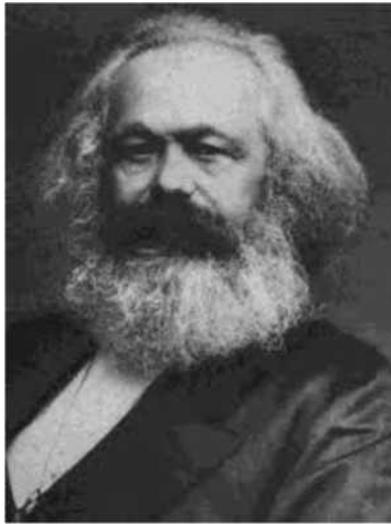


WHY I AM NOT A MARXIST



"If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a marxist." - Karl Marx, 1880.

'Marxism' is a term that emerged in the late 19th century. It is first recorded in the publications of the French socialists in 1880. Indeed, the quotation from Marx above occurred in reaction to this when Marx disagreed with some of the political positions adopted and described by Jules Guesde as 'marxist'. However, the term is thought also to have been uttered by Bakunin in his disagreements with Marx and thus in a pejorative way. It is sometimes the case in human affairs that a term of disapprobation comes to be adopted as one of positive self-designation and so it was to be somewhat with 'marxists'.

There are problems with calling oneself a marxist which are both ideological and psychological. First of all, there is evident in Marx's work a range of 'marxisms' stretching from the *Paris Manuscripts* to the *Grundrisse*. Thus, he was inconsistent to some extent between his earlier and later adulthood, but still not totally contradictory. Anybody who is not inconsistent to a degree in his or her lifetime's thought, shows signs of stunted growth.

Like Karl Marx, I am not a marxist. But, just as he was a scientific socialist, so am I. Marx mentioned scientific socialism in his exchanges with

Bakunin, and Engels expanded on the point in *Socialism-Utopian & Scientific*. Yet, it needs to be understood that Marx's scientific socialism and that of his confrere Engels were not altogether identical. In any event, the definition of scientific socialism should not be confined to these references. In fact, scientific socialism as a concept did not originate with Marx. It is first recorded as an idea in the work of Proudhon in 1840 (*Property is Theft*) and in a form that Marx did not agree with. Moreover, definitions of scientific socialism did not end with Marx-Engels.

However, what can be taken as common to all definitions of scientific socialism is an attempt to combine socialist principle with a scientific and thus empirical approach to historical and social analysis. Some academics laud social scientists in our universities while seeking to discredit scientific socialists engaged in politics: however, the only real distinction is that the first pretends to be objective, while the second is frankly committed.

With all the knowledge currently at our disposal, scientific socialism now sometimes leads to conclusions at variance with those reached on occasion by Marx (absolute polarisation between proletariat and bourgeoisie) as well as to progressive critiques of some of his methodology (such as the [abstract] labour theory of [product] value). At the same time, while not being infallible and his writings not being the first or last word on the subject matters concerned, in the development of socialist thought, he was a giant in the insights which he produced.

We all have incisive intelligence and, like Marx, should fully utilise it in analysing the circumstances that confront us, which can be taken as bearing many similarities to mid-19th century British capitalism, while also going well beyond them. To be a scientific socialist, of whatever kind, is to be non-devotional and post-scriptural. Thus, to speak of 'marxism' as one would of 'christianity', for example, is not to be a scientific socialist.

The point is not trivial or pedantic. Given the nature of the human mind, eponyms have a habit of insidiously dulling the scientific and entrenching the hagiographical. This can also lead to an inquisitorial search for the heretical with dire consequences, as in Stalinist Russia. And it is abundantly clear by now that these things are what has happened all too often in the case of 'marxism'.

Given where we find ourselves today, in the wake of communist collapse and neoliberal attack, the time has come to leave iconic marxism behind us and mature fully as scientific socialists. That is the way in which Marx's contribution can be fully appreciated. Yet there is a problem in persisting even with the term 'scientific socialism' insofar as it has come to be associated with dogmatic and quasi-metaphysical forms of historical materialism and neoHegelian dialectics. Moreover, any dialectic needs to be constantly complemented by the eclectic. Taking account both of these and the other considerations mentioned, and the fact that 'scientific socialism' has often been simplistically hijacked as a synonym for 'marxism', it might now be better for real scientific socialists to speak henceforth of 'empirical socialism'.

"Theories must always be the servants of facts." Charles Freeman

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