Karl Marx: Scientist or Moralist?

By way of introduction it may be useful to outline the general attitude of socialists to Karl Marx. It is our contention that Marx made valuable contributions to the sciences now known as economics and sociology. The essence of his discoveries are outlined in our Declaration of Principles. Because we accept Marx's contributions to social science we are Marxists in much the same way modern biologists are Darwinians. In keeping with the scientific spirit we do not regard the writings of Marx as the revealed truth, as a sort of Bible. We do not worship Marx as the founder of our movement. Nor do we rest our case entirely on the theories of Marx. In this respect it is interesting to note some of the writers who were highly regarded by socialists fifty years ago. Herbert Spencer, despite his political views, was recognized as a great sociologist who had made many useful contributions to that science. Thomas Buckle, in the introductory parts of his *History of Civilization in England* explained his methodological ideas and these ideas were recommended as being those of the materialist conception of history by socialists. Buckle held that social phenomena should be investigated by the same methods as used in natural science. In this way the laws governing the activities of men in society could be discovered. Since planned experiments were out of the question this would involve the collection of a great number of facts which could later be subjected to scientific investigation. It should be noted that ideas similar to those of Buckle were later outlined more precisely by Durkheim in his *Rules of Sociological Method* which are, for the most part, endorsed by modern sociology. This is important because attempts are often made, even by supposed Marxists, to show that the methods of Marxism are different from those of "bourgeois science," whatever that might be. Nothing could be further from the truth. Science is one of the most important weapons the working class has at its disposal in its struggle for emancipation. It is, in fact, *the* theoretical weapon of the working class. There is no such thing as a specifically "socialist" or "proletarian" science.

OUR BASIS IS SCIENCE

As our organisations are composed mainly of ordinary working men and women, the facts on which we base our case are those uncovered by professional scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, biologists, statisticians and so on. As most scientists claim to be morally and politically neutral—as indeed they should be in their scientific investigations — it is left to socialists to draw the conclusions from their researches. On many occasions we have given wide publicity to scientific views as those on biological evolution and on race. When religion had a firmer grip on the working class the theories of Darwin, T. H. Huxley and Haeckel were very useful weapons. Similarly today, when racism is fairly widespread, socialists use the findings of modern science to explore the myth of racism, and, consequently also, of patriotism and nationalism.

For socialists, Marx is just one of the many scientists whose theories along with those of Spencer, Darwin, Lewis Morgan and others go to make up the socialist case. Marx only assumes a prominent place because his subjects: economics and sociology are of particular interest to the working class and because he too was a practising socialist and one of the first to see the implications of the findings of other scientists. Of course, the theories of Marx, like those of the others, are subject to supplementation in the light of further research. Just as Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), based on Morgan, and our own *Socialism and Religion* (1911) which used Spencer's theory of the origin of religion, are to some extent dated, so is Marx's *Capital* (1867). It has been the function of our journals to bring forward more up-to-date facts on the condition of the working class, the concentration of industry, the distribution of wealth and so on which, however, confirm the *basic* theories of Marx.

INVALIDITY OF "DETERMINISM"

It is the great merit of such books as *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy,* together with its introduction* showing the relationship to his predecessors and successors that brings out the fact that Marx was a scientist. This is refreshing in view of the prevalence of books like Tucker's *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* which try to portray him as a mad philosopher. These particular writings deal with sociology, the study of social systems, how they work and how they change. A social system is not something existing independent of men but is the sum of the relations in which men in society stand to one another. It is a patterned way of behavior. Once this and the nature of scientific laws are understood the pitfall of a rigid "economic determinism" which assigns no place to man in the making of history can be avoided. When sociologists talk of "laws governing" the conduct of individuals, they are using a metaphor which is, in a sense, quite appropriate since men in the aggregate cannot always avoid acting and bringing about the results they do. But these laws are not to be taken as the *causes* of human actions. No "law of History" is driving men anywhere. Men are the beginning and end of social systems, they make them and they change them. How men act is, of course, affected by outside factors like the geography of the area in which they live and the tools they use to get a living. To investigate these effects and the regularities of human conduct which become evident as a result is the task of sociology. In the theoretical reasonings of sociologists these regularities of conduct become "social systems," "social laws" and "social institutions." The mistake to be avoided here is that of thinking that these abstractions exist independently of men. They are in fact just names for the ways men act in a social context. The great contribution of Marx to sociology was his emphasis on the importance of the tools men use to produce what they need and their effect on social behavior. As he expressed it in the *Poverty of Philosophy*:

> "Social relations are intimately connected with the forces of production in acquiring new forces of production, men change their mode of production, their way of earning their living; they change all their social relations."

MARX, A SCIENTIST

Marx approached the subject now called sociology through philosophy and especially the philosophy of history and jurisprudence which he studied in university. The predominant philosophical views in Germany at that time were those of Hegel and it would have been surprising if Marx had not been influenced by them. He was, and to a considerable degree, and also by Feuerbach and the left-wing Hegelians. Much of his language, especially in his early writings is the language of Hegel and Feuerbach; it is certainly not the language of science or of Marx's scientific works. The publication of Marx's early writings and notes some thirty or forty years ago** opened a new line of attack on Marxism. As exemplified by Tucker and various Jesuit priests: Marx was fundamentally not a scientist but a moralist and hence his "scientific" writing need not be considered seriously. Socialists, of course, are not called upon to answer for every word Marx wrote but we are called upon to defend his scientific reputation. Because Marx

*See "Marx, the Scientist" in W. S. No. 6-1964.

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