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Marx and History

We are here to discuss themes and problems of the Marxist conception of history a hundred years after the death of Marx. This is not a ritual of centenary celebration, but it is important to begin by reminding ourselves of the unique role of Marx in historiography. I will simply do so by three illustrations. My first is autobiographical. When I was a student in Cambridge in the 1930s, many of the ablest young men and women joined the Communist Party. But as this was a very brilliant era in the history of a very distinguished university, many of them were profoundly influenced by the great names at whose feet we sat. Among the young Communists there we used to joke: the Communist philosophers were Wittgensteinians, the Communist economists were Keynesians, the Communist students of literature were disciples of F. R. Leavis. And the historians? They were Marxists, because there was no historian that we knew of at Cambridge or elsewhere—and we did hear and know of some great ones, such as Marc Bloch—who could compete with Marx as a master and an inspiration. My second illustration is similar. Thirty years later, in 1969, Sir

John Hicks, Nobel laureate, published his *Theory of Economic History*. He wrote: 'Most of those [who wish to fit into place the general course of history] would use the Marxian categories, or some modified version of them, since there is so little in the way of an alternative version that is available. It does, nevertheless, remain extraordinary that one hundred years after *Das Kapital* . . . so little else should have emerged.'[1] My third illustration comes from Fernand Braudel's splendid *Capitalism and Material Life*—a work whose very title provides a link with Marx. In that noble work Marx is referred to more often than any other author, even than any *French* author. Such a tribute from a country not given to underestimate its national thinkers, is impressive in itself.

Historical Writings

This influence of Marx on the writing of history is not a self-evident development. For although the materialist conception of history is the core of Marxism, and although everything Marx wrote is impregnated with history, he himself did not write much history as historians understand it. In this respect Engels was more of a historian, writing more works which could be reasonably classified as 'history' in libraries. Of course Marx studied history and was extremely erudite. But he wrote no work with 'History' in the title except a series of polemical anti-Tsarist articles later published as *The Secret Diplomatic History of the 18th Century*, which is one of the least valuable of his works. What we call Marx's historical writings consist almost exclusively of current political analysis and journalistic comment, combined with a degree of historical background. His current political analyses, such as *Class Struggles in France* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, are truly remarkable. His voluminous journalistic writings, though of uneven interest, contain analyses of the greatest interest—one thinks of his articles on India—and they are in any case examples of how Marx applied his method to concrete problems both of history and of a period which has since become history. But they were not written as history, as people who pursue the study of the past understand it. Finally, Marx's study of capitalism contains an enormous amount of historical material, historical illustration and other matter relevant to the historian.

The bulk of Marx's historical work is thus integrated into his theoretical and political writings. All these consider historical developments in a more or less long-term framework, involving the whole span of human development. They must be read together with his writings which focus on short periods or particular topics and problems, or on the detailed history of events. Nevertheless, no complete synthesis of the actual process of historical development can be found in Marx; nor can even *Capital* be treated as 'a history of capitalism until 1867'.

There are three reasons, two minor and one major, why this is so—and why Marxist historians are therefore not merely commenting on Marx but doing what he himself did not do. First, as we know, Marx had

[1] J. Hicks, *A Theory of Economic History*, London 1969, p. 3.

great difficulty in bringing his literary projects to completion. Second, his views continued to evolve until his death, though within a framework established in the middle of the 1840s. Third, and most important, in his mature works Marx deliberately studied history in reverse order, taking developed capitalism as his starting-point. 'Man' was the clue to the anatomy of 'the ape'. This is not, of course, an anti-historical procedure. It implies that the past cannot be understood exclusively or primarily in its own terms: not only because it is part of a historical process, but also because that historical process alone has enabled us to analyse and understand things about that process and the past. Take the concept of *labour*, central to the materialist conception of history. Before capitalism—or before Adam Smith, as Marx says more specifically—the concept of labour-in-general, as distinct from particular kinds of labour which are qualitatively different and incomparable, was not available. Yet if we are to understand human history, in a global, long-term sense, as the progressively effective utilization and transformation of nature by mankind, then the concept of social labour in general is essential. Marx's approach still remains debatable, in that it cannot tell us whether future analysis, on the basis of future historical development, will not make comparable analytical discoveries that enable thinkers to reinterpret human history in terms of some other central analytical concept. This is a potential gap in the analysis, even though we do not think that such a hypothetical future development is likely to abandon the centrality of Marx's analysis of labour, at least for certain obviously crucial aspects of human history. My point is not to call Marx into question, but simply to show that his approach must leave out, as not immediately relevant to his purpose, much of what historians are interested to know—for example, many aspects of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. These were left to later Marxists, although it is true that Friedrich Engels, always more interested in 'what actually happened', did concern himself more with such matters.

The Materialist Conception of History

Marx's influence on historians, and not only Marxist historians, is nevertheless based both upon his general theory (the materialist conception of history), with its sketches of, or hints at, the general shape of human historical development from primitive communalism to capitalism, and upon his concrete observations relating to particular aspects, periods and problems of the past. I do not want to say much about the latter, even though they have been extremely influential and can still be enormously stimulating and illuminating. *Capital Vol. 1* contains three or four fairly marginal references to Protestantism, yet the entire debate on the relationship between religion in general, and Protestantism in particular, and the capitalist mode of production derives from them. Similarly, *Capital* has one footnote on Descartes linking his views (animals as machines, real, as opposed to speculative, philosophy as a means of mastering nature and perfecting human life) with 'the manufacturing period' and raising the question why the early economists preferred Hobbes and Bacon as their philosophers, and later ones Locke. (For his part, Dudley North believed that Descartes's method had 'begun to free political economy from its old supersti-

tions'.)[2] In the 1890s this was already used by non-Marxists as an example of Marx's remarkable originality, and even today it would provide seminar material for at least a semester. However, nobody at this meeting will need to be convinced of Marx's genius or the range of his knowledge and interests; and it should be appreciated that much of his writing about particular aspects of the past inevitably reflects the historical knowledge available in his lifetime.

The materialist conception of history is worth discussing at greater length because it is today controverted or criticized not only by non-Marxists and anti-Marxists, but also within Marxism. For generations it was the least questioned part of Marxism and was regarded, rightly in my view, as its core. Developed in the course of Marx's and Engels's critique of German philosophy and ideology, it is essentially directed against the belief that 'ideas, thoughts, concepts produce, determine and dominate men, their material conditions and real life'.[3] From 1846 this conception remained essentially the same. It can be summarized in a single sentence, repeated with variations: 'It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.'[4] It is already elaborated in *The German Ideology*: 'This conception of history thus relies on expounding the real process of production—starting from the material production of life itself—and comprehending the form of intercourse connected with and created by this mode of production, i.e., civil society in its various stages, as the basis of all history; describing it in its action as the state, and also explaining how all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality, etc., etc., arise from it, and tracing the process of their formation from that basis; thus the whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various aspects on one another).'[5] We should note in passing that for Marx and Engels the 'real process of production' is not simply the 'material production of life itself' but something broader. To use Eric Wolf's just formulation, it is 'the complex set of mutually dependent relations among nature, work, social labour and social organization'.[6] We should also note that humans produce with both hand and head.[7]

This conception is not history but a guide to history, a programme of research. To quote *The German Ideology* again: 'Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the practical process of human development. . . . When reality is described, self-sufficient philosophy *die selbständige Philosophie* loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of men. These abstractions in themselves,

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[2] Quoted from K. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, Harmondsworth 1976, p. 513.
[3] Marx, Engels, 'The German Ideology', *Collected Works*, London 1976, p. 24. Translation modified.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[6] E. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley 1983, p. 74.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history.'[8]

The fullest formulation comes in the 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. It has to be asked, of course, whether one can reject it and remain a Marxist. However, it is perfectly clear that this ultra-concise formulation requires elaboration: the ambiguity of its terms has aroused debate about what precisely are 'forces' and 'social relations' of production, what constitutes the 'economic base', the 'superstructure' and so on. It is also perfectly clear from the beginning that, since human beings have consciousness, the materialist conception of history is the *basis* of historical explanation but not historical explanation itself. History is not like ecology: human beings decide and think about what happens. It is not quite so clear whether it is *determinist* in the sense of allowing us to discover what will *inevitably* happen, as distinct from the general procedures of historical transformation. For it is only in retrospect that the question of historical inevitability can be firmly settled, and even then only as tautology: what happened was inevitable because nothing else happened; therefore, what else might have happened is academic. Marx wanted to prove *a priori* that a certain historical result, communism, was the inevitable result of historical development. But it is by no means clear that this can be shown by scientific historical analysis. What was apparent, from the very beginning, was that historical materialism was not *economic* determinism: not all non-economic phenomena in history can be derived from specific economic phenomena, and particular events or dates are not determined in this sense. Even the most rigid proponents of historical materialism devoted lengthy discussions to the role of accident and the individual in history (Plekhanov); and, whatever philosophical criticisms can be made of his formulations, Engels was quite unambiguous on this point in his late letters to Bloch, Schmidt, Starkenburg and others. Marx himself, in such specific texts as *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and his journalism of the 1850s, leaves us in no doubt that his view was basically the same.

Being and Consciousness

In reality, the crucial argument about the materialist conception of history has concerned the fundamental relationship between social being and consciousness. This has centred not so much on philosophical considerations (e.g., 'idealism' versus 'materialism') or even moral-political questions ('what is the role of "free will" and conscious human action?' 'if the situation is not ripe, how can we act?'), as on empirical problems of comparative history and social anthropology. One typical argument would be that it is impossible to distinguish social relations of production from ideas and concepts (i.e., base from superstructure), partly because this is itself a retrospective historical distinction, and partly because social relations of production are struc-

[8] *The German Ideology*, p. 37.

tured by culture and concepts which cannot be reduced to them. Another objection would be that since a given mode of production is compatible with *n* types of concepts, these cannot be explained by reduction to the 'base'. Thus we know of societies which have the same material base but widely varying ways of structuring their social relations, ideology and other superstructural features. To this extent men's views of the universe determine the forms of their social existence, at least as much as the latter determine the former. What determines these views must therefore be analysed quite differently: for example, following Lévi-Strauss, as a set of variations on a limited number of intellectual concepts.

Let us leave aside the question of whether Marx abstracts from culture. (My own view is that in his actual historical writings he is the very opposite of an economic reductionist.) The basic fact remains that analysis of any society, at any moment of historical development, must begin with analysis of its mode of production: that is to say, of a) the technical-economic form of 'the metabolism between man and nature' (Marx), the way in which man adapts to and transforms nature by labour; and b) the social arrangements by which labour is mobilized, deployed and allocated. This is so today. If we wish to understand anything about Britain or Italy in the late-twentieth century, we must obviously begin with the massive transformations in the mode of production that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. In the case of the most primitive societies, kinship organization and the system of ideas (of which kinship organization is, among other things, an aspect) will depend on whether we are dealing with a food-gathering or a food-producing economy. For instance, as Wolf has pointed out,[9] in a food-gathering economy resources are widely available for anyone with the ability to obtain them, and in a food-producing economy (agricultural or pastoral) access to these resources is restricted. It has to be defined, not only here and now but across generations.

Now, although the concept of base and superstructure is essential in defining a set of analytical priorities, the materialist conception of history faces another, more serious criticism. For Marx holds not just that the mode of production is primary and that the superstructure must in some sense conform to 'the essential distinctions among human beings' which it entails (i.e., the social relations of production), but also that there is an inevitable evolutionary trend for the material productive forces of society to develop, and thus to come into contradiction with the existing productive relationships and their relatively inflexible superstructural expressions, which then have to give way. As G. A. Cohen has argued, then, this evolutionary trend is, in the broadest sense, technological.

The problem is not so much why such a trend should exist, since, over the history of the world as a whole, it unquestionably has existed up to the present time. The real problem is that this trend is patently not universal. Although we can explain away many cases of societies which do not exhibit such a trend, or in which it seems to stop at a certain

[9] Wolf, pp. 91–92.

point, this is not enough. We may well posit a general trend to progress from food-gathering to food-production (where this is not made impossible or unnecessary for ecological reasons), but we cannot do so for the modern developments of technology and industrialization, which have conquered the world from one and only one regional base. This seems to create a 'Catch-22' situation. *Either* there is not a general tendency for the material forces of production of society to develop, or to develop beyond a certain point—in which case the development of Western capitalism has to be explained without primary reference to such a general tendency, and the materialist conception of history can at best be used to explain a special case. (I note in passing that to abandon the view that men are constantly acting in a way which tends to increase their control over nature is both unrealistic and productive of considerable historical and other complications.) *Or else* there is such a general historical tendency—in which case we have to explain why it has not operated everywhere, or even why in many cases (e.g., China) it has clearly been effectively counteracted. It would seem that nothing other than the strength, inertia or some other force of the social structure and superstructure over the material base could have held up the movement of that material base.

In my view this does not create an insuperable problem for the materialist conception of history as a way of interpreting the world. Marx himself, who was far from being a unilinearist, offered an explanation of why some societies evolved from classical antiquity through feudalism to capitalism, and also of why other societies (a vast body which he roughly grouped under the Asiatic Mode of Production) did not. However, it does create a very difficult problem for the materialist conception of history as a way of *changing* the world. The core of Marx's argument in this respect is that revolution must come because the forces of production have reached, or must reach, a point at which they are incompatible with the 'capitalist integument' of relations of production. But if it can be shown that in other societies there has been no trend for the material forces to grow, or that their growth has been controlled, sidetracked or otherwise prevented by the force of social organization and superstructure from causing revolution in the sense of the 1859 Preface, then why should not the same occur in bourgeois society? It may, of course, be possible and even relatively easy to formulate a more modest historical case for the necessity or perhaps inevitability of the transformation from capitalism to socialism. But we would then lose two things which were important to Karl Marx and certainly to his followers (myself included): a) the sense that the triumph of socialism is the logical end of all historical evolution to date; and b) that it marks the end of 'pre-history' in the sense that it cannot and will not be an 'antagonistic' society.

Modes of Production

This does not affect the value of the concept of a 'mode of production', which the Preface defines as 'the aggregate of the productive relationships which constitute the economic structure of a society and form the mode of production of the material means of existence'. Whatever the social relations of production are, and whatever other functions in

society they may have, the mode of production constitutes the structure which determines what form the growth of the productive forces and the distribution of the surplus will take, how society can or cannot change its structures, and how, at suitable moments, the transition to another mode of production can or will take place. It also establishes the range of superstructural possibilities. In short, the mode of production is the base of our understanding of the variety of human societies and their interactions, as well as of their historical dynamics. The mode of production is not identical with a society: 'society' is a system of human relations, or, to be more precise, of relations between human groups. The 'mode of production' (MOP) concept serves to identify the forces guiding the alignment of these groups—which can be done variously in different societies, within a certain range. Do the MOPs form a series of evolutionary stages, ordered chronologically or otherwise? There seems to be little doubt that Marx himself saw them as forming a series in which man's growing emancipation from, and control over, nature affected both the forces and the relations of production. According to this set of criteria, the various MOPs could be thought to be ranged in ascending order. But while some MOPs clearly cannot be thought as prior to others (e.g., those requiring commodity production or steam engines as prior to those that do not), Marx's list of MOPs is not intended to form a unilinear chronological succession. In fact, it is a matter of observation that at all but the (hypothetical) earliest stages of human development, a variety of MOPs have coexisted and interacted.

A mode of production embodies both a particular *programme* of production (a way of producing on the basis of a particular technology and productive division of labour) and 'a specific, historically occurring set of social relations through which labour is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization and knowledge' at a given phase of their development, and through which the socially produced surplus is circulated, distributed and used for accumulation or some other purpose. A Marxist history must consider both functions. Here lies the weakness of a highly original and important book by the anthropologist Eric Wolf: *Europe and the People without History*. This attempts to show how the global expansion and triumph of capitalism have affected the pre-capitalist societies it has integrated into its world system; and how capitalism has in turn been modified and shaped through being embedded, in some sense, within a plurality of modes of production. It is a book about connections rather causes, although connections may turn out to be essential to the analysis of causes. It brilliantly sets out a way of grasping 'the strategic features of . . . [the] variability' of different societies—that is, the manners in which they could and could not be modified by contact with capitalism. It also, incidentally, provides an illuminating guide to the relations between MOPs and the societies within them and their ideologies or 'cultures'.[10] What it does not do—or, indeed, set out to do—is to explain the movements of the material base and division of labour, and hence the transformations of the MOPs. Wolf operates with three broad MOPs or 'families' of MOPs: the 'kin-ordered' mode, the 'tributary'

[10] Wolf, p. 389.

mode and the 'capitalist mode'. But while he allows for the change from hunting and food-collecting societies to producing societies within the kin-ordered mode, his 'tributary' mode is a vast continuum of systems which includes both what Marx called 'feudal' and what he called 'Asiatic'. In all these, surplus is essentially appropriated by ruling groups which exert political and military force. There is much to be said for this broad classification, borrowed from Samir Amin, but its drawback is that the 'tributary' mode clearly includes societies at widely differing stages of productive capacity: from Western feudal lords in the Dark Ages to the Chinese Empire; from economies without cities to urbanized ones. Only peripherally, however, does the analysis touch on the essential problem of why, how and when one variant of the tributary mode generated developed capitalism.

In short, the analysis of modes of production must be based on study of the available material forces of production: study, that is, both of technology and its organization, and of economics. For let us not forget that in the same Preface whose later passage is so often quoted, Marx argued that political economy was the anatomy of civil society. Nevertheless, in one respect the traditional analysis of MOPs and their transformation must be developed—and recent Marxist work has, in fact, done so. The actual transformation of one mode into another has often been seen in causal and unilinear terms: within each mode, it is argued, there is a 'basic contradiction' which generates the dynamic and the forces that will lead to its transformation. It is far from clear that this is Marx's own view—except for capitalism—and it certainly leads to great difficulties and endless debates, particularly in connection with the passage from Western feudalism to capitalism. It seems more useful to make the following two assumptions. *First*, that the basic elements within a mode of production which tend to destabilize it imply the *potentiality* rather than the certainty of transformation, but that, depending on the structure of the mode, they also set certain limits to the kind of transformation that is possible. *Second*, that the mechanisms leading to the transformation of one mode into another may not be exclusively internal to that mode, but may arise from the conjunction and interaction of differently structured societies. In this sense all development is *mixed* development. Instead of looking only for the specific regional conditions which led to the formation of, say, the peculiar system of classical antiquity in the Mediterranean, or to the transformation of feudalism into capitalism within the manors and cities of Western Europe, we ought to look at the various paths which led to the junctions and cross-roads at which, at a certain stage of development, these areas found themselves.

This approach—which seems to me perfectly in the spirit of Marx, and for which, if required, some textual authority may be found—makes it easier to explain the coexistence of societies which progress further on the road to capitalism and those which, until penetrated and conquered by capitalism, failed to develop in that way. But it also draws attention to the fact, of which historians of capitalism are increasingly aware, that the evolution of this system is itself a mixed evolution: that it builds on pre-existing materials, utilizing, adapting but also being shaped by them. Recent research on the formation and development

of the working classes has illustrated this point. In fact, one reason why the past twenty-five years in world history have seen such profound social transformations is that such pre-capitalist elements, hitherto essential parts of the operation of capitalism, have finally become too eroded by capitalist development to play the vital role they once did. I am thinking here, of course, of the family.

Marx's Legacy

Let me now return to the illustrations of Marx's unique significance for historians which I gave at the start of this talk. Marx remains the essential base of any adequate study of history, because—so far—he alone has attempted to formulate a methodological approach to history as a whole, and to envisage and explain the entire process of human social evolution. In this respect he is superior to Max Weber, his only real rival as a theoretical influence on historians, and in many respects an important supplement and corrective. A history based on Marx is conceivable without Weberian additions, but Weberian history is inconceivable except insofar as it takes Marx, or at least the Marxist *Fragestellung*, as its starting-point. If we wish to answer the great question of all history—namely, how, why and through what processes humanity evolved from cave-man to cosmic travellers, wielders of nuclear force and genetic engineers—we can only do so by asking Marx's type of questions if not accepting all his answers. The same is true if we wish to answer the second great question implicit in the first: that is, why this evolution has not been even and unilinear, but extraordinarily uneven and combined. The only alternative answers which have been suggested are in terms of biological evolution (e.g., sociobiology), but these are plainly inadequate. Marx did not say the last word—far from it—but he did say the first word, and we are still obliged to continue the discourse he inaugurated.

The subject of this talk is Marx and History, and it is not my function here to anticipate discussion on what the major themes are or ought to be for Marxist historians today. But I would not wish to conclude without drawing attention to two themes which seem to me to require urgent attention. The first I have already mentioned: it is the mixed and combined nature of the development of any society or social system; its interaction with other systems and with the past. It is, if you wish, the elaboration of Marx's famous dictum that men make their own history but not as they choose, 'under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past'. The second is class and class struggle. We know that both concepts are essential to Marx, at least in the discussion of the history of capitalism, but we also know that the concepts are poorly defined in his writings and have led to much debate. A great deal of traditional Marxist historiography has failed to think them out, and has therefore landed in difficulties. Let me give just one example. What is a 'bourgeois revolution'? Can we think of a 'bourgeois revolution' as being 'made' by a bourgeoisie, as being the objective of a bourgeoisie's struggle for power against an old regime or ruling class which stands in the way of the institution of a bourgeois society? Or *when* can we think of it in this way? The present critique of Marxist interpretations of the English and French

revolutions has been effective, largely because it has shown that such a traditional image of the bourgeoisie and bourgeois revolution is inadequate. We should have known this. As Marxists, or indeed as realistic observers of history, we will not follow the critics in denying the existence of such revolutions, or in denying that the 17th-century English revolutions and the French Revolution did mark fundamental changes and 'bourgeois' reorientations of their societies. But we shall have to think more precisely about what we mean.

How, then, can we summarize Marx's impact on the writing of history a hundred years after his death? We may make four essential points.

1. Marx's influence in non-socialist countries is undoubtedly greater among historians today than ever before in my own lifetime—and my memory goes back fifty years—and probably than ever before since his death. (The situation in countries officially committed to his ideas is obviously not comparable.) This needs to be said, because at this moment there is a fairly widespread move away from Marx among intellectuals, particularly in France and Italy. The fact is that his influence may be seen not only in the number of historians who claim to be Marxist, though this is very large, and in the number who acknowledge his significance for history (e.g., Braudel in France, the Bielefeld school in Germany), but also in the large number of ex-Marxist historians, often eminent, who keep Marx's name before the world (e.g., Postan). Furthermore, there are many elements which, fifty years ago, were stressed chiefly by Marxists and have now become parts of mainstream history. True, this has not only been due to Karl Marx, but Marxism probably has been the main influence in 'modernizing' the writing of history.

2. As it is written and discussed today, at least in most countries, Marxist history takes Marx as its starting-point and not as its point of arrival. I do not mean that it necessarily disagrees with Marx's texts, although it is prepared to do so where these are factually wrong or obsolete. This is clearly so in the case of his views on oriental societies and the 'Asiatic mode of production', brilliant and profound though his insights so often were, and also of his views on primitive societies and their evolution. As a recent book on Marxism and anthropology by a Marxist anthropologist has pointed out: 'Marx and Engels's knowledge of primitive societies was quite insufficient as a basis for modern anthropology.' Nor do I mean that it necessarily wishes to revise or abandon the main lines of the materialist conception of history, although it is prepared to consider these critically where necessary. I, for one, do not want to abandon the materialist conception of history. But Marxist history, in its most fruitful versions, now uses his methods rather than commenting on his texts—except where these are clearly worth commenting on. We try to do what Marx himself did not as yet do.

3. Marxist history is today plural. A single 'correct' interpretation of history is not a legacy that Marx left us: it became part of the heritage of Marxism, particularly from 1930 or thereabouts, but this is no longer accepted or acceptable, at least where people have a choice in

the matter. This pluralism has its disadvantages. They are more obvious among people who theorize about history than among those who write it, but they are visible even among the latter. Nevertheless, whether we think these disadvantages are greater or smaller than the advantages, the pluralism of Marxist work today is an inescapable fact. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with it. Science is a dialogue between different views based upon a common method. It only ceases to be science when there is no method for deciding which of the contending views is wrong or less fruitful. Unfortunately this is often the case in history, but by no means only in Marxist history.

4. Marxist history today is not, and cannot be, isolated from the remainder of historical thinking and research. This is a double-sided statement. On the one hand, Marxists no longer reject—except as the source of raw material for their work—the writings of historians who do not claim to be Marxists, or indeed who are anti-Marxist. If they are good history, they have to be taken account of. This does not stop us, however, from criticizing and waging ideological battle against even good historians who act as ideologists. On the other hand, Marxism has so transformed the mainstream of history that it is today often impossible to tell whether a particular work has been written by a Marxist or a non-Marxist, unless the author advertises his or her ideological position. This is not a cause for regret. I would like to look forward to a time when nobody asks whether authors are Marxist or not, because Marxists could then be satisfied with the transformation of history achieved through Marx's ideas. But we are far from such a utopian condition: the ideological and political, class and liberation struggles of the twentieth century are such that it is even unthinkable. For the foreseeable future, we shall have to defend Marx and Marxism in and out of history, against those who attack them on political and ideological grounds. In doing so, we shall also defend history, and man's capacity to understand how the world has come to be what it is today, and how mankind can advance to a better future.

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