



Karl Marx means something to most people, as Sally Townsend and Paul Webster found out when they asked:

What does Marx mean to you?



PETER JENKINS (*political columnist The Guardian*)

I have no special interest in Marx but naturally am interested in all of the idea-systems which have helped to wreak such misery and murder upon humanity in this century. I think of Karl Marx as the founder of a great modern religion. In place of the hope of Christian redemption he offered the hope of the collective self-salvation of mankind. The experience of this century suggests that *all* forms of messianism are inimical to liberty and bring human suffering. The problem is how to live without such transcendental beliefs. Marx himself does not have to be blamed for Stalin, or even for Lenin; it is social utopianism, of which Marxism was but one variety, which is liable to lead to such tyrannies. I am more interested these days in Marxism than Marx and respect the Marxists who address the problems of freedom involved in socialist transformation; indeed some of them have addressed it more squarely than many who call themselves democratic socialists. They reinforce my conclusion, however, that the socialist era is at its end in the West although I fear that socialism will continue to thrive on the backs of nationalism and militarism in the Third World. What new religion will replace it in the West I do not know but I am afraid that we are not done with transcendental delusion.

KEN LOACH (*film director*)

In 1948, the Labour Party celebrated the centenary of the *Communist Manifesto* by publishing a new edition. In a foreword the Party acknowledged its indebtedness to Marx and Engels as . . . 'two of the men who have been the inspiration of the whole working class movement.' As the validity of

Marx's analysis is demonstrated yet again during our generation — at appalling cost in human experience — leaders of that party attempt another purge of Marxist ideas. And this, predictably, at the time of a crude attempt to regenerate capitalism by the Thatcher government, with the poverty, exploitation, and drive to war that that entails.

It is as though those Labour and union leaders are bent on reminding us of Trotsky's judgement: that the political situation is characterised by a crisis in the leadership of the proletariat. The labour movement need a leadership that will not attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable, but realises that Marx' work is the strongest weapon in the struggle to establish a just, peaceful and classless society.

MICK McGAHEY (*president Scottish NUM*)

I started work in the pits when I was 14. I read quite a lot, particularly Jack London but also Upton Sinclair, Bellamy and William Morris. I was in my mid teens when I started reading Marx. We used to discuss Marx's ideas at YCL education classes. I remember particularly *Wage, Labour and Capital* and *Value, Price and Profit*. It was not easy reading, but it always made you want to go back. At that time, which was the beginning of the war, not many miners read about socialist and Marxist ideas. Within a few years that changed a lot and a mass interest developed.

I learnt from Marx a great deal about trade unionism and, of course, the theory of the national cake: who controls the knife determines the size of the slices. More generally, I learnt a way of thinking about problems: with any problem, you must examine its origins, the stage it is at and be responsive to new changes.

JACK JONES (*former general secretary TGWU*)

Working people of the world owe a tremendous debt to Karl Marx and others will doubtless pay tribute to the depth and nature of his contribution to the progress of mankind. For me, personally, association with the Labour College movement, as a young man, led to reading Marx and discussing his ideas with fellow workers. That experience widened my outlook on the world around me and strengthened my trade union and socialist convictions. Marx provided the key to my understanding of economics and finance. The world has changed a lot since he died but a study of his works are a good grounding for anyone wishing to play an active part in the trade union movement. They are an essential strand in the thinking necessary to provide the answers to the considerable economic, political and social challenges of our time. He was not the fount of all wisdom but only a fool in the trade union movement would ignore his great contribution!

MIKKI DOYLE (Women's editor, *Morning Star*)

As a young mother in New York, I joined the Communist Party during the great depression mainly based on witnessing the destruction of food while millions starved. It was for me an emotional act. I soon learned it was not enough to be angry. I had to understand the nature of capitalism and fight to change it. It was Marxism that showed me the way. As a result of the great October revolution, socialism has made great advances. There are now many more socialist countries all over the world. The global class struggle, including the national liberation movement, with their infinite complexities, ranges on many fronts. It is only my understanding of Marxist theory that makes it possible for me to perceive clearly that despite many obstacles, there is no holding back the final victory of socialism based on the theories of Marx and Lenin.

ARNOLD KETTLE (*literary critic and writer*)

The difficulty I imagine almost everyone must find in responding to this question itself says something about Marx and Marxism. For Marxism is as complex and difficult as life itself and would not be any good to us if it wasn't. It is complex and difficult partly because of the emphasis Marx put on change, on the changingness of everything. Men and women, Marx held, come to understand more about the world through actually trying to change it, and in so far as they succeed in this they change themselves. We are all characters in history; but not in just a passive sense, for we also *make* history. I think this is the main thing I would want to stress about Marxism. Change is at the very heart of Marx's view of reality and that is why he saw theory and practice as inseparably linked. Marxism itself is not immune to change and that is why we find different generations of Marxists making different emphasis when they come to assess what Karl Marx means to them.

PEREGRINE WORSTHORNE
(*associate editor Sunday Telegraph*)

Being very conscious of the existence of a class-war, I have to admit to having been much influenced by Marx without whose writings this idea would never have become so all-pervasive. By forcing me to take

sides, Marx is responsible for the strength of my Conservative commitment. Without Marx, I might even have been a liberal. As it is, I am a Tory-Marxist, in the sense of accepting the need to take sides in the class war, even if, so to speak, on the other side. It is difficult to overestimate the extent to which the writings of Marx strengthened my Conservatism, by making me aware of the nature of the proletarian danger and the need to combat that threat by all means fair and not so fair. Tories like Ian Gilmour are politically naive, precisely because they know nothing of Marx. Although Marx intended to teach the proletariat to fight, he also taught some of the owning class to be equally militant. The present Tory recrudescence owes more to Marx than it does to Adam Smith, and although in Russia, Marxism did lead to revolution, its most lasting influence in the West may well be to have fuelled the flames of reaction. I count myself as one of the very miniscule flames.



DAVID OWEN MP (*founder-member SDP*)

Marx was a steam age socialist, dominated by a belief that society must inevitably be organised around a central power unit. The deepest division in political thought today is not between the Left and the Right but is between the centralists and decentralists. The advocates of centralised socialism have much in common with the corporatists on the Right. Whereas I have found a compulsive wish to read much of Freud's original writings I have only ever felt it necessary to read other people's selections of Marx. Freud, unlike Marx, has for me had far more relevance to our

present day society where the microchip has replaced the steam engine; a society which has to disaggregate, decentralise and give greater respect and relevance to the individual. It is not flippant or disrespectful to what has been a very important influence, to say that Alvin Toffler has more to offer the Left today than Karl Marx.

BERNARD CRICK (*author*)

I think more of the method than of the man. He does not sound wholly nice. Those who met him ran the great risk of subsequent denunciation for not becoming disciples, or of stealing ideas from him (such as that there is a capitalist system and that it is exploitative), or of spying on him. His demands for total loyalty and zest for *ad hominem* polemic have been a curse in the socialist movement. Nonetheless, I see him as a great thinker who had a genius for seeing general social relationships, though not always right or accurate in characterising the things related. He is not guilty of the religiosity of many of his later followers. He did not aspire, like Engels, to create a universal science, but rather a method of historical and economic inquiry that can be combined with other conceptual frameworks. He himself took for granted that the values of classical republicanism, mediated through Rousseau and Kant, would flourish in a classless society. If Marx were Christ, I am neither atheist nor heretic, simply Unitarian.



ERIC HEFFER MP (*Labour Party National Executive Committee member*)

Coming from a Labour working class family, I was automatically a supporter of

Labour. It was through reading Marx and Engels (and the *Communist Manifesto* in particular), that I grasped that the class struggle was the engine of change in society. Marx helped me to have a critical approach to economic, cultural, philosophical and political affairs. That critical approach of Marx, which I happily accepted, led me into many political conflicts, both in the Communist Party and the Labour Party. It was by reading Marx's modern disciples like Christopher Hill that I gained an understanding of the religious struggles of the English Revolution of the 17th century, and my Anglican beliefs were put into their proper context. Through the study of Marx, I became dedicated to fundamentally changing and destroying capitalist society, and helping to build a socialist one. Marx gave us an understanding of how and why it could and ultimately will be achieved. That I suppose makes me a socialist with both Marx and Christ as my mentors.

DALE SPENDER (*feminist writer*)

For me Marx represents an ongoing dilemma that on the one hand much of the way I operate in the world is directly traceable to a Marxist influence, but on the other hand much of the influence I wish to reject. And to name it is a fundamental problem.

I am daily indebted to Karl Marx for some of his insights and I am daily angered by many of his omissions. Most feminists have one foot in patriarchy and one foot poised for the future. I know I have one foot in Marxism and the other foot I would often dearly love to place on Marx. But then it's about dialectics.

BASIL DAVIDSON (*journalist and political writer*)

What does Karl Marx mean to me?

Three things, anyway.

A demonstration that people in society can be understood by thinking hard and long about the relations they possess or form within and between each other, always in the gritty soil of practical experience; and can therefore be explained in their actions and intentions; and can thus become amenable to constructive change and development.

A challenge to try to understand, explain, and in that precise sense participate in contemporary processes.

A warning against the constrictions of accepting dogma, doctrine or other *a priori* prejudice: so as to safeguard, as far as human frailty may allow, a capacity to investigate each 'situation' within its own reality, and thereby grasp its own dynamic and potential.

ALANSAPPER (*general secretary ACTT*)

When I was much younger the ethnic groups that concerned us were the Welsh in Hammersmith conflicting with the Irish conflicting with Jewish communities. Understanding in scientific terms the resolution and the counter attack against these examples of discriminations leads one inevitably to a Marxist understanding of society's evolution and development. Trained as a scientist, it was relatively easy to enter a life long study of Marx, by first reading *Wages, Prices and Profit*. I've recently gone back to this publication and not surprisingly, found its commentary absolutely applicable to our present day situation in Western capitalism.

How unfortunate we are that there are too many 'Citizen Westons' around us who refuse to understand the lessons of essential unity of purpose in order to combat the military-industrial axis so ruthlessly represented by our prime minister.

Our appeal should be to all citizens like Weston to read *Wages, Prices and Profit*, and the other works of Karl Marx, so that the Marxist scientific analysis will interpret the human society as the true agents of change and understand that Marxism is not a dogma. It is a structure and system that has enabled me to understand in a scientific fashion the destructive nature of capitalism and how the working class can combat and win the fight of human survival and progress.

EDWARD BOND (*playwright*)

Human subjectivity is derived from a material basis. That is the artists' discipline and opportunity. Our instincts do not work in the way other animals' instincts work. The 'releasers' for our instincts are ideas — and these change historically. That is why human nature changes. Ultimately we are creatures of social culture. As technology changes social relations, so it changes our behaviour and the ideas we live by. Art deals with these

changes and helps people to acquire the consciousness of a new age. We live in a time of great change. Marxism makes the nature of change more explicit and it is now the only basis for art. It is the key to reality and can include the intimate and the public in one epic span. 'Art' not based on Marxism is trivial or barbarous. Contemporary bourgeois art is written in the language of the dead. Marx gave art the language of the living.



GORDON McLENNAN (*general secretary Communist Party*)

For me, the first great thing about Marx is that he showed us that humanity and society are not static and fixed, but in the process of change. That women and men have capacities often beyond what they and others realise, and thus enormous possibilities for development. And that capitalism is a temporary stage in the process of human society. Second, he showed that the agency of change from capitalism to socialism — the next stage of society's development — is class struggle led by the working class and informed by socialist consciousness. And that a political party whose theory and practice is based on Marx's thinking is essential to this. Third, the great sweep of his ideas illuminates wide areas of human experience, clarifying what was previously obscure, showing us that the injustices and inequalities of society are not inevitable, giving us a vision of a better world, and arming us for the struggle to bring it about.

WALTER GOLDSMITH (*Director General, Institute of Directors*)

The hundredth anniversary of the death of Karl Marx will be cause for reverent remembrance in those countries who have tried to implement his economic philosophy and theories. Let us also hope it

will cause rethinking and reflection of Marx's contribution to economic progress and the cause of freedom.

In no country in the world has Marxism evolved into a freedom loving society. His writings and those of his disciples produced regimes which stand in the way of improving the material wealth of ordinary working people. So called stability has been maintained at a price in human freedom that we in Britain would never pay.

Those of us who believe in freedom and free enterprise can point to fact after fact, proving that Marxism leads to national economic bankruptcy and suppression of all those rights we take for granted in the Western democracies. I say taken for granted — that may be one of our greatest weaknesses. The new debate which will no doubt take place surrounding the anniversary of the death of Karl Marx should be welcomed — for as long as Communism exists we must not take our own freedoms for granted.

BRUCE KENT (*general secretary CND*)

At school I never had any problem with Karl Marx. He was, we were taught, the founder of communism and communism was an alien creed which both denied the existence of God and the right to private property. It was difficult at that early age to discover which was the more heinous fault. Since those days things have become so much more complicated. I have been introduced to the works of the early Christian writers who were, in their day, vastly ruder about the rich than it would ever have occurred to Marx to have been. Further it has been quite impossible to maintain that the many idealistic Marxists whom I have met (I do not refer to state functionaries of any sort) can be fitted into some materialist straight jacket. Machovec's *A Marxist looks at Jesus* did much to improve on my early education. In short Marx, impressive but not too lovable 19th century figure, has at the very least opened my eyes to the critical importance of the institutional economic factor in all our lives.

MARGOT HEINEMANN (*writer and historian*)

Coming to Marx in the 1930s, what struck me most forcibly in *Capital* — the historical and descriptive chapters, not the part at the beginning which I found too

difficult — was the demonstration that capitalist crisis was no accident: that unemployment and chaos were part of the way the system worked. They still are.

For a young worker at the Labour Research Department, Marx was a towering example in combining vision with practical realism. His writings convince because they support theoretical analysis with detailed facts drawn largely from official reports by Factory Inspectors and Royal Commissions. An outstanding intellectual (who would never have apologised for being one), he used all his skill to help the labour movement and disciplined himself to present complex ideas in language ordinary people could understand (though this probably came harder to him than to Engels). How much his imagination drew on Homer and Shakespeare as well as the blue books, I realised only much later from Praver's brilliant book *Karl Marx and World Literature*.

TONY BENN MP (*Labour Party National Executive Committee member*)

I was not introduced to socialism through a study of Marx and would not describe myself as a Marxist. However, the intellectual contribution made by Marx to the development of socialism was and remains absolutely unique.

But Marx was much more than a philosopher. His influence in moving people all over the world to social action ranks him with the founders of the world's greatest faiths. And like the founders of other faiths, what Marx and others inspired has given millions of people hope, as well as the courage to face persecution and imprisonment.

FRANK CHAPPLE (*general secretary EEPTU*)

If Marx were alive today he would be shocked at the number of so-called disciples who believe the views he expressed in 1848 relate to today's problems. Political dogma, which goes under the dubious title of Marxism, makes little sense when related to the mixed economy: for, who is the class enemy in a nationalised industry? Marxism serves mainly as justification for disgruntled elitists to perpetuate class war concepts. The tragedy is that in spite of Marx's irrelevance to modern economic and industrial problems, we have a hotch-

potch of communists, trotskysts and associated groups all claiming to be true descendants of Marx. The irrelevance of their creed causes them to rig ballots, denigrate Western democracy and act as apologists for the Soviet Union and its satellites. This marks them out, not simply as dangerous idealists, but denizens of a political undergrowth that spawned fascism and applauds political dictators.

JONATHAN DIMBLEBY

(*broadcaster and journalist*)

We first met at university when I was affected by alienation as I tried to cross the minefield between base and superstructure. Now he sits on the top shelf in my study, largely unread but in better perspective. 1983 not 1968. Although he never became part of my catechism — 'I believe in Marx, the father, Marx the son and Marx the holy family' — he still hovers balefully over me, rebuking my failure to see the world in his image.

Sometimes he still offers a guiding hand, for which I am grateful — when the way is not blocked by those evangelical pedants who claim unique access to his soul, then squabble over his entrails, extracting contradictory signs and portents while ignoring the evidence from the real world lest it mock their certainties. Marx has saved no one. People try to save themselves. His genius was to offer an illuminating and lasting account of how and why they set about it.

DAVID EDGAR (*playwright*)

In an extraordinary book published in New York last year, Marshall Berman attempts to recapture modernity for Marxism. He takes his title (*All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*) from the famous passage in the *Manifesto* in which Marx and Engels describe the devastating and dazzling effects of industrialism on the formerly 'fixed, fast-frozen relations' of feudalism. Berman's point is that Marxism is and has never been about recapturing some mythic golden age of primitive community; it is about the seizure of the immense capacities of technology by and for the masses of the people. The centenary of Marx's death has fallen at a time when rural Utopias seem peculiarly attractive to socialists, and also in a period when (once again) the socialist movement appears suspicious (if not hostile) towards modernism in the arts and architecture. It

has also (more happily) fallen in the era of the third great industrial revolution, a time when yet more great forces are being unleashed, for the potential liberation of humankind from exploitation, oppression and drudgery. Marx would have wished the masses to seize them, too.

JULIE BURCHILL (*rock music journalist*)

What Marx means to me is, simply and sentimentally, the Soviet Union. Without Marx there would be no Soviet Union and without the Soviet Union the world would be a far grislier place than it is today; the continents of Africa and Asia and Latin America would be even bigger abattoirs than they are already if there was no one to arm them against American fascism. In 1983 British Communists should stop aiding the Tory press by giving credence to such religion-ridden regressions as Solidarity, and start recognizing the support — material and spiritual — that the USSR gives to the struggling people of the world. I have never read Marx, but when I see the new health programmes in Afghanistan or when I see the new literacy schemes in Nicaragua, I know what he wanted and I know he will win.

SHIRLEY WILLIAMS
(*president SDP*)

Karl Marx was a thinker of such a formidable nature that no one can understand the modern industrial world without reading his work. I believe his concept of the classless, communist society was a messianic vision, and could not be achieved by the means of the dictatorship of any one class — only By pluralism. It has been the abuse of this means and the creation of a new bureaucratic ruling class that has in practice vitiated Marx's vision.

JACK ADAMS (*convenor
BL Longbridge*)

My introduction to Marx was on a romantic level; as a working class agnostic Marx represented hope; the creation of a society of fulfilment for working people rather than the abuse inherent in capitalism. Experience and the passing of the years has not altered this basic position. I would find the pressures of my position as convenor representing thousands of workers impossible to cope

with, without the strength I draw from this Marxist background. As one of my predecessors, Dick Etheridge, once said to me, Marx contains the intellectual tools to release the creative ability of our people. I know this is true — I see it every day. Accepting that socialism will not evolve naturally I see the works of Marx as an essential tool in the transformation of today's bankrupt society.

LAURIE TAYLOR (*sociologist*)

Well, there's absolutely no doubt about it whatsoever. As far as we in the university sector are concerned, Marx is a living revolutionary figure. As I'm actually speaking to you, just down the corridor from here, there's a seminar running *Marxism And The Contemporary Crisis In Capitalism*, and special options on *Marxism And Art*, *Marxism and Literature*, and *Marxism And A Whole Lot Of New French Theory Which Somehow More Or Less Ties Up With What He was Fundamentally Saying*.

And as Frank Parkin has explained quite clearly the tutors on all these courses will be right at the front of the crowd when it comes to the new storming of the Winter Palace, just so long as they can make it coincide with their sabbatical arrangements.

Or, to put it another way, when I was young and in the Labour League of Youth and the class traitor Morgan Phillips was going to expel every Marxist, I used to skip 9 o'clock mass and meet Steve Pallister in the park cafe in Crosby and we'd take excited turns with the illicit literature: a battered copy of the Communist Manifesto and the Sunday Dispatch with the latest episode of *Forever Amber*. With adolescent associations like that, is it any wonder that the radical charge one gets from Marxism on the campus is barely enough to tickle one's sense of tenure?

RON HALVERSON (*chairman
Communist Party*)

The key question confronting us today is whether the forthcoming general election will lead to a continuation of the present disastrous Tory policies or set Britain on a new course. In this modern age is there any answer to unemployment or is it a 'natural phenomenon' over which there is no control? Do wages have to fall as a necessity for ultimate prosperity? In this sense the ideas, scientific discoveries and conclusions of

Marx are essential 'tools of the trade' in answering these and other questions. They are crucial to the ending of capitalism. History proves that without the use of these tools, the task remains unaccomplished for Marxism not only explains the nature and development of capitalism but also the necessity of socialism.



JUDITH HART MP (*Labour Party
national executive committee*)

Like Harold Wilson, I began to read *Das Kapital* at the age of 13 and made little progress. I returned to Marx through the route of Engels a few years later, and in the context of Hegel; and then found the writings of such Marxists as Maurice Dobb, and Hyman Levy satisfying. Why? Because, I think, the Marxist approach as a method of analysis was more integrated and more complete than any other, encompassing economic, political and social inter-relationships as no other philosophical approach before or since has done.

It is as an analytical approach, and by no means as a dogma, that I value Marxism. Like all others, Marx himself was conditioned by his own times. I find it intensely irritating that those who attack Marxism and some who proclaim to be Marxist fail to distinguish between the precise prescriptions he offered a century or so ago, and a methodology of thinking, capable of application to a changing class structure, a very much more advanced political infrastructure, and a more sophisticated and international capitalism than he might have contemplated. It is the continuing updated analysis which is important.