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**KARL MARX'S**

Theory of  
Revolution

STATE AND BUREAUCRACY

**HAL DRAPER**

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KARL MARX'S  
THEORY OF REVOLUTION  
VOLUME 1



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Hal Draper



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KARL MARX'S THEORY OF REVOLUTION  
Volume 1: State and Bureaucracy  
Hal Draper

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To  
ANNE DRAPER  
(1917–1973)

Trade union organizer,  
champion of workingwomen's liberation,  
and revolutionary Marxist



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#### PUBLISHER’S NOTE

This book was originally published in two hardcover volumes. In order to make the work available in paperback at the lowest possible price, we have put the two volumes together for the paperback edition. The notes to Book I have been moved to the end of the combined text, leaving a gap in the pagination.

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## FOREWORD

It should be useful to begin with a statement of what this book attempts to do.

The goal has been a full and definitive treatment of Marx's political theory, policies, and practice. Needless to say, this goal is unattainable, but it has served to determine the form and contents, scope and limitations of the work.

### 1. POLITICS

The word *political* is one key. Its ambiguities are legion, even apart from its association with electoral activity in general and unscrupulous maneuvering ("dirty politics") in particular. The question of a "scientific" definition is touched on in Chapter 11; here let us make do with a process of elimination.

Of the making of books on Marx and Marxism there is no end if the books are on Marx's "philosophy," economics, or social-historical theory ("historical materialism"). This still leaves "everything else," which in fact constitutes the bulk of the forty-three volumes of the Marx-Engels *Werke*. True, this "everything else" is more miscellaneous than politics, but it will do as a first approximation. The scope, then, is the same as Pooh-Bah's, who after all comes on stage with one of the first essays on the role of the state bureaucracy to be found in the literature.

Marx's political ideas have not generally interested "marxology" (one of the most curious of industries) except as incidental appendages to the "grand theory." The exceptions are few if outstanding. To be

sure, a theory of the state usually has to be stated somewhere, and a reference to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is dictated by custom. Beyond that, there are few treatments, even important ones, of most of the questions in this area.

The "philosophic" side of Marx's development has been covered more copiously than any other aspect of Marx's activity or thought, from a multiplicity of viewpoints.<sup>1</sup> The imbalance is striking; even some books purporting to deal with his social and political thought are largely concerned with the philosophical concepts involved or read into it. The imbalance is also symbolic, for it represents a tendency to turn Marx into an abstract savant. Marx himself objected to such one-sided preoccupations even before he became a socialist: Feuerbach's weakness, he wrote a friend, was that "he refers too much to Nature and too little to politics," whereas philosophy had to be realized through politics.<sup>2</sup>

This lopsided situation is one of the difficulties here, for almost every heading represents an almost virgin field. The situation is curious because it is customary to quote Engels' overall appreciation of Marx as "before all else a revolutionist," yet to ignore the close attention he paid to a host of problems of revolution beyond the indispensable "ground theory." It is to bend the stick the other way that this work is titled *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* rather than *Political Theory*, which might be interpreted too narrowly.

It is significant that, in the graveside speech on Marx alluded to above, Engels made a similar distinction between Marx "the man of science" and Marx the "revolutionist." Formally speaking, Marx was a revolutionist also in his scientific work; less formally speaking, by the "revolutionist" Engels meant Marx the political man.

But this [the man of science] was not even half the man. Science was for Marx a ~~bisocially~~ dynamic, revolutionary force. . . .

For Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to stake conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a severity, and a justice such as few could rival.<sup>3</sup>

Writing to an old friend, Marx had had occasion to express his contempt for the philistines who "consider people like you and me immature fools who all this time have not been cured of their revolutionary fantasies."<sup>4</sup>

It is this Marx, the political man, that is our subject.

Besides the limitation to the political field, there are other self-imposed limitations that affect the scope of the book. I have resisted frequent temptations to follow questions farther than Marx and Engels themselves, into the discussions and views of the subsequent Marxist movement, let alone bring them up to date. To do otherwise, even sketchily, would take far more space without being definitive. References to later ideas and developments have been made only where they throw some special light on the subject under discussion.

On the other hand, in an important respect the scope of this work is broader than the usual approach to Marx's theory of the state, which tends to concentrate on the developed capitalist state. Here the emphasis is on Marx's world-historical view of the state. More specific material relating to the bourgeois state will be found in subsequent volumes. This approach is of a piece with Marx's. One must remember that most of the states that Marx had occasion to discuss were *not* capitalist states—as yet—even in Europe, let alone throughout the rest of the world. From the standpoint of theory this is a good thing, since no phenomenon can be thoroughly understood if only one specimen or type is available for examination. The literature of Marxism and marxology is unfortunately full of statements about Marx's views which actually apply only to capitalism and the bourgeois era, and which require at least considerable qualification as soon as the focus is widened to include most of the world and world history. It is a form of ethnocentrism.

The general limitation of the subject matter to politics creates a practical dilemma. On the one hand, the assumption is that the reader is more or less acquainted with the main lines of the basic social and economic theory underlying Marx's political conceptions. On the other hand, it has been impossible to hold to this assumption where issues in social and economic theory are either less well known or more commonly misstated. In the latter cases, some discussion of the underlying theory has been included. For this reason Chapter 21 is entirely devoted to an aspect of Marx's social theory.



## 2. CLASS

The problem just stated becomes most acute in Chapter 20 and other sections dealing with the concept of *class*. After all, class dynamics is the foundation of all of Marx's politics. It is the "transmission belt" between his social-historical and political theory; or, to change the image, it constitutes the latter's drive shaft. Since the concept is vital from the beginning, and since it is generally misstated, a summary may be useful here even if we only have the space to be suggestive.

1. In popular usage, a class is merely any group of people sharing some common characteristic(s). A "social class" may be seen as sharing certain social characteristics—say, rank; an "economic class" may be deduced from income brackets; and so on. These are *classifications*, the result of classifying people according to some more or less relevant criterion. For many loose-jointed purposes there need be no reasonable objection to such a usage. Contrary to a widespread misapprehension, Marx himself not infrequently used class in similar loose or broad ways when convenient. The issue is not whether this common use is wrong in itself, but rather what it is used for, what it is considered relevant to.

2. This popular usage implicitly regards a class attribute as a *manifestation* of society's structure, a derivative of it. But what if there are classes of people who share the common characteristic of forming a *structural element* of the society itself? Such a structural class is certainly more basic. In any case, in the context of Marx's theory a socioeconomic class is a class of people playing a common role as a structural component of a given society.

3. How this is concretized flows from Marx's theory itself. Historically, in Marx's view, class differentiation begins only with the appearance—due to development of the forces of production—of a *surplus product*; that is, that which is produced over and above the reproduction needs of the direct producer. This is the key to the meaning of class in Marx. Classes define themselves not simply in terms of the process of production (which existed before the separation into classes and will exist after classes are done away with); they must be defined in relation to *surplus* production, and specifically in relation to *control over the appropriation of the surplus product*.\*

\* In this connection, see the passage from Marx cited in Chapter 22, pp. 570-571.

Look at any given society through this lens, and two basic classes appear. One is the class of direct producers—this being Marx’s generic term for those who perform the actual productive labor, the working class of the particular society. The other is the class that controls the appropriation of the surplus product, the ruling class. It may accomplish this control through control of the means of production, but this latter relationship itself may need explaining in terms of the former. The two classes thus defined are the so-called *polar classes* of the society—“the extremes of a relation of production,” as Marx put it speaking of the capitalist/worker relation in bourgeois society.<sup>5</sup> It is the polar-class antithesis that forms the skeleton around which a given mode of production is socially structured. Around this central relationship the rest of the class structure takes shape, including elements left over from obsolete social forms.

4. The roster of classes in a particular society is determined by that society’s mode of production, not vice versa. This is another way of saying that one cannot determine what social strata are *structural* components of the given society simply by an abstract consideration of the characteristics of the strata involved; it is a question of how they relate to the mode of production. In this connection we can repeat here a relevant passage in Chapter 20:

The way in which a given society divides up into classes is specific to its own social relations. Thus, there are warlord elements in many societies, but a warlord becomes a *feudal* lord or baron only when specific social relations become dominant. There is no rule-of-thumb definition which decides whether the chief of an armed band who resides in a stronghold and lives off the surplus labor of unfree producers, etc. is or is not a member of a *feudal* class. The point can be settled not by a glossary but only by a concrete examination of the overall social relations of the society. Similarly, merchants become a separate *class* not simply because they buy and sell, but only when buying and selling begins to play a certain role in a given society.<sup>6</sup>

5. Therefore, any formal definition of *class* is, at bottom, only a restatement in other words of Marx’s basic method of sociohistorical analysis, not some special lexicographical formula. Many marxologists have reproached Marx for failing to give a dictionary definition of class which they can recognize as such, because they look for something which is alien to Marx’s method—a sort of Bismarck-paper test for class

which can be applied on the basis of formal descriptive elements *abstracted from the specific societal relationships.*

As it happens, Marx made this methodological point in so many words, but since he was writing about the definition of property at the time, it has often been ignored:

In each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production.

To try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea, can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence.<sup>7</sup>

If anything, this applies even more closely to class than to property.

6. It was stated in point 3 that classes cannot be defined simply in terms of the process of production. Still worse, methodologically, is a common pseudodefinition of class found in both Marxist and non-Marxist works. In the formulation of N. Bukharin, who may have invented it, it is "persons united by a common role in the production process."<sup>8</sup> The force of these words is to limit classes to categories *in* the production process. This is a basic mistake, flatly incompatible with Marx's historical analysis of actual classes. Most obviously, for example, it would exclude the early class of merchant capitalists, which was notable precisely because it played no role *in* the production process; though the role it *played*, in relation *to* the *production* process, was so important in establishing control over the *appropriation* of the surplus product that these capitalists tended to extend *their* control into production itself, *thereby* ceasing to be *merely* a merchant class. The Bukharin-type formula would also decree that the *petty-bourgeoisie* — a large sector of it, like *shopkeepers* — does not form a class, simply because it does not have the quality of a *major* class. The wide *everyday* acceptance of this error, even by establishment *sociologists*, is itself a sociological problem,<sup>9</sup> but at any rate it owes *nothing* to Marx.

7. The fact that Marx himself had little inhibition about using class in the loose popular sense has been an added complication in the post-Marx history of the *question*. To be sure, a physicist ordinarily uses *work* in two different senses, a *popular* one and a scientific one, without confusion, *depending* on context; one has to approach Marx's usage with an *equal* amount of common sense, together with some

feeling for the vocabulary and verbal conventions of the mid-nineteenth century.

Thus, in various of Marx's writings—published economic works as well as popular articles and unpublished notes—one can read about the “ideological etc. classes,” or the “unproductive classes,” or the “serving [or servant] class” with or without quotation marks, or the “educated classes” with or without a prefixed “so-called,” or the class of “professional conspirators,” or the “servile class of lawyers,” or artificial “classes” fabricated in British India, or the confrontation between “two particular classes of capitalists” (moneyed and industrial).<sup>10</sup> It all offers a splendid opportunity for pointless quotation-mongering through which a new “theory of class” can be discovered in Marx every week.

8. Another complication, which deserves more notice than is possible here, is how to deal with *classes in the process of being born*, as well as (conversely) classes or social estates, etc., which are in the process of dying out or decaying into something else—in short, classes taken in the process of becoming. In *The German Ideology*, speaking of the end of the eighteenth century with its still impotent German bourgeoisie, Marx comments: “One cannot speak here of estates or classes, but at most only of former estates and classes not yet born”; and he suggests the term *sphere of life* (*Lebenssphäre*) for these class-elements that are perceived in flux.<sup>11</sup> There are interesting discussions by Marx elsewhere of what might be called *anticipatory class-elements*.<sup>12</sup> Without a dynamic understanding of classlike formations outside the boundaries of stable situations, discussions of what is, is not, or cannot be a “class” are bound to be sterile.

In sum: while point 2 offered a formal definition of class, this is merely an “algebraic” formula, which takes on concrete meaning when it is fleshed out with the specific relationships of a specific social order. The rest of the foregoing propositions go beyond the obligation to provide a definition: they offer a guide to analysis.

### 3. MARX

Another key is the fact that the title specifies Marx, not Marxism.

What goes by the name of Marxism nowadays, like as not, has little to do with Marx's views, in general or on any particular subject. This is

a penalty for the “success” of Marxism—that is, its widespread appeal—in spite of the periodic announcements of its death, which are almost as frequent as of yore. This parasitic disease—cooptation by alien elements—attacks all world outlooks that encompass a whole era. Sweeping reorientations of consciousness, such as those denoted by the terms *democracy*, *science*, and so on, have all been victims of the same complaint. Thus a distinguished Frenchman wrote of the catchword *democracy*: “It is the sovereign, universal word. All parties invoke it and want to appropriate it as a talisman. . . . Such is the sway of the word *democracy* that no government or party dares to exist, or believes it can exist, without inscribing this word upon its banner. . . .”<sup>13</sup> This was not written yesterday but in the year 1849, by the historian-statesman Guizot.

It is easy for superficial pundits to conclude from this factionalization of meaning that *democracy*, *science*, and so on have no meaning whatsoever; but in fact their meanings have become pawns in a social and ideological struggle. The interpretation of *class struggle* becomes a weapon of class struggle, just as the meaning of *democracy* becomes an arena for the struggle to determine what democracy shall mean. Marx would have no trouble understanding why ideologues who hold conceptions he fought bitterly still insist on calling themselves Marxists. This corner of intellectual history is a function of social history, as usual. The response is also simple in principle if difficult in practice: the answer to pseudodemocracy is real democracy; the abuses of “scientism” can be countered only by a genuinely scientific attitude; and the obfuscations of various contemporary “Marxisms” can be understood only with the help of Marx’s Marxism. “God protect me from my friends!” wrote the young Marx once; and a few years later he explained to the radical Democrats of 1850 why he had no compunction about attacking a certain prestigious “revolutionary”:

We know in advance that we will evoke general indignation from the sentimental bunco-artists and Democratic elocutionists. . . . This makes no difference at all to us. Our task is ruthless criticism, even more of alleged friends than of open foes; and in affirming our position on this, we gladly forgo cheap Democratic popularity.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, the subject of this work is not Marxism in some inclusive sense but the theory, conceptions, and views of Karl Marx. It goes without saying that everyone concerned must in some fashion consider how Marx's views apply to the contemporary world, and, extrapolating from Marx to the present, arrive at a modern adaptation, which then becomes a "Marxism." No doubt the marks of my own opinions on this score are visible. But the goal is nevertheless a faithful discovery of Marx's views—not as the end-all of a political inquiry but as a basis for it.

If no attempt has previously been made to reconstruct the whole picture of Marx's views on political theory and political struggle, it can scarcely be doubted that prejudicial interest has stood in the way. The "grand theory," precisely because it seems to soar above current struggles, can sometimes be discussed with an air of tranquillity. When the subject is the political realm of power, the knife cuts deeper. Politics in the broad sense is only one aspect of social revolution, but it is its cutting edge.

While objectivity (which is not the same as impartiality) is a scarce commodity, with a small exchange value, there is only one way to proceed in this case if there is to be any hope of attaining it. That is to go to Marx's own writings on political questions. But these are uncollectable in the kind of anthology or "selected writings" that do for some other aspects of Marx's theory, since they are too scattered. Yet no reliable conclusions in this field can be based on less than the totality of what Marx had to say. The usual pattern is to cull quotations as "examples" of what is supposed to be Marxism: this is a respectable enough method where there is some measure of consensus and the problem is concise and comprehensible presentation. Such is not the case here.

Another difficulty, which applies particularly to Marx's political ideas, is that the source material for a complete survey has not long been accessible. A collected edition of Marx's and Engels' writings has existed for some decades in only one language, Russian (with omissions); but for reasons which need not take space here, access to this material by Russian marxologists and Western Kremlinologists has not changed the picture but exemplified it.

The situation began to change with the publication, between 1961 and 1968, of the German edition of the Marx-Engels *Werke*. But experience has shown—in the case of the Paris manuscripts of 1844, for

example, or the *Grundrisse* notebooks—that access to an important new source of knowledge seldom changes the entrenched myths until ten or twenty years have passed. The present work could not have been written before the publication of the *Werke*, practically speaking. There was a similar pattern when the great Marx-Engels *Gesamtausgabe* was published in the 1920s, collecting the writings of the young Marx (later extended through 1848). Its eventual impact on the understanding of Marx's early development was revolutionizing—but limited, since it was not allowed to continue.

#### 4. METHOD

The first work that attempted to tackle Marx's political thought in this way stated the problem clearly: "Now one has to engage in excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people."<sup>15</sup> And so Lenin's *State and Revolution* was, in form, an exercise in excavation. It was then, and still is, virtually unique in the literature—whether by Marxists or non-Marxists—in its method, leaving aside its conclusions. Its uniqueness consists in this: it does not state certain opinions about "what Marx really said" and illustrate them with selected quotations; rather, it sets about bringing together *everything* written on the subject by Marx and Engels, to the best of the writer's knowledge. As against the various claims and interpretations, it proposes the simple expedient of setting it all down and trying to work out an answer that is at least consistent with the assembled evidence.

It may be objected that finding out "what Marx really said" does not settle any question of politics. This is quite true: all it settles is the matter of "what Marx really said"—which happens to be the subject matter of a multitude of books, most of them collections of entrenched myths that have never even been examined.\*

The "excavation" method has serious literary disadvantages, which Lenin stated at the beginning of his first chapter. After the well-known

\* An example of the attention paid to "what Marx really said" is a book entitled *What Marx REALLY Said*, by H. B. Acton—a concise (141-page) compilation of vulgar marxology that refrains from mentioning that Marx had a theory of the state, let alone telling what it was.<sup>16</sup> This tour de force is in great vogue in some circles.

introductory passage (when revolutionaries have died, “attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons . . .”) Lenin makes a promise and an apology:

In these circumstances, in view of the unprecedentedly widespread distortion of Marxism, our prime task is to *re-establish* what Marx really taught on the subject of the state. This will necessitate a number of long quotations from the works of Marx and Engels themselves. Of course, long quotations will render the text cumbersome and not help at all to make it popular reading, but we cannot possibly dispense with them. All, or at any rate all the most essential passages in the works of Marx and Engels on the subject of the state, must by all means be quoted as fully as possible so that the reader may form an independent opinion of the totality of the views of the founders of scientific socialism, and of the evolution of those views, and so that their distortion by the “Kautskyism” [today, several other isms] now prevailing may be documentarily proved and clearly demonstrated.<sup>17</sup>

It is ironic that this method, so clearly demanded in the interest of simple scholarship, has never been used in any academic treatise in this field. (An apparent exception, Chang’s dissertation *The Marxian Theory of the State* literally proves the rule, for it was written in defense of Lenin’s interpretation.) The method, apparently so “academic,” is in fact directed to the possibility of objective verification, “so that the reader may form an independent opinion.”

Lenin’s insistence on long and full quotation of “Marx and Engels themselves” is pregnant with potentialities and problems, one no less than the other. It is the only real alternative to that quotation-mongering which leads to sterile results. Quotation-mongering is no recent phenomenon: it started while Engels was still around to comment on it. As it happens, the pace-setters came from the Russian émigré movements as early as the 1880s and 1890s. “If you have followed the Russian emigration literature of the last decade,” wrote Engels to a Russian correspondent, “you will yourself know how, for instance, passages from Marx’s writings and correspondence have been interpreted in the most contradictory ways, exactly as if they had been texts from the classics or from the New Testament, by various sections of Russian emigrants.”<sup>18</sup> A Russian visitor later reminisced that “Engels wished that the Russians—and not only the Russians—would not pick quotations from Marx or from him, Engels, but would think as Marx



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