

Marx Made to Serve Party-State

Paresh Chattopadhyay

September 16, 2010

[A review of *On Socialism: Selections from Writings of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V. I. Lenin, J. V. Stalin, Mao Zedong*, edited by Irfan Habib, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009]

In critiquing the assumptions of the Indian Marxist historian Irfan Habib's statist and ultimately market-oriented concept of socialism, Paresh Chattopadhyay elaborates Marx's concept of socialism as pointing toward a society free of all forms of domination, whether of capital or the state. – Editors

With a modicum of knowledge of Marx's work we approach with a good deal of trepidation this book whose editor is justly considered a great historian from whose works on history we have learnt a great deal over the years. Bound by space constraint, we propose in the following lines to discuss basically the theoretical issues of socialism raised here mostly leaving aside the practice of the regimes calling themselves socialist.

First some inaccuracies in the book which we encounter immediately.

The editor states at the start: "Until Marx wrote the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' both he and Engels avoided entering into a discussion of what the socialist order succeeding capitalism might look like" (p.1). We submit that this is simply not true. First of all, let us stress that the *Gothacritique* was a purely occasional brochure, which Marx had called in a letter to Bracke (5.5.1875) a "long scrap of paper" which was done without "enjoyment." He felt compelled to write it in order to underline what he considered as serious shortcomings in a workers' programme. So by its very nature it had a limited scope, and it had to leave aside some of the most vital aspects of the society which he envisaged as succeeding capital(ism). In fact these aspects were copiously discussed in a series of works at least beginning with his 1844 Parisian manuscripts, which should be read together with what really is their complement, the *Holy Family* (jointly with Engels), 1845, continuing notably through the *German Ideology* (1845-46) (jointly with Engels) and the monumental 1857-58 manuscripts, carried over in *Capital*. The editor himself has justly mentioned the 1848 *Manifesto* in this connection. It is rather a pity that even in his remarks in the 'Appendix', the first four works mentioned here with their immense (self) emancipatory message(s)-literally soaked in unalloyed humanism- find no reference. We come back to this point later.

Secondly, two specific inaccuracies. According to the editor “*Capital* vol.1, ... (was) published in German in 1867 (with) the subtitle...’A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production’. “As it stands the statement is not exactly true. *All* the German editions – the first two published by Marx himself and the last two published by Engels — carried the subtitle ‘Critique of Political Economy’. Only the English translation of the third edition published under Engels’s supervision carried the subtitle mentioned here by our editor. Again, we read “the ‘ascent from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom’ of which both Marx and Engels spoke” (p.193). This, we suppose, is a citation from Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*. First, the citation is inexact. The beginning term in original is not ‘ascent’, it is ‘leap’ (*Sprung*), which is qualitatively different. ‘Ascent’ could signify simply going up, an evolutionary process, whereas ‘leap’ indicates a jump, a revolutionary process. Secondly this is not Marx’s expression, which is found in a magnificent passage in his manuscript for the third volume of his great work: “Beyond the realm of necessity begins the development of human power, which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom which however can blossom only on the basis of the realm of necessity”(Marx 1863-67,1992:838). It is clear that Marx’s statement is not quite the same as Engels’s. It is more nuanced, showing a contradictory movement.

However, there is a much more serious inaccuracy in the book in question. This refers to the editor’s presentation of an idea foreign to Marx into Marx’s framework: socialism as the first stage of communism. Thus the editor writes: “In Marxist theory, socialism is a stage which follows the overthrow of capitalism. The classics have defined three important features of a socialist society (the first or lower stage of communism)...”(p.171). On the contrary, he will not find this anywhere in Marx’s work. For Marx socialism *is* communism, refers to the same social formation, simply being another term, like the terms Republic of Labour, cooperative society, association of free individuals or simply Association (most frequently used), reunion of free individuals, society of free and associated producers. There are at least three texts spread over four places in Marx’s work in different periods where he uses the term socialism and not communism to indicate the future society replacing capital(ism). Thus in an 1844 polemic Marx writes: “Generally a revolution – overthrow of the existing power and the dissolution of the old relations – is a political act. Without revolution socialism cannot be viable. It needs this political act to the extent that it needs destruction and dissolution. However, where its organizing activity begins, where its aim and soul stand out, socialism throws away its political cover” (Marx 1976a: 409). The second and the third texts are almost identical, appearing –*in Marx’s own English*- respectively in his 1861-63 notebooks (second notebook) and in the so-called ‘main manuscript’ for *Capital III*. Here is the 1861-63 text:

“Capitalist production...is a greater spendthrift than any other mode of production of man, of living labor, spendthrift not only of flesh and blood and muscles, but of brains and nerves. It is, in fact, at the greatest waste of individual development that the development of general men is secured in those epochs of history which prelude to a socialist constitution of mankind.” (Marx 1976b: 324-27)

This text is repeated almost word for word in the ‘main manuscript’ for the third volume of *Capital* (Marx 1992: 124-26). Finally, in the course of correcting and improving the text of a book by a worker (Johann Most), meant for popularizing *Capital*, Marx inserted: “The capitalist mode of production is really a transitional form which by its own organism must lead to a higher, to a co-operative mode of production, to socialism” (in Most 1989: 783). The idea of socialism as different from communism, being only the first phase of and transition to communism, was popularised –though not invented — by Lenin. This equivalence between socialism and the first phase of communism, but really separate from “(full) communism”(Lenin), may look at first sight as merely an innocuous linguistic exercise. However this had far reaching consequences, (presumably) unanticipated by Lenin. This was put to good use by the rulers of the Party-States calling themselves socialist. These ideas became convenient instruments of legitimizing every act of these regimes- however repressive of the human individual- in the name of (building) socialism, which was stressed as the need of the hour, thereby shelving all the (self) emancipatory aspects of Marx’s socialism to the never-never land of ‘communism’, metamorphosing Marx’s emancipatory project into the “music of the future” (*Zukunftsmusik*) (to use Marx’s expression, ironically used against the composer Richard Wagner, see Marx 2008: 794).

Let us now see how the editor depicts the socialist society, basing himself, in Marx’s case, almost wholly on a single text-the *Gothacritique*. Here we find as designers of this society not only Marx and Engels but also Lenin, Stalin and Mao. This ‘Hall of Fame’ also accommodates in one corner Lange and Dobb (p.171). Socialism has a number of features: means of production are socialized, they are brought under “public ownership,” that is state ownership. The product of surplus Labour generated under this ownership provides for replacement and enlargement of the productive apparatus, “distribution among workers as additions to their *wages* or for social services,” and administration (our italics) (171,173). This is a mixture of *Capital* and the *Gothacritique*, between the accumulation process of *capital* and the enlarged reproduction of *socialist economy*. Let us explore further the editor’s analysis. He cites from the *Gothacritique* the ultra famous paragraph beginning with the statement that in the cooperative society producers do not exchange their products, and that producers receive from society labor certificates indicating the amount of labor s/he has performed enabling her/him thereby the means of consumption having cost the same amount of labor. The editor then finds out by cost-benefit analysis, (aided presumably by market socialists like Lange and Dobb), that Marx’s distribution scheme was not the most efficient, and concludes by asserting the necessity of the use of money (in lieu of Marx’s scheme) and declaring “we therefore come back to money, and so to commodity sale” (in socialism) (p.173-74). Next the editor asserts that “Marx grappled with the problem of payment for labor under socialism, one notices his cautious hesitations.” He refers to Marx’s affirmation of the prevalence of the principle of equal exchange — as in the commodity world (a bourgeois right) — in socialism, and concludes that “labor process *thus* remains that of free *wage labor* “ (p.174, our emphasis). “Labor power remains a commodity under Socialism.”(175). The question now is, after taking over commodity production and wage labor from capital(ism) as the necessary elements, what specific characteristic could still mark the new society as socialist *in Marx’s sense*! The editor’s view that

“a socialist economy is established by converting means of production into public—that is, state-property” was indeed the view of the spokespersons of Russia’s Party-State, but certainly not Marx’s. State, commodity production and wage labor were always considered by Marx as foreign and antagonistic to the society of free and associated producers, which is what socialism is, right from its first stage onwards. There is no counter example in Marx’s texts. Marx starts his struggle against these elements of enslavement and alienation right from 1843-44. The remarkable thing is, in this whole discussion the editor, like Stalin, Lange *e tutti quanti* never refers to the new society’s specific *mode of production* or the specific *relations of production* arising therefrom. Marx opposes socialism’s associated mode of production (AMP) to the capitalist mode of production (CMP). “Property relations are only a juridical expression of production relations” (Marx 1859,1980:100). Even the very text of Marx which the editor is analyzing underlines this. “Are the economic relations (that is, production relations) regulated by the legal conceptions or do not, on the contrary, the legal conceptions originate (*entspringen*) in the economic relations?” (Marx 1875,1966: 177). Stalin understood the implications of this proposition for his ‘socialism’ so well that his solution was simply to invert Marx’s materialist proposition. Hence his 1938 *pronunciamento*: “under socialist regime it is the social ownership of the means of production which forms the basis of the relations of production” (Stalin 1938,1980:505). On the basis of this casuistry the ex-seminarist tried to “spirit away” (*wegzuhexen*, to use Marx’s expression for Smith — see Marx 2008:712), the inherent exploitative character of wage labor from his ‘socialism’. And this was accepted uncritically by the ‘communists’ after Stalin. Our editor, by specifically crediting Stalin for this view, shows that he is of the same opinion (p.174). He seems not to pay attention to Marx’s famous 1864 distinction between “hired labor” of capitalism and “associated labor” of socialism. Completely preoccupied with the efficiency of the system in order to make it free from anarchy of the market, his sole concern is technocratic — socialism’s planning vs. capitalism’s free market. His term “free wage labor” (p.174), perfectly understandable within the Stalinist framework, is a *contradictio in subjecto* within Marx’s emancipatory framework. Blinded by the specific form of property-‘public property’-and ignoring its revolutionary implication for labor under AMP, the category labor is considered here as one considers labor under CMP. For Marx labor in socialism is directly social labor as opposed to labor under capital which is only indirectly social. In the case of private exchange, labor is recognized as social only *post festum*, only after its product is sold in the market. In the case of “collective (*gemeinschaftliche*) production” labor is directly social right from the start of the production process, its sociality is presupposed. Then “there is only collective consumption, but no exchange”(Marx 1857-58,1953:88,526). This is clear in Marx’s text under consideration. The exchange of equivalents—this bourgeois right— under commodity production is established “ only on *average* but not for each individual case” which is what it is in the lower phase of the new society”(Marx 1966:179.Emphasis in original).

Commodity-capitalist production requires a universal equivalent-money—precisely because it is impossible here to determine each individual laborer’s share in the total social labor. This is totally irrelevant in AMP. Hence Marx’s suggestion (taken over from Owen) for a separate labor

voucher for each laborer makes perfect sense for this new mode of production. The difficulty of market socialists in this connection, given their total neglect of the social relations of production, is perfectly understandable. They do not see any aspect of capitalism here because for them capital is basically individual private property in the means of production. So when it is ‘abolished’ by a governmental decree, capitalism is also ‘abolished’ giving place to socialism. However, Marx does not speak only of “property of separate individuals” in the means of production in the 1917 sense of Lenin. In Marx’s work we also read about another kind of private property largely left aside by the Marx readers. In this second and more important sense, private property in the means of production exists as property of the few in the face of non-property of the great majority who are compelled to sell their labor power in order to live. In this sense the objective conditions of labor are the “property of a definite class” or “*private property* of a part of society” (Marx 1956: 9,21; emphasis added). It is then “class property,” and the “abolition of private property” precisely means the “disappearance of class property,” as the 1848 *Manifesto* stresses. The same concept of private property appears in Marx’s *Civil War* (1871,1971:75). Hence even with the juridical abolition of individual private property in means of production if the great majority are compelled to sell their labour power against wage in order to live, they effectively continue to confront “class property” as propertyless individuals. It is not with state ownership but only with direct, collective appropriation of the means of production by society itself that private property along with commodity and wage labour disappears. At this point let us call an internal witness from Russia to have a reality check. The doyen of labor economics underlined: “The state ownership was neither public nor socialist. Surplus labor and the corresponding surplus value belonged not to the people or to those who generated them. Profit was appropriated by the state, ... the directors of enterprises hired labor power in the name of the state. Wages, in these conditions, were, as in any capitalist society, the transformed form of the value of labor power as a commodity (*prevrashchennoi formoi stoimosti tovara rabochaya sila*) (Manevich 1991: 139).

By reading in Marx the exact opposite of what he said our eminent historian has transmuted Marx’s manifesto of emancipation into a market socialist tract, introducing into the association of free individuals (socialism) what Marx had always considered as the elements antagonistic to it - commodity production, wage labour and state. By reading the present text which uncritically accepts this ‘socialism’ one will never know what kind of regime it was-that “at any time there were between 11 and 13 million individuals” in the labour camps performing “forced labour” (Manevich 1991: 136). Here is another internal witness – Pasternak — who called the regime “an inhuman reign of the lie (where) the promulgated constitution was never meant to be applied, and (where) elections violated the very principle of free choice (and where) the people had to be cured, by every means of terrorism, of the habit of thinking and judging for themselves, and forced to see what didn’t exist, to assert the very opposite of what their eyes told them”(1958:422).

Preoccupation with the property form and the form of managing the economy- outgrowth of a mode of production, not determining it — prevents the professor from focusing on the essence of AMP — the place of the human individual in the Association. Here Marx carries over his earlier

discussions in the Parisian manuscripts, *German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto* whose crowning point is the well known affirmation that in the “Association” the “freedom of each is the condition of the freedom of all.” Indeed, Marx’s focus throughout his adult life was on the condition of the human individual in a society, in fact his basic criterion for judging a society had been the extent to which the individual is free here. We suggest that Marx’s 1859 assertion that the whole period of human evolution till now has been characterized by the “pre-history of human society” precisely refers to the inhuman situation of the human individual which has prevailed till now where the individual’s subordination to an external power, alien to the individual, has prevented the individual from the “real appropriation of human essence by and for the individual,” the “complete elaboration of human interiority.” The community facing the singular individual has been till now, as Marx underlines, “false” community, an “abstraction,” an independent power subjugating the individual. With the advent of Association this hitherto existing community vanishes and there appears now the “true” community whose members are “universally developed individuals” (1857-58, 1953:79. Indeed, the “fundamental principle of the higher society is the full and free development of each individual” (1872,1987:543). It seems that Marx’s tenth Feuerbach thesis — the insistence on “human society or social humanity” as the “standpoint of (his) new materialism” — has escaped the professor.

Unsurprisingly, the professor’s tale of Party-State socialism ends with an enthusiastic support for the 1989 Tiananmen pogrom perpetrated by the Chinese rulers on thousands of unarmed workers and students demonstrating—many singing the *Internationale* — for democracy and individual liberty (almost reminding one of Goya’s great 1814 painting “The third of May 1804”). Naturally, accepting uncritically the official version of the mass massacre he dismisses any contrary report as “publicity by western media”(p.193). But there were ‘western’ eyewitnesses—one outstanding witness being William Hinton who gave irrefutable evidence of the event completely contradicting the official version (1990:183).

We submit it is illegitimate to include Marx and Engels — through a complete deformation of their emancipatory texts — in the crowd of anti-libertarians who have effectively reduced the labouring people to perpetual wage slavery and thereby consigned them to the netherworld of the “pre-history of human society”.

References

Hinton, William. 1990. *The Great Reversal*. New York: Monthly Review Press

Manevich, E. 1991. ”Zarabotnaya plata v uslovyakh rynochnoi ekonomiki” (Wage in the conditions of market economy). *Voprosy ekonomiki* no.7.

Marx, Karl. 1953 (1857-58).*Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. Berlin:Dietz Verlag.

Marx, Karl. 1956 (1861-63). *Theorien über den Mehrwert*,vol.1.Berlin: Dietz.

U.S. Marxist-Humanists

Marx, Karl. 1966 (1875). "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei". In Marx-Engels *Ausgewählte Schriften*. vol.2. Frankfurt am Mein:Fischer.

Marx, Karl (and Friedrich Engels). 1971 (1871) *On the Paris Commune*. Moscow:Progress.

Marx, Karl. 1976a (1844). *Kritische Randglossen zu dem Artikel "Der König von Preussen..."*. Berlin:Dietz.

Marx, Karl. 1976b (1861-63). *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*(Manuskript 1861-63). Marx/Engels *Gesamtausgabe* II/3.1(hereafter MEGA,Complete Works).Berlin:Dietz.

Marx, Karl. 1980 (1858-61). *Ökonomische Manuskripte und Schriften*.MEGA II/2.Berlin:Dietz.

Marx, Karl. 1987(1872) *Das Kapital*, vol.1,MEGAI/6,Berlin:Dietz.

Marx, Karl. 1992(1863-67). *Ökonomische Manuskripte* MEGA II/4.2. Berlin:Dietz

Marx, Karl. 2008 (1868-81). *Manuskripte zum zweiten Buch des "Kapitals"*. Berlin:Akademie Verlag..

Most, Johann. 1889 (1876). *Kapital und Arbeit* MEGA II/8.Berlin:Dietz.

Pasternak, Boris 1958. *Dr.Zhivago* (English Translation).London:Collins.

Stalin, J.V. 1980 (1938), *Oeuvres Choiesies*. Tirana:Nëntori-Tirana.

— Paresh Chattopadhyay

(This article also appeared in Economic and Political Weekly, Mumbai, India.)

Source: <http://www.usmarxisthumanists.org/articles/marx-made-to-serve-party-state-by-paresh-chattopadhyay/>