

KARL MARX

By LUDWIG LORE

In the midst of the bloodiest slaughter the world has ever seen we have celebrated the centenary of the birth of the man who hurled the words "Workers of all countries, unite," into the world.

And yet we know that the teachings of Karl Marx are not forgotten. Marxian ideas influence the whole civilized world, their truths are becoming apparent even to those who formerly looked upon them with doubt and unbelief.

How times have changed since that 14th of March 1883, when Karl Marx closed his eyes forever. A small group of intimate friends and supporters stood about his bier. Small was the number of those who recognized his theoretical teachings. The world knew, it is true, that the spiritual leader of the General Council of the International Workmen's Association was a prominent scientist and a remarkable thinker. But it had little or no understanding of the ideas he had created. Even of those who fought under his banner, few had more than a very incomplete and superficial conception of their import.

How could it have been otherwise? This lack of clearness was, after all, simply the reflex of the movement that he served. The downfall of the Paris Commune, the dissolution of the International Workmen's Association, the socialist exception laws in Germany and the severe industrial crisis in the seventies had vitally impaired the working class movement. There were Socialists in every civilized country, but the movement everywhere bore the marks of inner chaos. Only here and there the movement had succeeded in concentrating into a real social-democratic party. The struggle for the political enfranchisement of labor had only just begun; independent political working class action in the sense of the Social-Democracy was still in embryo. Referring to the Reichstag elections of October 27, 1881, Friedrich Engels wrote to Edward Bernstein on Nov. 30,

of the same year, "If ever an outward event has been capable of restoring Marx to his former vigor, it has been done by these elections." True, the number of socialist votes had fallen from 493,000 in 1877 and 437,000 in 1878, to 312,000. But the result filled Marx and his intimate followers with rejoicing. That it was possible to emerge from the elections with this comparatively small loss of votes, at a time when the heaviest political and economic pressure rested upon the people was, to them, encouraging proof of the power of resistance of the German working class. "Never has a proletariat responded so splendidly," continued Engels in his letter. And truly, the German working class showed more firmness and more unity, particularly in the large cities and industrial centers, than any other working class in the world. Little Denmark excepted, the movement everywhere stood on the verge of dissolution, where it had not, indeed, already fallen to pieces.

Out of these weak beginnings a socialist movement has developed that is today a power in the world.

Disheartening as the outlook today may be, there is not a country in the civilized world in which the socialist movement, in one form or another, has not become a decisive factor in political and economic life.

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In every age of human progress in the history of every great idea, one may observe the same phenomena. The new idea, the outgrowth of existing historic and social conditions, slumbers in the unconscious masses of humanity until it becomes embodied as it were in a few particularly sensitive, great and active minds. But seldom has the embodiment of a new idea found such complete expression in a *single* person, as when modern Socialism received its first concrete expression in the life, thought and work of Karl Marx.

In 1842 Marx first stepped into the arena of public life, as fighter in the radical wing of the bourgeoisie. Two years later, he turned toward Socialism. In 1845 and 1846, together with Engels, he was working out his socialist teachings, and came

into direct contact with the socialist labor movement. At that time it was still a secret organization. In his writings he relentlessly attacked all radicalism and socialism that failed to take account of the political struggles of the times or deemed itself superior to them. He opposed that abstract philosophical speculation that plays with concepts and ideas, and the kind of socialist speculation that fixes its aim according to ideas and ideals, instead of by the concrete needs of the working class. But his own theories, in so far as they had not already appeared in his critical works, were published by Marx and Engels on the eve of the revolution of 1848, in the memorable, epochmaking manifesto of the Communist Party.

It is generally known that Marx and Engels each prepared a separate draft for this manifesto, that Engels, after the two had been compared, immediately declared that of Marx to be superior to his own, that the two worked together on this manifesto until it appeared in its final form.

To us it would seem as if the original draft prepared by Marx, which has been published in the "Letters of Marx and Engels," defines the most permanent scientific work of Marx and Engels, the *materialistic conception of history*, more clearly than the final manifesto. There we read:

"The Communists propagate no new theory of private ownership. They merely express the historical fact that capitalist production and, therefore, bourgeois property relations are no longer in harmony with the social forces of production nor with the development of industry itself."

"Do not wrangle with us by judging the intended abolition of bourgeois property by your bourgeois standards of freedom and culture. Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into law for all, a will whose essential character and direction are determined by the economic conditions of existence of your class.

"You share with all past ruling classes the prejudiced conception that regards existing production and property relations as

the eternal laws of nature and reason, instead of looking upon them in their true light, as the historic conditions that are the outcome of a temporary stage of development of the forces of production."

"What you are well able to comprehend in the history of feudal ownership, you refuse to understand about capitalist ownership."

"Communists propagate no new theory of ownership. They merely express a fact. You deny their most forcible arguments. You must deny them. You are about-face Utopians."

This gives us, briefly, the materialistic conception of history. According to this theory, all human conceptions of right and morality as well as their philosophical expressions, are the outgrowth of human conditions, or, in other words, the methods of production of the human race, i. e., the character of the productive forces used by man—the forces of nature and the tools—are the ultimately decisive factors.

The conditions under which the human race produces exert a definite influence upon its conceptions of right, morality and world philosophy; and these latter are therefore subject to constant change in the course of human evolution.

The materialistic conception of history was by no means the immediate discovery of Marx and Engels. It had been well developed in its fundamental elements, before their time. The scientific greatness of the authors of the Communist Manifesto lies in the fact that they developed it systematically and with a definite aim in view, that they created out of a mass of undigested ideas and ideals a compact and pregnant formula.

Greatest of all contributions made by Marx to posterity is the determination of the specific role played by political economy in the history of the world. Upon this is based the theory of the class struggle. True, the existence of classes and the inevitable struggle between them had already been proclaimed. It was left to Marx and Engels to give to this struggle a scientific founda-

tion, to turn it, by the recognition of its historic significance, into more clearly defined and more consistent channels.

Earlier French and English writers had conceived of history as a series of class struggles taking place under everchanging forms and conditions. But Marx first investigated the economic causes that are responsible for the rise and decline of the classes themselves, and the economic motives that determined their inner struggles. He drew them out into the light of scientific research, stripped of the ancient wrappings and trappings of religion, righteousness, ethics and morals in which they had been presented to the human race often more or less consciously by the combatants themselves.

In his works the various classes that have held the scepter in the history of human kind, were for the first time justly tried and justly adjudged. They were recognized as the necessary products of social evolution, of a process of development moreover that made their overthrow a necessary condition of the progress of human kind. He showed the inexorable law of social developments that creates within each new class that comes into power the class that will one day hurl it from its throne.

This brings us to the second historical contribution of Marx, the perception that the great human struggle of the classes is ultimately of an economic nature, that its object is the surplus product of human labor that the producing classes must pay to their masters. The form of this surplus product changes under varying forms of production. In a capitalist state of society, the obvious form of surplus production disappears, i. e., the form in which it presents itself in a system of serfdom or chattel slavery. It became necessary, therefore, to disclose this hidden surplus product paid by the proletariat to the dominant class in capitalist production. The specifically economic works of Marx, which find their concentrated expression in his gigantic, uncompleted "Capital," are devoted to the investigation of this problem.

According to Marx, this surplus product is the surplus value of capitalist production that is produced by the wage worker for the employer over and above the price of his own labor power.

In other words, the wage paid by the capitalist to his worker, whatever form it may take, whether as time or piece wage, is not a return for accomplished labor, but rather the price for which the capitalist buys the labor power that the worker temporarily places at his disposal. The employer utilizes this labor power for the production of a surplus value over and above the price paid therefore. Without this surplus value a capitalist system of production is inconceivable; the accumulation of surplus value is the law of life of capitalist society. The fight for surplus value, as it is expressed on the one side by the competitive struggle between capitalists against one another, on the other as a struggle for wages and hours of labor between capital and labor, is the driving force that leads first to higher methods of production, and thereby, ultimately, to increasing concentration of capitalist undertakings, to the accumulation of capital in the hands of individuals until this concentration has reached a point when it becomes incompatible with the further development of human production. At this stage the working class will be forced to enforce the expropriation of capitalistic monopolists—or fall into a state of extreme degradation and servitude.

But the disappearance of the last class dependent upon the exploitation of surplus value will put an end to production for surplus value, and in its place will come communistic production upon a socialized basis.

This phase of the Marxian theory, particularly the conclusions he has drawn from his theory of surplus value, has met with active skepticism, not only from the so-called "Katheder Socialisten" (College Professors) the school of Schmoller, Wagner and Sombart, but particularly on the part of the school of "Revisionists" that first received a systematic program of sorts under the leadership of Edward Bernstein. But even Marx's socialist critics—who by the way have become more and more silent, cannot deny, what even Werner Sombart must concede: that capitalist production is production for surplus value, that surplus value is the dominant force in capitalist society.

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If the great revolutions in Finland and Russia, and the pro-

gress of events in the British labor movement possess any significance, it is that we have emerged from the period of petty social and political reforms into an era of revolutionary social upheavals.

The revolutionary upheaval of society by the abolition of the capitalist state has ceased to be an academic question. It has come into a stage of living actuality and will henceforth demand the most intense attention of the socialist movement and of the International. Under these circumstances it is particularly interesting to recall the words that Marx has written of the coming revolution. His "Capital" contains the most concise description of the revolution and the characteristics Marx believed it must ultimately assume:

"What now remains to be expropriated is no longer the independent workingman, but the capitalist exploiter of many workingmen. This expropriation will be enforced by the laws of capitalist production itself, by the concentration of capitalist industries. One capitalist kills many others . . . The number of capitalist magnates who usurp and monopolize all benefits that result from this upheaval constantly decreases. And in the same measure suffering, oppression, enslavement, degradation and exploitation, increase, and with it there grows the revolt of the united and organized working class, trained by the mechanism of capitalist productive processes. Capitalist production becomes a fetter to the productive process that has grown up with and under its protection. The concentration of the means of production and the socialization of labor reach a point where the capitalist shell becomes unbearable. It will be rent asunder. The hour of capitalist private property will strike. The expropriator will be expropriated."

According to Marx, then, it depends only upon the one consideration, whether or not the point has been reached when production by private capitalists will release production, i. e., when the Revolution will come of its own accord. For of course it cannot be hastened, it must break its own way, as a historic necessity. Marx did not mean an ordinary industrial crisis.

Undoubtedly he had in mind a crisis of extraordinary dimensions, a crisis that would spread out over all of *the most important industrial nations*, because this social revolution can come only from economic, not from purely, or even mainly political sources. He means, in other words, the "world catastrophe," that checks all industrial production by wiping out all markets, that depreciates capital and so staggers the economic foundation of present day society that its proud capitalist superstructure will fall into tottering ruins. Even terrified capitalist economists are beginning to see that a few more years of war will inevitably result in the overthrow of the existing social state.

In this paragraph Marx mentions another outward characteristic that will mark the great social revolution: the expropriation of the smaller capitalist by the larger, and the development of a working class "united and organized, schooled by the process of production itself," a class to which he referred at another time as the "only revolutionary class." The revolution itself will be the expropriation of the expropriator, at the command of the revolutionary working class through a new social order.

In other words, Marx never believed in the possibility of a gradual revolution that would lead to the great expropriation, for he was never so childish as to believe that the monopolists would submit peacefully to gradual expropriation. He knew that this expropriation can come only in one great upheaval, and that it must come when the processes of production in all countries where modern industry exists, have been so completely dominated by its masters that the pressure of their power becomes unbearable.

According to Marx, "the education, organization and unification of the working class" to revolutionary action will be, in the main, the work of the capitalist class. This has been interpreted to mean that Marx attached no importance to the propaganda work of the socialists and their parties. In a man who was himself the organizer of international socialist propaganda, this would be a peculiar contradiction. What Marx actually wished to express was this: that even when socialist propaganda seems

to make only slow, hardly noticeable progress, as was the case at the time when his "Capital" was being written, this is no cause for despair. He recognized that the conditions for the realization of the socialist goal are created, as a historical necessity, by the capitalist class, and that these will determine the moment when the eyes of the workers and the expropriated will be opened, when they will be turned into a revolutionary proletariat. The Bourgeoisie, says Marx, produces, above all, its own gravedigger.

In the "Communist Manifesto" Marx further describes the character of the revolution, and the tools with which these "grave diggers" will bury the titanic corpse of capitalism forever: "If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled by the force of circumstances to organize itself as a class, if by means of a revolution it makes itself the ruling class and, as such, sweeps away the force of the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonism, and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class."

And at the end of this epochmaking document, which is the more impressive because it was written at a time when capitalism was still in its infancy, it is expressed still more clearly:

"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."

He who has carefully read and understood Karl Marx will never class him with those well-behaved children of polite society who look forward to *the* revolution as a friendly neighborly afternoon-tea, and shudder with holy terror before the actual realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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In every age of human progress in the history of every great idea, there occurs the same phenomena. The new idea, the outgrowth of historic and social conditions, slumbers in the unconscious masses of humanity, until it becomes embodied, as it

were, in a few particularly sensitive, great and active minds. But seldom has the embodiment of a new idea found such complete expression in a *single* person, as when modern Socialism received its first concrete expression in the life, thoughts and work of Marx.

The scientific greatness of Marx and the greatness of scientific Socialism can find no better formulation, than that which they received in that pregnant sentence of the Manifesto in its early wording:

"We do not come to the world with a new doctrine: Here is the truth; fall on your knees before it! We have but evolved new principles from the principles of the world. We do not say 'Cease your struggles, they are vain; from us you will hear the true message for your struggles!' We only show you *why* you are struggling, and this realization the world *must* make its own, even against its will."

Therein lies the all-conquering power of the ideas that Marx and Engels brought forth into the world. They did not preach Socialism as a doctrine. They held up before humanity a mirror in which it could see itself, its struggles and the causes that brought them forth, Marx did not say: "Follow my teachings and you will be happy." He said: "Nature and industrial conditions in their inevitable course will force you, willingly or unwillingly, whether you close your eyes to the truth or not, along the path that history has marked out for you."

What Marx was as a thinker, he was as a propagandist, as the fighter for an ideal, for whose clarification and concrete realization he rendered such inestimable service. His practical work as leader of the "International Workingmen's Association," which is described elsewhere in this magazine by one intimately acquainted with the circumstances, can hardly be separated from his scientific activity. The former was the natural and necessary consequence of the latter. The spirit that conceived and explained the fundamental idea of the "Capital" was ordained to cry out the thunderous "Workers of all countries, unite!" into the world.

And this slogan became mighty, became glorious because it so

fully expressed the needs of the times, because an international union of labor had to arise to take up arms against the internationalism of capital. Therefore it re-echoed, from North to South, from East to West, like a trumpet blast waking the exploited and the miserable from their drugged sleep of slavery.

Marx is still young. With the freshness and determination of youth his thoughts and his spiritual weapons are fighting the battles of the proletariat. He has found the alchemy that will heal human misery. He has taught us how to destroy the slavery that lies at the root of all slavery. Before his achievements in the field of socialist science, the works of all his predecessors vanish. Before his bold, almost adventurous undertaking, to achieve the fraternity of the most neglected, most derided of all classes, to destroy classes themselves, the boldest plans of history pale into insignificance. Never was there a character of greater purity. In him words, deeds, thoughts and actions were one harmonious whole. Ideal in his family relations, as a man and as a citizen, Marx may well be for us an eternal monument of spiritual greatness and human power.

His name will live forever in the Pantheon of humanity—in the noblest temple of fame whose gates are closed to the “great men” of the earth, in the hearts of the poor and the miserable, in the hearts of the working class.