantial sums of money that Engels forwarded to him and that served as a kind of continuing research grant, Marx, who had a family to support, would never have been able to engage in his lengthy researches into the workings of the modern economy.

Twentieth-century Marxism-Leninism (="Soviet Communism," or "Communism" with a capital C) is not exactly the same as the theory that Karl Marx put forward in the nineteenth century. Communism in the twentieth-century sense derived from the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924), who led the Bolshevik (radical revolutionary) wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party into power in the October Revolution. One trademark of Lenin's version of Marxism was the important role it gave to a disciplined, centrally organized, "vanguard" party that was supposed to lead society into the future. Lenin also held that "imperialism"—the domination of economically dependent parts of the world by economically advanced countries—was centrally important to capitalism's functioning. In consequence, Marxism-Leninism involved strategies for revolutionizing economically "backward" countries, whereas Marx, writing in an earlier period, tended to assume that socialist revolution would succeed in the most advanced capitalist countries with little or no input from "backward" regions.

The theory that Marx and Engels put forward was a response on their part to the European economic, social, and political system in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. The young Marx and Engels believed that the conservative, somewhat repressive Prussian monarchy under which they lived was backward in comparison to the social and political systems prevailing in France, England, and the United States. They viewed the French Revolution that began in 1789 as a positive, historically progressive occurrence, and regretted only that, in their view, its radical potential had not been fulfilled and that it had ended up leaving basically intact the conservative monarchical regimes of central Europe. Marx and Engels were also well placed to notice the slow but persistent advance of what we have come to call the Industrial Revolution. It is an indication of Marx's genius that he was able to see, early in his career, that the economic processes making up the Industrial Revolution would have a huge effect on all aspects of human life and society, even in regions that in 1840 were still only on the periphery of industrialization.

A significant Marxian political movement emerged only late in the nineteenth century, after Marx's death, although already before his death small groups influenced by his views existed in many European countries, and he even had a few followers, mostly German immigrants, in the United States. The largest Marx-oriented party was the German Social Democratic Party, which in the elections of 1912 became the biggest party in the German Reichstag (legislature), in part because it

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pursued a reformist rather than a revolutionary line. World War I brought disarray and division to the European socialist movement, but also provided the occasion for Lenin and the revolutionary Bolshevik party to seize power in Russia, thus initiating the twentieth century's long "experiment" with Communism.

In the time since Marx and Engels wrote, Marxism has had a mixed history. Marx was perhaps the most optimistic follower that the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment ever had. He was an unequivocal believer in human progress. The goal at which he aimed, and toward which he believed humanity was in fact heading, was the maximum development of human potential and freedom extended to the maximum number of people. And yet the twentieth-century regimes that were established in his name ranged from deeply intrusive and meddlesome to murderous on a scale dwarfing even the crimes of the Third Reich. Accordingly, as you read through this module, you should ask yourself the following questions, which are really two sides of the same coin: What is attractive (and perhaps even true) in Marx's and Engels's views concerning human society and politics? In what respects do their views seem to have been mistaken, or, at the least, incomplete?

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# PRIMARY SOURCES

The Primary Source texts presented here are all taken from Marx's and Engels's own writings. They will give you a "feel" for Marx's way of thinking. As you read them, keep in mind two facts, already noted above, about the historical context. First, Marx and Engels were writing barely half a century after the political upheavals caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. These momentous events led many European thinkers to ponder how and why historical change takes place. Second, at the time that Marx and Engels were embarking on their careers, the Industrial Revolution was beginning to have an impact on European life. Today we take it for granted that we live in a restlessly dynamic economic system, in which commodities, and the conditions under which they are produced, are always changing. But the dynamic, expanding character of the modern industrial economy was not so obvious in the 1840s. Marx was one of the first economists to see continual change (with periods of expansion far outweighing those of crisis and contraction) as one of the central features of the modern economy.

Marx did not begin his career as an economist. Mainly because of his father's wishes, he began his studies in the field of law, at the University of Bonn, where he matriculated in October 1835. In fall 1836 he moved to the much more important University of Berlin. Shortly thereafter, he shifted his interests from law to philosophy. In April 1841 he obtained a doctorate in the field of philosophy, having written a dissertation on a topic in the history of ancient Greek philosophy. Marx's philosophical studies had a deep impact on his social theory. For this reason, the first section below, "Marx the Young Radical Philosopher," offers two excerpts from Marx's early period of philosophical study (1837–1841). Next, after a brief period working as a journalist and as the editor of a newspaper (1842–early 1843), Marx for the first time launched into a serious study of political theory and then of economic theory, and rapidly began to develop his own independent views on modern society and on human history in general. The second section, "Marx Discovers the Proletariat," includes three excerpts, dating from late 1843–44, in which Marx discusses the proletariat—the working class—in whose name and on whose behalf he claimed to write. The third section, "Marx and Engels on Alienation," includes two excerpts, dating from late summer 1844 and from 1845 or 1846, that introduce a theme that would never disappear from Marx's work, that of alienation or estrangement. (The second excerpt is taken from a work that Marx co-authored with Friedrich Engels, with whom he began to work closely in late summer 1844). Finally, the fourth section, "Class Struggle, Progress, and the End of Capitalism," includes a lengthy set of excerpts from Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). *The Communist Manifesto* gives an excellent overview of Marx's conception of modern economics, society, and politics as of that year. The fourth section also includes two much shorter excerpts, one from Marx's major work, *Capital* (1867), and the other

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from Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), a popular account of Marx's theories. In these excerpts the two authors discuss, respectively, the collapse of the modern bourgeois economic system, a.k.a. capitalism, and the beginnings of socialism.

Some of the Primary Source excerpts, especially the initial, philosophical excerpts, are quite difficult. It may help you in reading them if you keep your eyes open for the following underlying, and not always completely obvious, assumptions: (a) human beings can come to see the world as it really is, in its essence; (b) human beings ought to be able to live free, active, fulfilling, unalienated lives; (c) humanity is moving toward a future society in which there will be "universal emancipation" (freedom); and (d) to the extent that the world still lacks rationality and order, these can be brought about.

## Marx the Young Radical Philosopher (1837, 1839)

*Both the following excerpts show the impact on Marx of the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). Hegel, a 19-year-old theology student when the French Revolution broke out, became the most prominent philosopher in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century. Marked by the world-shattering events of the Revolution, Hegel attempted in his philosophy to take account of historical change. More precisely, he tried to show how "spirit" or "mind" [Geist], which in Hegel's philosophy includes all human institutions (family, civil society, the state, art, religion, philosophy, science), develops in a continuing process over time. In putting forward his historical, developmental philosophy, he introduced the notion of a historical dialectic—a dialectic of history. In ancient Greek philosophy, "dialectic" referred to rational debate among philosophers, as follows: a philosopher puts forward a proposition or theory; another philosopher contradicts the first philosopher; and a debate ensues that generates a new position in which the contradiction is resolved. Explicitly, in his posthumously published Lectures on the History of Philosophy (1833–1836), and implicitly in other works, Hegel presented history as if it were just such a debate. The young Marx picked up on this idea, but with some differences. Most important, the young Marx thought that Hegel was too conservative—too favorably inclined toward the existing political order, and thus too willing to think that every significant contradiction had already been resolved.*

*The first of the following two excerpts is from a letter that the 19 1/2-year-old Marx wrote to his father, back home in Trier, on the night of November 10/early morning of November 11, 1837. In the letter Marx describes in detail his studies during his first year at the University of Berlin. The letter shows us a young student of philosophy and law who wanted to understand the world in a unified, rational way, and who was also interested in how the world ought to be, as well as in how it actually is.*

*The second excerpt is from a notebook that Marx wrote up in 1839 while working on his doctoral dissertation. Here the young Ph. D. student, now aged 21,*

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*suggests that there is a connection between philosophy and radicalism. In particular, he suggests that Hegelian philosophy has gone as far as it can as philosophy. Now it must become "practical"—that is, it must intervene in the world in order to change it. Marx imagines something like a debate between philosophy on the one hand and the unphilosophical world on the other. Unlike people who think that things are perfect the way they are, and unlike people who want some change but are content with compromise and half-measures, the young Marx wanted to intensify conflict. He wanted to make conflict "extreme," in the hope that this would force both philosophy and the world to change.*

*In the 1837 excerpt, how does the 19-year-old Marx think that "law, the state, nature, and philosophy" ought to be studied, and why do you think that he thinks this? In the 1839 excerpt, what new role does Marx seem to be attributing to philosophy? In the two excerpts, what role does conflict "between what is and what ought to be" seem to play in Marx's thinking?*

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*After my arrival in Berlin, I broke off all hitherto existing connections, made visits rarely and unwillingly, and tried to immerse myself in science and art.

In accordance with my state of mind at the time, lyrical poetry was bound to be my first subject, at least the most pleasant and immediate one. But owing to my attitude and whole previous development it was purely idealistic. My heaven, my art, became a world beyond. . . .

Poetry, however, could be and had to be only an accompaniment; I had to study law and above all felt the urge to wrestle with philosophy. . . . I . . . tried to elaborate a philosophy of law covering the whole field of law. . . .

Here, above all, the same opposition between what is and what ought to be . . . stood out as a serious defect. . . . From the outset an obstacle to grasping the truth . . . was the unscientific form of mathematical dogmatism, in which the author argues hither and thither, going round and round the subject dealt with, without the latter taking shape as something living and developing in a many-sided way. A triangle gives the mathematician scope for construction and proof, it remains a mere abstract conception in space and does not develop into anything further. It has to be put alongside something else, then it assumes other positions, and this diversity added to it gives it different relationships and truths. On the other hand, in the concrete expression of a living world of ideas, as exemplified by law, the state, nature, and philosophy as a whole, the object itself must be studied in its development; . . . the rational character of the object itself must develop as something imbued with contradictions in itself and find its unity in itself.

*Excerpted from Karl Marx, "Letter from Marx to His Father in Trier," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 1 (New York, 1975–2003), 11–12.

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*[I]n the history of philosophy there are nodal points which raise philosophy in itself to concretion . . . so also there are moments when philosophy turns its eyes to the external world, and no longer apprehends it, but, as a practical person, weaves, as it were, intrigues with the world. . . . It is essential that philosophy should then wear character masks. . . . [A]s Prometheus [an ancient Greek god], having stolen fire from heaven, begins to build houses and to settle upon the earth, so philosophy, expanded to be the whole world, turns against the world of appearance. The same now with the philosophy of Hegel.

While philosophy has sealed itself off to form a consummate, total world, the determination of this totality is conditioned by the general development of philosophy, just as that development is the condition of the form in which philosophy turns into a practical relationship towards reality; thus the totality of the world in general is divided within itself, and this division is carried to the extreme . . . The division of the world is total only when its aspects are totalities. The world confronting a philosophy total in itself is therefore a world torn apart.

## Marx Discovers the Proletariat (1843–44)

*In October 1843 Marx moved to Paris, where he planned to edit a radical journal (the progressive newspaper that he had edited in Germany in 1842–43 had been closed down by the Prussian censorship authorities, and France was freer than the German lands were). Paris was the largest city on the European continent, with a population in 1841 of 935,000. It had a thriving intellectual and cultural life. It also had a very large working class (made up of artisans, not of workers in large factories), who had developed their own working-class culture and institutions. Furthermore, several tens of thousands of these workers were, like Marx, Germans, who had migrated to Paris to practice their trades in a city that offered a lot of employment. Finally, there was a good deal of discontent with the existing government and with the existing political system—which would in fact fall to a revolution in February 1848. Not surprisingly, Marx found this environment both enlightening and stimulating. He first turned with greater intensity to a study of politics. Then, beginning in summer 1844, he undertook for the first time a serious study of economic theory, writing, from May/June through August 1844, a manuscript that we know as the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" or, alternatively, as the "Paris Manuscripts." Economics now became the center of Marx's intellectual attentions, pushing his political studies aside. We can justly say that what we call Marxism was born in Paris in the summer of 1844.*

*The first excerpt, below, is taken from "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," written in late 1843–January 1844 and*

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*Excerpted from Karl Marx, "Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 1 (New York, 1975–2003), 491.

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*published in February 1844. Here, for the first time, Marx announces his "discovery" of the role to be played by the proletariat (note that this was before Marx had engaged in any serious study of economics). The second and third excerpts are descriptions of the culture and spirit of the workers, as observed by Marx in Paris in late 1843–44. The descriptions are taken from the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," and from a letter that Marx wrote in August 1844 to the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach.*

> *What, according to Marx in the excerpts below, will be the main agent bringing about a transformation of the existing social order? How is Marx's position on this point different from his position in 1839? In the two excerpts from summer 1844, what special qualities does Marx attribute to the proletarians (artisans, workers)? What differences, or even contradictions, seem to exist between Marx's account of proletarians in the first excerpt and his account in the second and third excerpt?*

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*The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. . . .

Where, then, is the *positive* possibility of a German emancipation?

*Answer*: In the formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong* but *wrong generally* is perpetrated against it; which can no longer invoke a *historical* but only a *human* title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in an all-round antithesis to the premises of the German state; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man and hence can win itself only through the *complete rewinning of man*. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*.

The proletariat is coming into being in Germany only as a result of the rising *industrial* development. For it is not the *naturally arising* poor but the *artificially impoverished*, not the human masses mechanically oppressed by the gravity of society but the masses resulting from the *drastic dissolution* of society, mainly of the middle estate, that form the proletariat. . . .

As philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has

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*Excerpted from Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 3 (New York, 1975–2003), 182, 186–87.

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squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people the emancipation of the *Germans* into *human beings* will take place.

*When communist *artisans* associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need—the need for society—and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring them together. Association, society and conversation, which again has association as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.

*You would have to attend one of the meetings of the French workers to appreciate the pure freshness, the nobility which burst forth from these toil-worn men. The English proletarian is also advancing with giant strides but he lacks the cultural background of the French. But I must not forget to emphasise the theoretical merits of the German artisans in Switzerland, London and Paris. The German artisan is still however too much of an artisan.

## Marx and Engels on Alienation (1844–46)

*The two excerpts below give an account of the "estrangement" or "alienation" that Marx believed workers suffer from within a society based on production for the market. The first excerpt is taken from Marx's notes and comments on the work of a famous British economist, James Mill (1773–1836). Marx wrote these comments sometime after May/June 1844, probably shortly after writing the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts." In this excerpt Marx asserts that workers under capitalism are "estranged"—that is, separated—from other human beings and from their own individuality, and he envisages a future society, not based on production for the market, in which estrangement will be overcome.*

*The second excerpt is taken from Marx and Engels's* The German Ideology *(1845–46), a work that Marx co-wrote while living in Brussels, Belgium. (The French authorities, as a favor to the Prussian authorities, who regarded Marx as a dangerous provocateur, expelled him from France in January 1845.) In this excerpt Marx and Engels imagine the character of dis-estranged, fulfilling labor in a future communist society.*

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*Excerpted from Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 3 (New York, 1975–2003), 313.

*Excerpted from Karl Marx, "Letter from Karl Marx to Ludwig Feuerbach," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 3 (New York, 1975–2003), 355.

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*In the first excerpt, to what extent does it seem that Marx is arguing that individual freedom ought to be subordinated to what is good for the group as a whole? Does Marx's position surprise you? According to the second excerpt, how will life in the future communist (socialist) society differ from the way it is now? In either of the two excerpts, does it appear that any sort of coercive power or authority is needed in order to keep production organized? If so, what is that power?*

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*Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings [rather than to be exchanged on the market]. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person. 1) In my *production* I would have objectified [that is, put into the object that I make] my *individuality*, its *specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt*. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *man*'s essential nature, and having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *man*'s essential nature. 3) I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the [human] species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal nature*.

Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature.

This relationship would moreover be reciprocal; what occurs on my side has also to occur on yours. . . .

My work would be a *free manifestation of life*, hence an *enjoyment of life*. Presupposing private property, my work is an *alienation of life*, for I work *in order to live*, in order to obtain for myself the *means* of life. My work *is not* my life.

[T]he *specific nature* of my individuality, therefore, would be affirmed in my labour, since the latter would be an affirmation of my *individual* life. Labour therefore would be *true*, *active property*. Presupposing private property, my individuality is alienated to such a degree that this *activity* is instead *hateful* to me, a *torment*, and rather the *semblance* [illusion] of an activity. Hence, too, it is only a *forced* activity

*Excerpted from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Comments on James Mill's *Èlémens d'économie politiques*," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 3 (New York, 1975–2003), 227–28.

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and one imposed on me only through an *external* fortuitous need, *not* through an *inner*, *essential* one.

*[A]s long as man remains in naturally evolved society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.

## Class Struggle, Progress, and the End of Capitalism (1848, 1867, 1880)

*Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*

*There are three excerpts in this section. The first, and by far the longest, comes from Marx and Engels's 1848 pamphlet,* The Communist Manifesto*. This is followed by two very short excerpts from, respectively, Marx's* Capital *(1867) and Engels's* Socialism: Utopian and Scientific *(1880).*

*The selections from* The Communist Manifesto *are the most important reading in the present module. Here Marx and Engels are trying to do what Marx, in the 1839 notebook excerpt, above, suggested ought to be done—that is, they are trying to intervene "against the world of appearance." Marx and Engels wrote the* Manifesto of the Communist Party *in December 1847/January 1848. It was first published (with the authors' names not given) in February 1848. At almost the very moment that* The Communist Manifesto *appeared in print, the "February Revolution" broke out in France. (In turn, the revolution in France was followed by other revolutions in western and central Europe.) It should be noted, however, that the* Manifesto *had no impact at all on events. It only became widely read after about 1883. In that year the German Social Democratic Party published an edition of 10,000 copies, a large print run at the time. In German and in other languages it became a standard introduction to Marxism, and has remained so ever since.*

*Excerpted from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The German Ideology," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 5 (New York, 1975–2003), 47.

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*By "proletarians," Marx and Engels mean workers in large-scale mechanized industry. By bourgeoisie, they mean hard-driving entrepreneurial businessmen, whom they see as carrying capitalism to its heights—and to its destruction.*

*A "manifesto" is not necessarily an accurate statement of fact. In 1848 the "spectre" haunting Europe, namely, communism, was for the most part exactly that—a spectre (or hobgoblin) existing in people's imaginations and not in reality. But after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 put real Communists into real power, the* Manifesto *took on new life, at least in the non-Communist world and especially in the United States, as the authoritative primer on The Communist Threat.*

*The second excerpt in this section is drawn from Marx's* Capital, *volume 1 (1867). (Marx never actually completed any volumes beyond volume 1.) The revolutions of 1848 failed to live up to Marx's radical hopes. In consequence, in August–September 1849 he and his family moved to London. Here, besides engaging in radical organizing activity, he carried out research into the capitalist economy, using the resources of the great British Museum Library.* Capital *was the outcome of Marx's research. The excerpt from* Capital *focuses on the collapse of capitalism.*

*The third excerpt is drawn from the conclusion of Engels's pamphlet,* Socialism: Utopian and Scientific *(1880). Here Engels alludes to the disappearance, from future socialism, of two things: the "anarchy of production" characteristic of the market, and the "political authority of the state." Instead, politics and the market will be replaced by planning. The outcome, Engels suggests, will be universal human freedom.*

> *In the Communist Manifesto passages, do Marx and Engels approve or disapprove of the (alleged) activities of the bourgeoisie? Does their position surprise you in any way? In the two shorter excerpts, to what degree do Marx and Engels seem to think that the transition from capitalism to socialism requires conscious political struggle on the part of the proletariat? In Marx and Engels's view as expressed in these three excerpts, what is the ultimate source of historical change?*

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*A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies.

Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as Communistic by its opponents in power? Where [is] the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?

*Excerpted from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 6 (New York, 1975–2003), 481, 482, 485-86, 487-92, 493, 494-95, 496.

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Two things result from this fact:

I. Communism is already acknowledged by all European Powers to be itself a Power.
II. It is high time that Communists should openly, in the face of the whole world, publish their views, their aims, their tendencies, and meet this nursery tale of the Spectre of Communism with a Manifesto of the party itself.

To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London and sketched the following Manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages. . . .

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. . . .

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. . . .

The modern Bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. . . .

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development. . . .

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacture no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture [production by hand] was taken by the giant, Modern Industry, the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages. . . .

Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance that class. An oppressed class under the sway of the feudal nobility, . . . the bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.

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The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. . . . It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. . . . [F]or exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.

The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation into a mere money relation.

The bourgeoisie . . . has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former Exoduses of nations and crusades.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. . . . Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.

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The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie . . . has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. . . .

The bourgeoisie . . . has agglomerated population, centralised means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.

The bourgeoisie . . . has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground—what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?

We see then: the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder. . . .

A similar movement is going on before our own eyes. Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells. For many a decade past the history of industry and commerce is but the history of the revolt of modern productive forces against modern conditions of production, against the property relations that are the conditions for the existence of the bourgeoisie and of its rule. It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois society. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, are periodically destroyed. In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity—the epidemic of over-production. . . . The productive forces

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at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions, by which they are fettered, and so soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property. The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them. And how does the bourgeoisie get over these crises? On the one hand by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces; on the other, by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones. That is to say, by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises, and by diminishing the means whereby crises are prevented.

The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself.

But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, *i.e.*, capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed—a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. . . .

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker [supervisor], and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. . . .

. . . Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex.

The lower strata of the middle class—the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants—all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which Modern Industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialised skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production. Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population. . . .

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. . . [W]ith the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more. The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalised, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labour, and nearly everywhere reduces wages to the same low level. The growing competition among the bourgeois, and the resulting commercial crises, make the wages of the workers ever more fluctuating. The unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their livelihood more and more precarious. . . . [T]he workers begin to form combinations (Trades' Unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts. Here and there the contest breaks out into riots.

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle. And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years. . . .

. . . The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests. . . .

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air. . . .

The essential condition for the existence, and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage-labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

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*That which is now [at the end of capitalism] to be expropriated is no longer the labourer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many labourers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent [inherent] laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralisation of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever-extending scale, the co-operative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common. . . . Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. . . . Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument [outer covering, shell, husk]. Thus integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

**Proletarian Revolution* . . . The proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property. By this act, the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne, and gives their socialised character complete freedom to work itself out. Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible. . . . In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the State dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master—free.

To accomplish this act of universal emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat.

*Excerpted from Karl Marx, "Capital," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 35 (New York, 1975–2003), 750.

*Excerpted from Friedrich Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works,* Vol. 24 (New York, 1975–2003), 325.

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## Primary Source Questions

1. What impact does Marx's early philosophical concern with studying an object "in its development" and in seeing the object as "imbued with contradictions" [1837 letter] seem to have had on his social theory—as manifested in, for example, *The Communist Manifesto*?
2. What impact does the young Marx's concern with overcoming the opposition between "what is and what ought to be" [1837 letter] seem to have had on his social theory?
3. What role is played in Marx's social theory by the notion of dialectic (that is, the notion that progress occurs by the clash of opposing ideas or forces)? To what extent do you find this idea to be illuminating or persuasive?

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## Secondary Sources

Marx was one of the greatest philosophers and social thinkers not only of the nineteenth century but also of the modern world generally. The range of his interests was vast, and on many of the topics he discussed he had interesting things to say. The English edition of Marx and Engels's *Collected Works*, which is not actually a complete edition, takes up fifty volumes, and the critical edition of their complete writings, not yet finished, contains well over one hundred volumes. But only a few specialized scholars would pay attention to these writings if it were not for the fact that Marx (and Engels) provided the main theoretical basis for Communist revolution and Communist regimes in the twentieth century.

Communism and the Soviet system constituted one of the defining realities of twentieth-century history. It is hardly surprising, then, that the merits and demerits both of Communism and of Marx's own views were extensively debated over the course of that century. These issues continue to be debated today. The following selections, which focus on the applicability (or not) of Marx's theories to the real world, represent only a tiny segment of the vast literature on Marx and Marxism. Still, the selections will give you some sense of the issues that surrounded—and still surround—Marx's (and Engels's) ideas.

All the authors excerpted below address a single and obvious theme. In one way or another, they are all concerned with assessing Marx's theory. In what respects has it turned out to be correct in its descriptions and predictions, and in what respects incorrect? Some authors are also concerned with another, closely related issue, namely, the existential and/or moral standing of Marx and Engels's vision of human life.

Of course, Marx (assisted by Engels) was a prolific researcher and author (the two men were also deeply involved in organizational activity intended to promote their views). Consequently, Marxist theory has many different aspects, and many different things to agree or disagree with. Marx offers a theory of human history in general. He offers a theory of modern bourgeois society (capitalism). He offers a doctrine of revolution, claiming that the transition to something beyond the current order cannot be a matter of mere incremental improvements, but must instead involve a radical change. He makes various claims about the proletariat (the working class): it will become larger; it will become more unified; it will become progressively more impoverished; and it will develop a revolutionary self-consciousness. He adheres to certain highly optimistic views concerning human nature. He has a tremendous faith in the power of rationality, of science. He believes that religion, nationality, and other non-rational and/or merely local commitments will progressively decline in importance. He believes that the efficiency of a scientifically administered economy will significantly exceed the efficiency of an economy based on private property and on the supposed anarchy of the market. All these aspects of Marxian theory are subject to debate, and to rejection or revision.

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# Emergence of Revisionist Marxism

*Felix Gilbert*

*Felix Gilbert (1905–91) was born in Germany, of Jewish ancestry although not of Jewish religion. In 1936, like many Germans targeted by the Third Reich's racial laws, he emigrated, going to the United States, where he eventually became professor of history at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N. J. In this selection Gilbert focuses on "inner contradictions" in Marxist theory that became evident once large-scale socialist political movements got under way—as happened, especially in Germany, after about 1890.*

> *According to Gilbert, what dilemma was imposed on socialists by Marx and Engels's claim (central to what is called "orthodox Marxism") that under capitalism the condition of the proletariat cannot improve? Why did some socialists agree with Bernstein that gradual evolution (revisionism) rather than revolution is the best path toward achieving socialism? Why did other socialists reject Bernstein's view?*

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*The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the formation in almost all European countries of political parties which called themselves socialist or social democratic. These parties shared the main tenets of the political creed which Karl Marx (1818–1883) had formulated. Before the First World War the most powerful socialist party was the German Social Democratic party. Its program, named after Erfurt, the town where it was adopted in 1891, was written with the cooperation of the aged Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), Marx's friend and collaborator. The Erfurt Program, subsequently the model for the programs of all the European socialist parties, was based on a few clear and simple tenets. Fundamental was the Marxist assumption that every society consisted of classes determined by economic interests, and every political struggle was actually a struggle between different economic classes. Thus, no improvement of the economic situation of the workers could be expected without a political revolution in which the workers would wrest power from the capitalist ruling group. By this transfer of power the means of production would fall into the hands of the proletariat; private property would be replaced by common possession of all goods; and the results of labor could be distributed to the benefit of all. Everyone would receive according to his needs. . . .

The socialist doctrine had obvious attractions for the workers who were outsiders in the prewar society. But the doctrine had inner contradictions: If society had to be

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*Excerpted from Felix Gilbert, *The End of the European Era, 1890 to the Present,* 2d ed. (New York, 1979),18–19, 20.

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entirely transformed, was it meaningful to work for its democratization? If the collapse of capitalism was historically inevitable, what justification was there for forming political parties and for undertaking a political struggle? These contradictions became the more puzzling because the actual political and economic situation in the prewar years did not develop according to the Marxian scheme. Economic crises did not become more frequent or more serious. Indeed, no serious economic crisis arose between 1890 and 1914; in general there was an upward trend in the standard of living on the Continent. By 1900 the wages of skilled workers were almost double those of unskilled workers, and the skilled workers were able to accumulate some reserves. . . .

. . . Some socialists suggested that evolution rather than revolution was the way to socialism. Since the workers would slowly become a majority, it might be possible, they thought, to achieve the transition to socialism gradually, by a democratic process. The originator of this theory was a German socialist, Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), who had been impressed by improvements in the situation of the working classes in Great Britain during the nineteenth century. Revisionism, as the movement was called, was particularly influential in Great Britain and Germany, countries with highly developed industrial systems, where the workers received some of the benefits of economic progress. In Spain, France, and Russia, where industrialization was still in its infancy, and where the governments looked with disfavor upon demands of the workers that might retard the process of industrialization, socialists rejected the entire doctrine of Revisionism. In the meetings of the [Socialist] International, the views of the Revisionists were debated, but they never became official socialist doctrine. The demand for revolution was maintained.

## Freedom from Economics

*Robert C. Tucker*

*Robert C. Tucker (b. 1918), long a professor of politics at Princeton University, has written extensively on Marxism, Communism, and the Soviet Union. Although Marx is often referred to as an "economic determinist," Tucker argues that this is an extremely misleading way of thinking of his theory. In this selection Tucker points out that Marx thought that human beings would eventually be able to get beyond economics altogether.*

*According to Tucker, why did Marx and Engels not discuss the economics of communism? Why did they believe that all human needs would be satisfied under communism? Why did they think that, under communism, production would be much more efficient than it is under capitalism?*

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*Since Marx and Engels believe that every form of society fundamentally *is* its mode of production, most of what they have to say about the future communist society . . . is naturally concerned with the anticipated new mode of productive activity. But the latter . . . is not analyzed in economic terms. This omission of an economics of communism from the theory of Marx and Engels is entirely logical considering that part of what they mean by communism is *the end of economics*. They assume that with the emancipation of the immensely potent productive forces inherent in modern machine industry from the "fetters" of capitalist wage labor, there will very soon be created a material abundance so great as to satisfy all proper human needs. At this point . . . the historic scarcity of goods and resources ceases and therewith the need for economics as a theory and practice of allocation of scarce goods and resources. "And at this point," writes Engels, "man in a certain sense separates finally from the animal world, leaves the conditions of animal existence behind him, and enters conditions which are really human. . . . It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom." For Marx and Engels this "leap" is a take-off not into affluence as such but into the authentically human higher form of existence that man's creative and artistic nature, as they see it, naturally tends toward and for which material well-being is no more than a precondition.

## Marx's Faith in the Unbounded Power of Human Self-Creation

*Leszek Kolakowski*

*Leszek Kolakowski (b. 1927) is a Polish philosopher who was forced out of Communist Poland in 1968 for political reasons and became a research fellow in philosophy at Oxford University. In this selection he emphasizes Marx's optimism and, in particular, his dismissal of certain contingent, non-rational, and limiting aspects of the human condition that Kolakowski believes should not be ignored—such things as disease, death, aggression, sexual desire, and evil.*

*According to Kolakowski, what, in Marx's view, was capitalism conquering, and what, in its turn, would socialism (communism) conquer? What, in Marx's view, would be the most important thing that the proletariat would achieve? What is the fundamental defect of Marxism?*

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*Excerpted from Robert C. Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (New York, 1969), 29.

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*Marx was certain that the proletariat as the collective Prometheus would, in the universal revolution, sweep away the age-long contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the species. In this way, too, capitalism was the harbinger of socialism. By smashing the power of tradition, brutally rousing nations from their slumbers, revolutionizing production, and liberating fresh human forces, capitalism had made a civilization in which man for the first time was able to show what he could do. . . . It was pitifully sentimental to upbraid capitalism in the hope of stopping or diverting its victorious advance. The conquest of nature must go forward; in the next stage, men would achieve mastery over the social conditions of progress.

A typical feature of Marx's Prometheanism is his lack of interest in the natural (as opposed to economic) conditions of human existence. . . . Man is wholly defined in purely social terms; the physical limitations of his being are scarcely noticed. Marxism takes little or no account of the fact that people are born and die, that they are men or women, young or old, healthy or sick; that they are genetically unequal, and that all these circumstances affect social development irrespective of the class division, and set bounds to human plans for perfecting the world. Marx did not believe in the essential finitude and limitation of man, or the obstacles to his creativity. Evil and suffering, in his eyes, had no meaning except as instruments of liberation; they were purely social facts, not an essential part of the human condition. . . .

. . . Marx can scarcely admit that man is limited either by his body or by geographical conditions. . . . [H]e refused to believe in the possibility of absolute overpopulation. . . .

Marx's ignoring of the body and physical death, sex and aggression, geography and human fertility—all of which he turns into purely social realities—is one of the most characteristic yet most neglected features of his Utopia.

## Proletarian Revolution: A Failed Marxian Prediction

*Richard. F. Hamilton*

*Richard F. Hamilton (b. 1930) is Professor Emeritus of Sociology and Political Science at the Ohio State University; previously he taught at McGill University and at various other colleges and universities. In this selection he assesses the empirical validity of Marx and Engels's predictions concerning proletarian revolution.*

> *According to Hamilton, how successful has proletarian revolution been in the major capitalist countries? How did the revolutions that actually did occur differ from what Marx and Engels anticipated? What conclusion needs to be drawn concerning Marx and Engels's views on revolution?*

*Excerpted from Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*, trans. P. S. Falla, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1978), 412–14.

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*The proletarian revolution: Marx and Engels . . . anticipated that the workers' revolution would occur in the downswing of the next economic cycle. The economic collapse would aggravate workers' grievances and, simultaneously, demonstrate clearly the basic failure of capitalism. . . . But the predicted revolution did not occur. Britain, the central case for their argument, never experienced a proletarian revolution. Almost a century after the *Manifesto*, the Labour Party secured a parliamentary majority and, in the next legislative session, instituted sweeping changes, including the socialization of much heavy industry. But even that belated achievement proved disappointing. It did not bring a "qualitative transformation" in the lives of workers.

France had a revolution in 1848, which inadvertently overturned the July monarchy and brought in the Second Republic. A working-class uprising occurred in Paris in June of that year. In his first historical monograph, Marx declared the "June days" to be a decisive struggle, a preview of events to come. As history, the monograph was a poor achievement. At almost every point, Marx cut and distorted so as to give plausibility to his larger claims. The next working-class uprising came two decades later, again in Paris and again it was defeated. Marx wrote his third (and last) historical monograph on this occasion. He again depicted the event as providing proof for his basic claims. No proletarian revolution occurred in the ensuing century. . . .

On the last page of the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote, "The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany. . . ." A month after publication, a revolution did occur in Germany and two bourgeois notables took office. . . . But within months the two were out of office and a somewhat wiser old regime was back in power. No subsequent bourgeois revolution followed.

In November 1918, at the end of World War I, a revolution occurred in Germany and brought in a socialist government. . . . But the first election, in mid-January 1919, failed to produce a socialist majority. . . . Within two years, the socialists were out of power and were replaced, in a reversal of the predicted sequence, by a succession of "bourgeois" governments. There was no subsequent proletarian revolution.

In the course of Marx and Engels's lifetimes, it was clear that the United States was the rising capitalist nation and, given the trend lines, was destined to eclipse Britain. . . . In this case, the basic prediction was modified and an evolutionary possibility was indicated. Socialism might come to the United States through a gradual electoral advance. But that expectation also failed. The American Socialist Party gained its greatest success in the 1912 presidential election: 6.2 percent of the total.

The basic conclusion to be drawn from this review of the four leading capitalist nations is that the central Marx-Engels proposition, imminent working-class revolution, was not supported. Marx and Engels attempted to save the proposition with revised claims about the timing, but that merely avoided the obvious conclusion.

*Excerpted from Richard F. Hamilton, *Marxism, Revisionism, and Leninism: Explication, Assessment, and Commentary* (Westport, CT, 2000), 74–75.

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# It Might Still be Rational to Bet on Marxian Socialism, in Spite of Past Failures

*Wallis Arthur Suchting*

*Wallis Arthur Suchting (1931–1997) taught philosophy at the University of Sydney. In this selection, Suchting, admitting that we can no longer see socialism/communism as the inevitable outcome of the historical process, argues that it is still rational to wager that a future socialist/communist society might be possible, and to make this wager the basis for political activity in the present.*

> *According to Suchting, why is Communism now "a ghost of the dead" rather than a hobgoblin haunting the present and future? What accounts for the fact that, so far, socialism has failed to replace capitalism? On what grounds can we still justify to ourselves adherence to "a socialist/communist political programme"?*

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*[T]he idea of the vanguard role of communists is dead. But what of the general goal of communism. . . ?

It is clear that this is also dead in the sense that there exists no social force with any claim to be taken seriously as a historical agent which has that goal on its political agenda, and that it is completely unlikely that one will exist within the however remotely foreseeable future. To the extent that, in the opening words of the *Manifesto*, 'A spectre haunts the land of Europe—the spectre of communism', that spectre is not a premonition, terrifying to capitalists, of what is to come, but a ghost of the dead, and the following claim that 'Communism is already recognised as a force by all the European powers' at best a report about the past.

The reasons for this are complex. On the one hand, they include capitalism's success so far in surviving its colossal internal economic and general social problems. On the other, they include the failure of all attempts so far to realise anything even distantly like the sort of communist programme which Marx envisaged: every 'actually existing socialism' has been, or become more or less rapidly, economically dysfunctional and/or inegalitarian, and also politically repressive.

Of course, it is true that many different explanations, in terms of specific historical factors, have been given for such failures. However, even if there is some adequate explanation for each, this would provide no positive ground whatsoever for

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*Excerpted from Wallis Arthur Suchting, "What is Living and What is Dead in the *Communist Manifesto*?" in *The* Communist Manifesto*: New Interpretations*, ed. Mark Cowling (New York, 1998), 162–63.

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thinking that some future and reasonably lasting communist mode of organisation of society is achievable, that future ventures will not fail, even if, each time, for explicable reasons.

If history so far furnishes no actual examples of successful socialist/communist projects then it furnishes no rational grounds for believing that they are really possible in the future.

However, if we discount crudely inductivist arguments from past failures, neither does it afford rational grounds for believing that such projects are really impossible.

Indeed the historical facts are consistent with a rational gamble on a socialist/communist political programme. To start with, it needs to be established, as far as anything of the sort can be, that the ultimate goal of such a programme offers the best available theoretical alternative to capitalism, in, as Brecht [a twentieth-century playwright] put it, 'these dark times', present and future. Then it can be further argued in the following way that it is rational to pursue such a programme without any prior knowledge of the possibility of its success. If the programme is in fact achievable (though we cannot know this to be so), and if pursuing it is a necessary condition for achieving it, then it is rational to pursue it. If the programme is not in fact achievable (though again we cannot know this to be so) then pursuing it is, hopefully, merely futile. . . .

This sort of consideration may well be pretty thin gruel to offer to an understandably desperate appetite for hope. But there is no point in denying that, at the present time, we can see humanity's historical prospects, even in the fairly short term, through a glass at best only very darkly. The fact is that, in general, there is an irreducible element of contingency in history and therefore in politics . . . which should bate too immoderate a desire for programmatic certainties of any sort.

## Communism is a Capitalist Fantasy

*Slavoj Žižek*

*Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949) is a prolific psychoanalyst and philosopher who grew up in Slovenia, which, until it became an independent country in 1991, was the northwestern-most republic in Yugoslavia. Žižek thus had the interesting experience of growing up under the Yugoslavian Communist regime. A researcher at the University of Ljubljana and a frequently lecturer at universities around the world, Žižek has written many books on philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics, and popular culture.*

*According to Žižek, what was the fundamental mistake in Marx's view of capitalism? In what respects was Marx right about capitalism? What was the fundamental mistake in Marx's view of communism?*

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*Precisely as Marxists, in the interests of our fidelity to Marx's work, we should identify Marx's mistake: he perceived how capitalism unleashed the breathtaking dynamics of self-enhancing productivity—see his fascinated descriptions of how, in capitalism, 'all things solid melt into thin air', of how capitalism is the greatest revolutionizer in the entire history of humanity; on the other hand, he also clearly perceived how this capitalist dynamics is propelled by its own inner obstacle or antagonism—the ultimate limit of capitalism (of self-propelling capitalist productivity) is Capital itself, that is, the incessant development and revolutionizing of capitalism's own material conditions, the mad dance of its unconditional spiral of productivity, is ultimately nothing but a desperate forward flight to escape its own debilitating inherent contradiction. . . .

Marx's fundamental mistake was to conclude, from these insights, that a new, higher social order (Communism) is possible, an order that would not only maintain but even raise to a higher degree, and effectively fully release, the potential of the self-increasing spiral of productivity which in capitalism, on account of its inherent obstacle/contradiction is thwarted again and again by socially destructive economic crises. . . . [But] if we abolish the obstacle, the inherent contradiction of capitalism, we do not get the fully unleashed drive to productivity finally delivered of its impediment, we lose precisely this productivity that seemed to be generated and simultaneously thwarted by capitalism. . . . So, in a way, the critics of Communism were right when they claimed that Marxian Communism is an impossible fantasy—what they did not perceive is that Marxian Communism, this notion of a society of pure unleashed productivity *outside* the frame of Capital, was a fantasy inherent to capitalism itself, . . . a strictly *ideological* [distorted and self-serving] fantasy of maintaining the thrust towards productivity generated by capitalism, while getting rid of the 'obstacles' and antagonisms that were—as the sad experience of 'actually existing capitalism' demonstrates—*the only possible framework of the actual material existence of a society of permanent self-enhancing productivity.*

. . . [T]he standard Communist project was . . . not *radical enough*—in so far as, in it, the fundamental capitalist thrust of unleashed productivity survived, deprived of its concrete contradictory conditions of existence. . . . '[A]ctually existing Socialism' failed because it was ultimately a subspecies of capitalism, an ideological attempt to 'have one's cake and eat it', to break out of capitalism while retaining its key ingredient.

. . . Marx's notion of Communist society is itself the inherent capitalist fantasy—a fantasmatic scenario for resolving the capitalist antagonism he so aptly described. . . . The task of today's thought is thus double: on the one hand, how to *repeat* the Marxist 'critique of political economy' without the utopian-ideological notion of Communism as its inherent standard; on the other, how to imagine actu-

*Excerpted from Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London, 2000), 17–18, 19–20.

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ally breaking out of the capitalist horizon *without* falling into the trap of returning to the eminently *premodern* notion of a balanced, (self-)restrained society.

## Putting the Communist Ideal and Program into Practice Leads to Disaster

*Richard Pipes*

*Richard Pipes (b. 1923) is Baird Professor of History Emeritus at Harvard University. He has written extensively on the history of the Soviet Union. In 1981–82 he was President Reagan's National Security Council adviser on Soviet and East European affairs. In this selection (and in the book that it prefaces) Pipes argues that Marxian socialism is inherently flawed and that any and all attempts to implement it will have "enormous"—that is, disastrous—consequences.*

> *According to Pipes, what are the three phenomena to which communism refers? Which of these three phenomena derive from Marx and Engels? Where does one primarily need to look to find the implementation of communism?*

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*This book is an introduction to Communism and, at the same time, its obituary. For it is quite certain that even if the quest for perfect social equality that had driven utopian communists since antiquity ever resumes, it will not take the form of Marxism-Leninism. The latter's rout has been so complete that even post-Soviet Communists in Russia and elsewhere have abandoned it in favor of an eclectic social democratic platform laced with nationalism. We are, therefore, today able to draw up a balance sheet of a movement that dominated most of the twentieth century, to determine whether its failure was due to human error or to flaws inherent in its very nature.

The word *communism*, coined in Paris in the 1840s, refers to three related but distinct phenomena: an ideal, a program, and a regime set up to realize the ideal.

The *ideal* is one of full social equality that in its most extreme form (as in some of Plato's writings) calls for the dissolution of the individual in the community. Inasmuch as social and economic inequalities derive primarily from inequalities of possession, its attainment requires that there be no "mine" and "thine"—in other words, no private property. This ideal has an ancient heritage, reappearing time and again in the history of Western thought. . . .

The *program* dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century and is most closely associated with the names of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In their

*Excerpted from Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History* (New York, 2001), ix–xi.

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*Communist Manifesto* of 1848 Marx and Engels wrote that "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in a single sentence: Abolition of private property." Engels claimed that his friend had formulated a scientific theory that demonstrated the inevitable collapse of societies based on class distinctions.

Although throughout history there had been sporadic attempts to realize the communist ideal, the first determined effort to this effect by using the full power of the state occurred in Russia between 1917 and 1991. The founder of this *regime*, Vladimir Lenin, saw a propertyless and egalitarian society emerging from the "dictatorship of the proletariat" that would eliminate private property and pave the way for Communism.

We shall trace the history of Communism in this sequence both because it makes sense logically and because it is in this manner that it has evolved historically: first the idea, then the plan of realization, and finally the implementation. But we will concentrate on the implementation because the ideal and the program, taken by themselves, are relatively innocuous, whereas every attempt to put them into practice, especially if backed by the full power of the state, has had enormous consequences.

## Mao and the Chinese Revolution

*Robert J. C. Young*

*Robert J. C. Young, a professor of English and critical theory at Oxford University, is an expert on postcolonial theory. He writes here of Mao Zedong (1893–1976), who was the foremost leader and theorist of the Chinese Communist Party, which by 1949 had gained control over almost all the Chinese mainland.*

*The Chinese Communist Party came to power by taking up the cause of the peasant masses, de-emphasizing the role of the proletariat in the revolutionary struggle. This was a significant divergence from the views of Marx and Engels themselves, who rarely saw any progressive possibilities in the peasantry: for example, in a famous passage in The Communist Manifesto, quoted in the Primary Sources, Marx and Engels refer to "the idiocy of rural life." It was out of such "idiocy" that the Chinese Communist revolution emerged.*

*According to Young, what fundamental feature of Chinese society did Mao see that was not understood by the Russian Communist notables, Stalin and Trotsky? How did Mao respond, after concluding that the peasantry was both the largest class in China and radically discontented? What larger impact, beyond China, did Mao's revision of Marxist theory have?*

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*Mao's commitment to the cause of the peasants against the landlords was accompanied by a revision of communist politics that would transform the revolutionary potential of peasant societies throughout the three continents [Asia, Africa, Latin America]. . . . After Mao, liberation movements in Asia, Africa and America were increasingly inclined to identify with the peasantry rather than the urban proletariat and to present themselves as peasant revolutions. . . . [Mao's] *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* [February 1927] . . . argued for the primacy of the peasantry as a revolutionary force. . . .

Neither Stalin nor Trotsky [Stalin's rival for leadership in the USSR in the late 1920s] . . . were able to grasp the radical division within Chinese society between the cities, which possessed a small urban proletariat, and the countryside which was still ruled by a powerful landlord class which held sway over the poor peasantry. . . . In this situation, Mao's insight was to recognize that the rural peasantry rather than the urban proletariat constituted the fundamental revolutionary force and power base in China. . . . In his rejected *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, Mao reported on the widespread spontaneous peasant organizations that had been established to fight the primary form of tyranny in the countryside, that of the landlords. . . . These 'riffraff', these destitute, subaltern peoples, Mao argued, possessed the real power for revolutionary change in China. . . . Mao never lost his fundamental belief in the power and worth of the peasantry: it was he who stopped regarding them as a problem, a constituency that needed to be politicized for a progressive politics, as the Bolsheviks had done, and recognized them as a powerful, radical political force for change. This shift towards the peasantry gained an immediate response in all colonial and dependent non-industrialized countries where revolutionary models based on the existence of an industrial proletariat were rarely appropriate.

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## Secondary Source Questions

Insofar as you can judge from the Secondary Source texts, supplemented by your reading of the Primary Sources, especially *The Communist Manifesto*:

1. In what respects did actual historical events fail to conform to Marx and Engels's predictions?

*Excerpted from Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, 2001), 182, 183, 184.

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2. In what ways did Marxists make revisions in Marx's theory? In response to what situations not anticipated by Marx did they make those revisions?
3. In what specific ways have commentators on Marx and Marxism criticized his theories? How many distinct criticisms of Marxism do you find in the secondary source texts?

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# VISUAL SOURCES

As you have gleaned from your reading, Marx and Engels wanted to engage directly with the world in order to change it. It seems only right in light of this that we should examine the actual state of affairs in Industrial Revolution-era Europe. What relationship did the writings of Marx and Engels bear to the conditions of real people's lives?

The following images and graphs are intended to illuminate three related issues. They ask us to reflect on the actual conditions under which factory laborers worked and lived in the middle to late nineteenth century. Second, they ask us to think about who the proletariat—for whom the "brotherhood of man was no mere phrase"—actually was. Finally, the images and graphs together ask us to think about why Marx's prediction that the socialist revolution would come about first in the most economically advanced countries (England, for instance) proved false. Given that the October Revolution of 1917 was the first instance of the establishment of a revolutionary socialist state, we may wish to know how highly developed capitalism in Russia actually was. Marx himself, like most liberals and radicals in his time, considered Russia the most backward and barbaric of all the European states. The deeply oppressive social and political climate of the Russian Empire may offer us some clues as to why Marxian socialism (in its impatient Leninist variant) became such a force in Russian life, and why Marx enjoyed such a long and profitable (in one sense, at least) afterlife in the least economically developed part of Europe.

Try to view the images contained in this section as historical documents of a particular type. You must "read" them critically. They do not "tell the story" on their own.

To access the visual sources, log on to: http://custom.cengage.com/etep

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## For Further Investigation

A lot of material on Marxism is to be found on the Web at "The Marx & Engels Internet Archive," which includes many of Marx and Engels's writings in searchable electronic form. The Archive can be accessed at www.marxists.org. Using www.google.com or other search engines, you can find many sites offering guidance on Marx, although they are of variable value and it is hard for a neophyte to judge the quality of what is being presented.

Books are your best bet. Good one-volume selections include *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1978) and *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York, 1983). A readable biography is Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London, 1999), but unfortunately Wheen says nothing about Marx's thought. Jerrold E. Seigel, *Marx's Fate: The Shape of a Life* (University Park, PA, 1993), deals excellently with both Marx's life and his thought, although the book is difficult. David McLellan's *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1973) combines explications of Marx's writings with accounts of what was going on in his life while he was writing. Shlomo Avineri's *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, U.K., 1968) offers a relatively accessible general introduction to Marx's thought that stands up well in spite of its age. Allan Megill's *Karl Marx: The Burden of Reason (Why Marx Rejected Politics and the Market)* (Lanham, MD, 2002) is too focused on Marx's early intellectual development to serve as a good general introduction, but its Key to Abbreviations, Bibliography, and 80 pages of endnotes offer guidance on the Marx literature.

As for attempts to implement Marx's ideas, Donald Sassoon's *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1996) surveys the history of western European socialism, both Marxian and non-Marxian. Of course, contrary to Marx's predictions, Marxian socialism never came to power in Western Europe. Geoff Eley's *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (Oxford, 2002) deals with a "Left" and with a "democracy" that do not equate to Marxism but that from the 1850s onward were entangled with it: for Marxism's role in the Left, see especially Eley's chapter 2, "Marxism and the Left: Laying the Foundations," 33-46.

A question that has been posed time and again is: Why did neither Marxism nor any other form of socialism "take off" in the United States? Perhaps the best survey of this question is Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York, 2000).

Lastly, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, ed. Stéphane Courtois et al., trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer, consulting editor Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA 1999) chronicles the horrors that resulted when Communism (meaning Marxism-Leninism, plus Stalinism, Maoism, and the Khmer Rouge) did come into power—almost invariably in "backward" regions.

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