

Karl Marx

BY HARRY POLLITT*

WE MEET ON the occasion of the 56th Anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, to commemorate the life and work of a thinker, genius and leader.

Although it was in England that Marx spent the major portion of his life and wrote his greatest and most fundamental works, recognition of Marxism has perhaps been more slow here than in any other country.

I am often struck by the fact that when foreign Socialists and Communists call upon me at our Party offices, the first thing they ask after the conversation is finished is as to the "best way they can visit the grave of Karl Marx."

And to-night, as I look around this meeting, I observe many who, like Marx, are exiles from the land of their birth and who, as John Goss sang so magnificently those revolutionary songs from many countries, I could not help observing that their eyes were not undimmed.

Now the recognition of the rôle of Marxism is coming slowly; as is also the fact that it was precisely on the basis of the most profound study of the political, economic and social conditions under British Imperialism that Marx was able to outline those fundamental principles which have helped to revolutionise and change the world.

The truth of what he taught gains force and authority as every current political event takes place. Never was the accuracy of the Marxian method of analysis, of stating the next tasks and how they shall be accomplished, so brilliantly accurate and justified as at the present moment.

The growing volume of Marxist opinion and thought is at last breaking through the criminal conspiracy that was organised against Marx when he was living, a conspiracy that was organised because his teachings in very truth did make the ruling class tremble.

It was perhaps Lenin who best exposed what Marx had to suffer, both in life and after death, when in his famous work, *State and Revolution*, he declared :

During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes relentlessly persecute them, treat their teachings with malicious hostility, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaign of lies and slanders. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say, and to surround their names with a certain halo for the "consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping them, while at the same time emasculating the *content* of their revolutionary doctrine, vulgarising it, and blunting

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its revolutionary edge. At the present time, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists in the labour movement concur in this "revision" of Marxism.

And never more than now were the bourgeoisie and the opportunists in the Labour movement so busily engaged in trying to vulgarise and revise revolutionary Marxism.

When Marx came to England, it was at the moment when Chartism, whose Centenary we are celebrating this year was a living movement, reaching the highest point of its greatness and power. He saw at once the significance of this movement, mixed freely and joyously with the Chartist leaders, studied every aspect of the movement most deeply, and, on the occasion of the anniversary of Ernest Jones' paper, the *People's Paper*, the paper associated with the Chartist Movement, he paid a remarkably high tribute to the character of the English working class as fighters, holding them up as a model.

The English working men are the first born sons of modern industry. They will then, certainly, not be the last in aiding the social revolution produced by that industry, a revolution which means the emancipation of their own class all over the world, which is as universal as capital-rule and wages-slavery. I know the heroic struggles the English working class have gone through since the middle of the last century—struggles less glorious because they are shrouded in obscurity and burked by the middle-class historians to revenge the misdeeds of the ruling class . . .

The experiences and lessons of Chartism were undoubtedly one of the most vital elements which enabled Marx to build up his theory, the theory the practical application of which has led to the establishment of the modern working-class movement.

He saw that the early working-class movement, despite its numbers, energies, strength and capacity for sacrifice, was weak through lack of a clear social theory to guide and steer it through all its turbulent struggles.

He saw too that the early theories of Socialism were weak and unable to give that political consciousness and understanding; because Socialism was, so to speak, placed on a pedestal, removed from the current class struggles and unrelated to them, and here we are bound to note how the vulgarisers and distorters of Marx in Transport House to-day again endeavour to put Socialism on a pedestal—a socialism that has no relation to the present fight against the ruling class and its chief representative, Chamberlain.

Marx set himself the task to place on an indestructible scientific basis the whole theory of Socialism, Communism and the working-class movement, and from the moment he embodied this, not only in his monumental works, but in his daily advice and articles in the varied circles with which he came into contact, the way forward became crystal clear.

It is this achievement and basis which made Karl Marx the founder of the modern working-class movement, in whose early years, in so many lands, he played such a decisive and leading rôle.

But he not only set Socialism as the final aim of all working-class activity, he showed how it can be achieved, how the working class in the midst of its present struggles are able to advance towards the conquest of power and a complete change of society.

He made clear, too, the relations between the fight for democracy and the fight for Socialism, and none was so zealous as Marx in understanding and showing the importance of the working class defending every hard-won right it had already established and seeking to continually extend these rights.

It is very important to remember this to-day, when capitalism in decline seeks fascism as its final method of terrorism to destroy democracy in order to protect the maintenance of its system of rent, interest and profit.

And there are many to-day who are so loud-mouthed in their protestations for Socialism and Revolution and who despise democracy and the struggle for its maintenance so much, who might, with very great profit to themselves, read once again what Marx had to say about democracy and the need to defend it. If this were done it might help to end the vicious types of anti-working class and anti-democratic propaganda that in the present situation only result in a strengthening of the ruling class and a weakening of the forces of the Labour and democratic movement.

So too, in these critical times, when the fight for unity and the People's Front is one of the foremost political issues of the day, is it more than ever essential to show the importance that Marx attached to the working class winning support from other sections of the population and endeavouring to build an alliance with them in order to defeat the main reactionary force arrayed against them at each specific stage of the struggle.

He bitterly attacked those who tried to isolate the Socialists in one camp by themselves and to treat the rest of society as "one reactionary mass." He showed that this policy helped reaction at every stage of the struggle and postponed the final victory of the working class.

Who, to-day, can read his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and his polemic against the formulation of Lassalle about the rest of society being "one reactionary mass," without being able at once to see its immediate political application in the circumstances of our time?

And in this connection it is timely to recall the famous letter of Frederick Engels to Bernstein, dealing precisely with this question of one reactionary mass:

The real weakness is the childish notion of the coming revolution which is supposed to *begin* by . . . the whole world dividing itself into two armies; we here, the "one reactionary mass" there. That means that the revolution is to begin with the *fifth act*, and not with the first in which the mass of all the oppositional parties stands together against the government and its blunders and thus is victorious, upon which the separate parties among the victors one after another wear themselves

out, make themselves impossible, until finally by this means the mass of the people is thrust wholly onto our side and then Vollmar's much vaunted decisive battle can proceed.

Lenin also, in an exceptionally brilliant passage exposes the political bankruptcy of those who cannot understand the need for the class-conscious workers seeking allies from all discontented classes, groups and elements of the population, where he says :

To imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* with revolts by small nations in the colonies and Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices*, without a movement of non-class-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against the oppression of the landlords, the church, the monarchy, the foreign nations, etc.—to imagine that means *repudiating social revolution*. Apparently they imagine that in one place an army will line up and say, "We are for socialism," and in another place another army will say "We are for imperialism," and that this will be social revolution ! . . . Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will *never* live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is. The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. . . . *Objectively*, the mass movement broke the back of Tsarism and paved the way for democracy; and for that reason the class conscious workers led it. The socialist revolution in Europe *cannot be anything else* than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry of the oppressed and discontented elements.

But nowhere should this particular aspect of Marx's teaching and its subsequent elaboration by Frederick Engels, Lenin and Stalin be studied more closely than by the reactionary leaders of the Labour Party, who to-day, from their pedestal in Transport House, are endeavouring to oppose the organised working-class movement seeking support and allies from all other sections of the democratic and progressive people of this country in order to establish a common fight against Chamberlain; Chamberlain and his Government which at this moment are the main reactionary forces against which the whole united strength of the Labour and democratic movement has now to be exerted, if the people of Britain are to avoid facing what the people of Spain and Czechoslovakia are facing now.

When the English working-class movement, after the defeat of Chartism sank for a period into apathy and seemed to give chief attention to the development of narrow, limited craft trade unions in which craft prejudices and sectional jealousies were rampant and in which political activity and thought seemed to be at a very low ebb, Marx revealed the many-sided character of his approach to every problem by his ability to work with the leaders of these craft unions, however limited their own personal outlooks may have been.

He found those common points in joint association with them, in which the fight against capitalism could be carried on, so that out of that fight and its growing repercussions, political consciousness

also developed and the need for a clear political line became more correctly understood.

He was undoubtedly the first to stress the necessity for international working-class unity and his delight knew no bounds when he was able to collaborate, after the letter of the London Trades Council to the Polish workmen and the visit of a French deputation to London, with the leaders of the English trade unions, and help them to build up the first International which was established in September, 1864.

Marx drafted the inaugural address on the occasion of the foundation of the First International and to-day this document can be read and studied with profit, time and time again.

What an ironic comment it is and how it also shames a little to remember that it was in London that the First International was established, but it is also from London now that the policy of the Labour leaders alone prevents the development of a full international working-class unity in the present unprecedentedly urgent situation.

In drafting the inaugural address, Marx had to take into account the most diverse industrial and political tendencies existing amongst those who made up the representation at that First Congress, from England, France, Italy, Poland and Germany. And yet the fact that his address was adopted was a tremendous tribute to the unifying character of Marx's thoughts, ideas and leadership, and Engels was a thousand times right when, in his preface to the English edition of the *Communist Manifesto* he wrote :

The International on its breaking up in 1874, left the workers quite different men from what it had found them in 1864.

Marx always pointed emphasis at the importance of the working class concerning itself in foreign affairs and urging them to exert their influence to force changes in the foreign policies of the governments of the day.

In his inaugural address to the first International, he brought this point out in the following way :

If the emancipation of the working class requires their fraternal concurrence, how are they to fulfil that great mission with a foreign policy in pursuit of criminal designs, playing upon national prejudices and squandering in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure ? It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes, but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of England that saved the West of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation and propagation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic. The shameless approval, mock sympathy, or idiotic indifference, with which the upper classes of Europe have witnessed the mountain fortress of the Caucasus falling a prey to, and heroic Poland being assassinated by Russia : the immense and unresisted encroachments of that barbarous power, whose head is at St. Petersburg, *and whose hands are in every cabinet of Europe, have taught the working classes the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power; when unable to prevent,*

to combine in simultaneous denunciations, and to vindicate the simple laws of morals and justice, which ought to govern the relations of private individuals, as the rules paramount of the intercourse of nations.

The fight for such a foreign policy forms part of the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes.

Proletarians of all countries, Unite !

How proud would Marx be if he knew that such a policy *was* being carried out by the Russia to-day, the home of Socialism, the home of the Third International.

The Anniversary of the Paris Commune also draws near and in this connection, at this particular moment, it is inevitable that we should think of Spain, for after the Paris Commune the capitulators raised their heads, as they are raising them now in the Spanish question. After the Paris Commune there were many who could be found to exclaim "the struggle had been in vain"—as similar elements are making the same exclamations in regard to Spain.

How Marx lashed these fainthearts, these men who had lost faith in the working class and in the fact that historical development assures its ultimate victory. How he seared with language that can never die those who were responsible for organising the blood-shed and barbarities against the Parisian workers :

Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them

The Parisian workers have been crushed by superior force, crushed but not destroyed; they have been defeated, and yet it is their opponents who are really vanquished. . . ."

How true this is also of Spain at the present moment. The Spanish people are not destroyed; they have been defeated, and yet it is really their opponents who are vanquished. Do you believe that this great popular movement of the Spanish people can be destroyed? These people who have fought with an heroism unparalleled in the history of the class struggle, for 32 months, who have seen things that men and women were never meant to see? Whose children at Figueras ran out to pick up from the streets the gaudily decorated boxes that the Italian bombers had dropped and on untying the ribbons of these boxes, bombs inside exploded and blew off their little fingers and half their faces? Do you think that such people as these are ever going to forget?

We pillory those now who are responsible for these outrages. All the prayers of all their priests, as Marx said, will not avail to redeem them.

We must stimulate and encourage the feelings that will inevitably arise for revenge. For we need now, more than ever, that unshakeable confidence that Marx always displayed in the final victory of the working class. That confidence of Marx has been more than justified.

The victory of Socialism in the U.S.S.R. is the living proof of the correctness of Marxist teachings. He may lie quietly in a shabby grave in Highgate Cemetery, but no man born of a woman ever had such a monument as he has in the existence on one-sixth of the world's surface of a society which to-day, as the reports of the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union show, is already passing from the first stage of Socialism into Communism and the complete classless society.

This month, too, is the the 20th anniversary of the Communist International, which to-day has a membership of 1,200,000 and alongside it the Young Communist International, with a membership of 746,000 in the capitalist countries. This powerful united disciplined army carries on its struggles under the banner of Marxism, enriched by the teachings of Engels, Lenin and Stalin; an army that cannot be suppressed, defeated or intimidated; an army advancing towards achieving the complete unification of the entire international Labour movement; an army that knows the whole of historical development is on our side, that whatever setbacks or temporary defeats may be experienced, the future is ours.

We therefore call for a renewed study of all the works of Karl Marx, not to turn men into bookworms and armchair philosophers, not only for theoretical study, but as guides to our every-day actions, for these works are based on scientific study as well as the accumulated practical experiences of the working class in Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, England, Ireland, India and Russia. We have unique opportunities for obtaining Marx' works to-day. On this platform to-night we have listened to our veteran leader, Tom Mann. If he, and those with him who were the pioneers of our Labour movement had had the opportunities that we have at the present time, then we would not be talking about defeating Chamberlain, we would be doing what they are already doing in the Soviet Union—building Socialism.

And here too it is necessary to make a call for increased support for Marx House. To make Marx House a really powerful Marxian educational centre to which Labour Parties, Trade Union branches, Co-operative Guilds, Trades Councils and Branches of the Communist Party all should be affiliated in order to guarantee that the masses who to-day are hungry for knowledge, can be supplied with a correct Marxian education, free from vulgarisation and distortion such as is to-day the characteristic of the N.C.L.C. so-called " Marxist " education.

To study, to learn, and to act. This is the best tribute we can pay to the memory of the genius who was a revolutionary, human fighter; always close to the workers; a man driven from one country after another by the ruling classes of his time; who suffered dire poverty and necessity; who loved his home and family; a genius, who to know, was to love, admire and follow; who loved the things that the common

people loved; but who fought without mercy their class enemies and those who would betray them from within their own ranks; a genius who hurled his challenges to capitalist society; whose pen and voice whose fire, is that of no other man of his time.

To-night, in paying homage to Karl Marx, we dedicate ourselves anew to his and our cause and proudly declaim the closing words from the immortal *Communist Manifesto* of 1847 :

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. . . .

We will win that world !

OUR CONTENTS

This number goes to press at a moment which it needs no great degree of political development to recognise as one of the most critical in our history and in the history of Europe. Even those who up to now have taken "no interest in politics" see that the actions of politicians affect their lives. And they want to know "what it is all about." We have chosen our contents with a view to giving, as far as possible in the space at our disposal, the answers to the most important questions that face the people of this country to-day. The Notes of the Month appear again after an interval of two months due to the illness of the Editor, and we are sure that our readers will find this analysis of the position and this guide to future action more invaluable than ever. If the number of other articles is less than is usually included in an issue of the LABOUR MONTHLY, it is because it has seemed better to deal thoroughly with a few of the many questions that are arising than partially with a greater number.

We have, therefore, held over several important articles. Among these is a special article on the situation in India in connection with the Tripuri Session of the Indian National Congress which will appear next month. In the May number we shall also publish an important article on the U.S.A. by John Strachey and one on the situation in Palestine following the termination of the Arab-Jewish Conference. We have also held over an article on Armaments and Unemployment by John Knight. The inclusion of these as well as the usual ones which keep our readers up to date with the now rapidly altering situation will make the May number of no less importance and interest than the present one.