1873–1973: The century of Marxism The death of Marxism and the emergence of neo-liberalism and neo-anarchism

Chris Cutrone

At the 2012 Platypus Affiliated Society's (PAS) annual International Convention, held at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, March 30–April 1, Chris Cutrone, President of the PAS, delivered the following presentation, which has been edited for clarity. A full audio recording is available online at <http://archive.org/details/2012PresidentsReport>.

IN THE TRADITION we established just two years ago, there is a Platypus President's report, speaking to the historical moment. At our convention last year, I presented on the "anti-fa" vs. "anti-imp" Left, as a division in the history of the Left that bears upon the present.[1] In the year prior to that, in my first report, I presented on the 1970s as a decade in the history of the Left that continues to inform the present, but in ways that are usually not acknowledged.

This year, I am presenting on "1873 to 1973: The century of Marxism." The reason that I, in consultation with my comrades and colleagues, chose this topic, is to attempt to grasp the crisis of 2007–08 as closing the period of neoliberalism that began with the crisis of 1973. One thing to consider, therefore, is the parallel but also lack or disparity between the period from 1873 to, say, 1912 vs. the period from 1973 to today. I think this bears upon how we might consider our present historical moment. So the provocative formulation I have is to call the period from 1873 to 1973 the "century of Marxism," locating Marxism itself historically in this period.

Historical periodization

I will begin with some historical dates, the birth and death years of various figures in the history of Marxism that are of prime importance for Platypus. The "century of Marxism" is, principally, after Marx's time, and ends, roughly, around the time of Adorno's death.

1818–83	Karl Marx
1820–95	Friedrich Engels
1870–1924	Vladimir Ilyich Lenin
1871–1919	Rosa Luxemburg
1879–1940	Leon Trotsky
1885–1971	Georg Lukács
1889–1914	Second International
1892–1940	Walter Benjamin
1895–1973	Max Horkheimer
1903–69	Theodor W. Adorno

If, according to Jim Creegan, in his article on #Occupy, "Hot autumn in New York,"[2] the events of 2011 were similar to but different in certain key respects from those of 1968 and 1999, this is due to 1968, as a crisis year of the New Left, and 1999, the year of the Battle of Seattle, taking place during periods of economic boom, whereas 2011 took place during the economic crisis that began in 2007–08. However, in terms of similarities and differences, what this comparison neglects is the crisis of 1973, the crisis of Keynesianism and Fordism that occurred in the aftermath of the New Left explosion of 1968. One can say, perhaps, that 1968 took place during an economic boom, but the 1970s phase of the New Left took place during a period of economic crisis, after 1973. Why Creegan, among others, may choose to forget this is that it raises the question of Marxism in the 1970s, the last time that there was a potential renascence of the Left during an economic crisis on the order of magnitude we're facing today. The 1970s were a period whose failure conditions any attempts at Marxism in the present.

The last apparent renascence of Marxism, in the 1970s "Marxist-Leninist" turn of the New Left, may indeed be considered, rather, Marxism's long-delayed *death*. In other words, Marxism didn't come back to life in the '70s so much as it finally died then. This is quite different from considering the collapse of the Soviet Bloc beginning in 1989 to be the crisis and death of Marxism. For it was in the 1970s that the crisis of Keynesian Fordism led to the neoliberal era, symbolized by the election of Thatcher and Reagan by the end of the decade. Neoliberalism has this crucial history in the 1970s, two decades before the 1990s, despite the preponderant consciousness today of later anti-globalization protests.

If the recent crisis is to be considered a crisis of neoliberalism, then it recalls the birth of the neoliberal era in the failure of the New Left, specifically the failure of New Left Marxism in the 1970s. The Marxist-Leninist turn of the New Left is coincidental historically with neoliberalism, so neoliberalism can be considered a historical phenomenon of the failure of the New Left. It was this failure that led to "postmodernist" anti-Marxism, specifically the death of the Left in its "post-political" phase of the 1980s–90s that we describe in Platypus's official Statement of Purpose.

The century of Marxism: 19th and 20th centuries

The question before us, then, is the century of Marxism, considered as the emergence, crisis, death, and memory of Marxism. That question can be historically periodized as 1873–1973.

Marx's thought predates this period, and is properly considered a phenomenon circa and in the aftermath of the Revolutions of 1848.[3] If Marx's own thought was born in the crisis of the 1840s (the "hungry '40s"), then Marx*ism* (as distinct from Marx's own thought and practice), as a form of politics *sui generis*, a Marxist politics *per se*, dates from the collapse of the First International (International Workingmen's Association) and the formation of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party (SPD) in the 1870s. As such, Marxism is contemporaneous with the first Great Depression that began with the crisis of 1873. Marxism, as a form of politics distinct from other forms of socialism, dates from this period. Prior to this, there was no question of "Marxism" but, rather, Marx and Engels and their close colleagues participated in the broader socialist movement.

1873 is commonly regarded as the end of the mid-19th century "liberal" era (which saw a certain heyday in the 1860s, also when Leftist politics emerged from post-1848 reaction). In Marxist historiography, the period after 1873 dates the emergence of the "monopoly" era of capitalism, the era of modern "imperialism." By contrast, the 1860s is the decade, for instance, marked by the U.S. Civil War, which conditioned the formation of the First International.[4] However, that period ended by the 1870s.

Significantly, 1873 was a blow to, and not a boon for, the First International. If we take the First International as paradigmatic of 19th century socialism, the crisis of 1873 did not boost 19th century socialism as much as it was coincidental historically with the crisis of 19th century socialism, namely, the collapse of the First International. The 1870s signaled a shift. This shift, towards what became "Marxism," therefore, was bound up with other changes.[5] These changes can be summed up in the historical shift from the liberal era to the state-centric era of capitalism.

"State capitalism" and Marxism

"State capitalism" is a tricky category, with a variety of different meanings. For instance, Friedrich Pollock, a member of the Frankfurt School, wrote an influential essay on "state capitalism," published in the early 1940s, which referred to changes in the inter-war years of the early 20th century. But, in another sense, "state capitalism" can be dated in two very different ways: from 1873 or 1914, either Bismarck or WWI. The fact that state capitalism can be characterized as having such very different start dates is significant: it places, specifically, the period between these two dates under certain questions. This period, 1873–1914, is coterminous with another historiographic period, the time between the Franco-Prussian War and WWI (in France, this is the period of the Third Republic, after the collapse of the Louis Bonaparte's Second Empire and the suppression of the Paris Commune), which developed towards a certain flowering of global capitalism in the Belle Époque. This is also the period of Marxism. Thus, it is significant that Marxism, in its "classical" era, can be considered a phenomenon of the turn to state capitalism. Marxists of this period called this era "imperialism," or the "highest stage of capitalism," the eve of socialist revolution. In other words, the period of the emergence of Marxism as a politics *sui generis* was also understood by Marxists of the time as sharing the historical moment of capitalism's highest possible stage. "State capitalism," in this view, was not the overcoming but rather the exacerbation of the contradictions of capitalism. Marxism was thus bound up with heightening contradiction.

The late-19th to early-20th century period of "imperialism" resulted in the First World War, which was, of course, the crisis of Marxism: the collapse of the Second International. The question is how Marxism was bound up with the imperialist phase of capitalism, and how the crisis of Marxism in WWI was connected to the other results of this period of history. In other words, how did the crisis of Marxism itself share in the historical moment of the emergence and crisis of state capitalism, understood by Marxists at the time as "imperialism"?

For the Marxists of this time, WWI was the crisis of capitalism in its period of "revolution," which was signaled, in an inaugural sense, by the Russian Revolution of 1905. Marxists such as Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky regarded this period as one confronted by the choice of "socialism or barbarism," or, more specifically, the "civil war" of the workers against the capitalists or a "world war" between imperialist states. This was the prognosis.

The 20th century (1): The death of Marxism

Both predictions, of civil war and world war, in fact, came spectacularly true. Up to that time, Marxists understood this as either one alternative or the other. As it turned out, it was both. There was a world war and a civil war in 1914–19, in which the Second International collapsed and Marxism was divided. Marxism was divided specifically on the questions of both the imperialist world war and the class-struggle civil war that followed. So the crisis of Marxism was not only over the world war but was also over the civil war.

Marxism, specifically as a form of politics *sui generis* (distinguished from the greater 19th century history of socialism, from the Utopians to Proudhon, Blanqui, Lassalle, Bakunin, et al.) that had developed in the pre-

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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ceding period, from 1875–1914, did not survive its crisis in WWI and the revolutions that followed. Rather, Marxism died then.

The failure of Marxism can be seen most clearly in the birth of a new right-wing form of politics, fascism, in this period, issuing directly out of the crisis of Marxism in WWI (see, for instance, Benito Mussolini, who before the war was a leading member of the Marxist Left of the Italian Socialist Party). Fascism, 20th century social-democratic reformism, 20th century forms of nationalism (i.e., "anti-colonialism"), and Stalinism were the predominant (but not exclusive) results of the failed crisis of Marxism 1914–19.

So, how are we to regard the history of Marxism post-1919? Precisely as its post-history, its *memory*.

The 20th century (2): The memory of Marxism

The memory of Marxism was carried, for the purposes of our project in Platypus, principally by two figures: Trotsky and Adorno. Trotsky, as the major surviving figure of Second International radicalism (Luxemburg died in 1919, and Lenin in 1924); and Adorno, as the "Critical Theorist" who tried to sustain the insights of Lukács and Korsch in the aftermath of 1917–19 (also through the attempt to sustain Benjamin's work, which was itself inspired by Lukács and Korsch's work of the early 1920s). Trotsky and Adorno represented the disintegration of theory and practice that had characterized the crisis and failure of Marxism as a *relation* of theory and practice, as a form of thinking and political action *sui generis*, as it had developed up to 1914. In other words, Marxism developed from the 1870s, it ran into a crisis by 1914, and then it became divided in its theory and practice, especially around the revolutions of 1917–19. These two figures, Trotsky and Adorno, exemplify the effects of this history. But what they actually exemplify, to be more precise, is not the separation of theory (Adorno) from practice (Trotsky), but, rather, *both* Adorno and Trotsky are symptoms of the disintegration of Marxism as a relation of theory and practice that developed in the preceding period. The theory and practice problem exists on both sides of Trotskyism and the Frankfurt School.

The memory of Marxism haunted the 20th century, especially regarding the grotesque farce of Marxism in Stalinism. If there was a tragedy of Marxism in 1914–19, then this was followed by the farce of Stalinism. Both Trotsky and Adorno exemplify the possibilities for anti-Stalinist Marxism.

What died in the 1970s (let alone in 1989!) was not Marxism but rather the memory of Marxism, which had been only tenuously sustained. Between 1919 and 1973, we had the memory of Marxism, which faded out: this memory did not really survive Adorno's death. This is not to say that Adorno was the personal embodiment of the memory of the Marxism, but that it didn't really survive the time of Adorno's death. The reason that the passing of the memory of Marxism might date, coincidentally, with the death of Adorno (who was more a thinker and not a very overtly political actor), is that "Trotskyism" as a form of Marxist politics did not really survive Trotsky's death in 1940.

What is of interest, then, is how the last great renaissance of interest in Marxism, in the 1970s, actually marked the "death" of its effective memory. The apparent recovery of Marxism in the '70s was actually the effective obscuring of its memory.

What we have been living through more recently, say, since the 2000s, is the exhaustion and falling away of the *means for obscuring* the memory of Marxism that emerged and developed in the 1970s–80s–90s, which were a process of forgetting Marxism. The 1990s were an especially interesting period in this history, as there were already some intimations of the exhaustion of the postmodernism of the previous 1970s–80s. In this sense, 1989 can be considered a certain end to the "long 1960s" that had extended into the '70s and '80s (or, '89 can be considered as an "inverted '68").

The period from 1914 to 1973 (or, perhaps, 1989) was the essential, "short" 20th century.[6]

Platypus: Marxism in the 21st century?

Now, what does this say about Platypus in this regard? There are two different generations of Platypus, broadly speaking: the generation of the 1990s and that of the 2000s. These two generations express (the tensions within) the possible recovery of the memory of Marxism against its passing means of effacement. Thus, two different founding moments of Platypus's own historical consciousness—1999, Seattle, and 2007, the exhaustion of the anti-war movement—are interrelated and interact specifically as different modulations of the exhaustion of processes for obscuring the memory of Marxism. Platypus, therefore, has two histories: a pre-history, 1999–2007; and an actual history, 2007–11/12.

If we compare our historical period with one a hundred years ago, the specificity of our project can be thrown into stark relief.

Whereas Marxism up to 1914 responded to and participated in the culmination of the imperialist phase of post-1873 capitalism, Platypus circa 2012 faces the very different challenges of the crisis of the neoliberal phase of post-1973 capitalism. In other words, our project in Platypus is a product of the end of the post-1973 neoliberal era. In this respect, the era of Marxism 1873–1914 could not contrast more starkly with our time, 1968/73–2011. Where one, 1873–1914, was a mounting crisis and a deeply ambivalent process of historical progression *and* regression, the other, our period, is one of spiraling decomposition.

This is how Platypus must relate to the history of Marxism: through the profound contrasts of post-1873 vs. post-1973 history.

Unprecedented historical moment

The reason that our project in Platypus is unprecedented is precisely because our historical moment is unprecedented: without the post-1848 and post-1873 projects of Marxism, and without the memory of Marxism 1914/19–73. Our period is a "post-Marxist" time in a totally unparalleled way. We are entering into a time not only very much unlike post-1873 or post-1914, but also significantly unlike the decades post-1973 (1970s–80s) and post-1989 (1990s–2000s).

This is why our project is so specifically one of the 21st century, of its first, and, now, its second decade. We need to attend closely to the various ways in which our project is so conditioned. The specificity of our time is our *task*.

Reference to the history of Marxism, as the ghost that might still haunt us, helps specify the peculiarities of our time, in which a fundamental transformation of Marxism is necessary for it to continue at all—for Marxism to be reborn, or, more precisely, to be reincarnated, in the traditional sense of spirit forgetting its past life. Such forgetting today, however, is a pathological repression. We must make Marxism remembered, if however, and necessarily, obscurely.

Unredeemable legacy of the 20th century

The 20th century, the period of the emergence, crisis, death, and memory of Marxism, cannot really be redeemed. In other words, the language of redemption you find in the Second International, with figures such as Rosa Luxemburg, or even with figures such as Benjamin or Adorno (who followed Luxemburg), their notion of redemption doesn't apply for us in the 21st century. The reason that the 20th century cannot be redeemed is that, unlike the 19th century, we can say that the 20th century was one of *unnecessary* suffering. This is because the failure of Marxism was unnecessary—which is why it cannot be properly forgotten.

Rather, all of (prior) human history is now filtered through the 20th century—not through capital (as in the 19th century, for Marx), but rather through the failure of Marxism. The postmodernist attempt to overturn "grand narratives" of history was first and foremost the attempt to overcome Marxism as the grandest of all narratives of history. But postmodernism was not successful in this.

Whereas, for Marx, capital was the crossroads of human history as it had culminated in the 19th century, the 20th century was characterized by the crossroads of Marxism. This affects what came after. All ideology today is anti-Marxism, thus always returning to the question of Marxism. This is why Platypus is not about Marxism as an answer to the crisis of history, but rather as a question. That means that Platypus as a project is peculiar and unlike any other Marxist project historically, and the reason that we are unlike any other Marxist project today is that we emerged when we did. Our historical moment is unlike any other period. We cannot pose Marxism as an answer but only as a question.

Now, our claim is not that Marxism is *a* question, but is, rather, the more emphatic one, that Marxism is *the* question.

Because of the nature of the last year, 2011–12, this narrative requires a postscript, on anarchism.

Neo-anarchism and neo-liberalism

I just narrated 1873–1973 with respect to Marxism. Now, I'd like to narrate 1873–1973 in terms of anarchism.

Post-1873, anarchism was a waning ideology in the wilderness, excluded from the Second International, and thus cast into the shadows.

Post-1973, by contrast, it has become impossible to avoid anarchism. There is a way in which everything has become a kind of anarchism. Everything becomes filtered through an ethos of anarchism. Such (pseudo-) "anarchism" is more ideologically prevalent today than ever before.

It is significant that anarchism was excluded from the Second International. For the Second International, it didn't seem that this was to any political detriment.

Starting in 1905, however, with the Russian Revolution, there began to be a changed relationship between anarchism and Marxism. After the 1870s, Marxism felt entirely justified in regarding anarchism as an antiquated and obsolete ideology. After 1905, however, this is no longer really the case. There are splits in both Marxism and anarchism that point to a changed relationship between Marxism and anarchism. Starting with 1905, anarchists become Marxists and, also, Marxists become (somehow) more anarchist. For instance, it was important for Rosa Luxemburg to argue, with respect to her pamphlet on 1905, *The Mass Strike, the Trade Unions and the Political Party* (1906), that she was *not* offering an anarchist argument or apologia for anarchism.

And, later, again, with the Russian Revolution in 1917, significantly, anarchists became Marxists.

From 1920/24–73, however, dissident Marxism becomes ("neo"-)anarchism, as seen in "council-communism," Korsch's later (post-1924) trajectory, figures such as Castoriadis, Murray Bookchin, the Situationist International, etc.

In 1969, Adorno wrote, in his last essay, "Resignation," that "the return of anarchism is that of a ghost," that (historical) Marxism's critique of anarchism remained valid (see there Adorno's paraphrasing of Lenin's 1920 pamphlet *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*).

Marxism's failure to transcend anarchism post-1919 means that the recrudescence of anarchism becomes an important symptom of the failure of Marxism. But this return of anarchism is not true but rather "pseudo."

More broadly speaking, socialism's failure to transcend liberalism in the 20th century means that liberalism becomes an important symptom of the failure of socialism, i.e., neo-liberalism. There are thus significant parallels between neo-liberalism and what we might call neo-anarchism after the failure of Marxism in the world revolution 1917–19.

Why characterize (pseudo-")anarchism(") as "dishonest liberalism," or, as "hysterical" liberalism?[7] What might we mean by that? This is because anarchism is the only serious non-Marxian approach to socialism—other versions of socialism, for instance 20th century Social Democracy, are more clearly apparently relapses into (decadent, "ideological" forms of) liberalism. (Hence, Luxemburg's characterization, in *Reform or Revolution?*, 1900/08, of Eduard Bernstein's "reformism" as "liberalism.")

The failure of Marxist socialism thus has two essential results: neo-anarchism and neo-liberalism. They are distinguished not in principle, as their proponents might imagine, but only on a spectrum of opportunism. Hence, the indicative, symptomatic ideology of "libertarian socialism" in our post-1973 era. Libertarianism is merely an ideologically cruder version of anarchism, or, (neo- or pseudo-)anarchism post-1973 is merely an ideologically overwrought libertarianism. Anarchists are libertarians who take themselves too seriously; and libertarians are anarchists who are content to remain muddled in their thinking.

Following the Marxism of Lenin and Trotsky (and Luxemburg), Stalinism, as a form of "state socialism" is not to be defined properly as "authoritarian" but rather as *opportunist*. It was not simply a "wrong way," but an opportunistic adaptation to defeat (or failure), what Trotsky called the "great organizer of defeat." Hence, neo-anarchism is to be defined as dishonest opportunism, or as "(reactionary-)utopian ideology."

The primary character of such ideology is the obscuring of history—the effacing of post-1848 political authoritarianism ("Bonapartism") as a historical symptom that cannot be avoided but must be worked through. Anarchism is indicted by its anti-Marxism. This is what it means to say that (neo-)anarchism lacks historical consciousness or theory, replacing this with anthropology or psychology.

Q&A

In speaking about the "unnecessary suffering" of the 20th century, what did you mean?

It is significant that it is only in the late 19th century that one finds, for instance, a *genocidal* policy towards indigenous peoples (e.g., Native Americans). But, also, there is a new kind of racism, whether Dreyfus Affair anti-Semitism, or the new post-(collapse of) Reconstruction anti-black racism in the U.S. These came to characterize the 20th century. I would assert that such pathologies were not historically necessary but avoidable.

What about Bonapartism, as a post-1848 vs. post-1873 phenomenon?

This is related to the difference between Marx and Marxism, which is potentially obscure. Is there a difference in Bonapartism post-1848 and post-1873? Perhaps. This is the importance of "state capitalism." What is the difference between the 1848 Revolutions and the (1870–71) Paris Commune? What is the difference between the First and Second Internationals? Marx and Engels did not seek to make "Marxism," whatever that would be, hegemonic in the First International. But it seems to become necessarily hegemonic in the Second International. This expresses a historical shift.

I have two questions about the historical periodization: perhaps two blind spots. What about the period between the death of Trotsky in 1940 and the emergence of the New Left in the 1960s? This would appear to be an important bridge period. Also, aren't you collapsing the post-1973 and post-1989 periods? What about the 1980s, before the collapse of Stalinism, but after the efflorescence of the 1970s? One sees this, for example, in the degeneration of the Spartacist League, among other Marxist organizations, after the 1970s.

The 1980s were importantly characterized by the disintegration of the Left into academicism and activism. Hence, there were two phases of what I'm calling the obscuring of the memory of Marxism, in which this occurred differently: the 1970s and the 1980s.

In terms of the mid-20th century period, one could say this was the heyday of Stalinism, as well as of ersatz or quasi-Stalinism, that is, Third World nationalism and Maoism, Castroism/Guevarism, etc. The Cold War films of the period showed the "blob" of the "Red Menace" growing. But this was not, I would contend, the growth of Marxism.

The memory of Marxism was sustained by the farce of Marxism in Stalinism.

But wasn't Adorno's own work a response to this mid-20th century moment?

I would say that neither the Frankfurt School nor Trotskyism experienced any real development in the mid-20th century, after 1940. At best, they held their ground. At worst, they retreated.

What about the 1860s? What about Bonapartism as an epochal development? What about Marx's own growth and maturity as a political thinker? In 1873, from my understanding of European history, the kind of state interventionism one sees then is a political *choice, not (merely) an* economic *one. When* was *the crisis of Marxism? How does this relate to the crisis of neoliberalism in the present? Why do you place such emphasis on Trotsky and Trotskyism? I know you were once around the Spartacist League. But wasn't Trotskyism a farce as much as Stalinism? Didn't Trotsky underestimate the profound, paralyzing influence of Stalinism? Wasn't Stalinism a profounder problem than Trotsky thought? Isn't there a problem with the "red thread" argument, linking Marx, through Lenin, Trotsky, etc.?*

I must say that I don't think Trotsky's Fourth International project was particularly viable. But I also don't think the Third, Communist International project was viable. Now, of course, Lenin and Trotsky had to hope against hope with the Third International.

But this is not to fault Trotsky (or Lenin!). When Trotsky was launching the Fourth International—people had spoken of the October Revolution as one characterized by "youth;" the soldiers were teenagers—there was still a living memory of the Revolution in the 1930s. Those who were once 20 were then 40, and thus still capable of making revolution. There is also the problem of what I would call Trotsky's self-vulgarization, his propaganda orientation. Moreover, there was a problem in Trotsky trying to split the Third International, and basing his politics on the early Third International. But we must bear in mind that after 1933 Trotsky also oriented towards the remnants of Second International Social Democracy (as expressed in the so-called "French turn"), and refused to characterize Stalinism as somehow more Left than Social Democracy. I think that Trotsky's "crisis of leadership" estimation of political possibilities meant something more supple than what his followers offered later. I think he recognized the profundity of the problem and its historical roots.

Let me be clear: The failure of Marxism was profound. Hence, there is no Marxism to return to. There is no answer, only a question. The question is the failure of Marxism.

The reason I am putting such emphasis on post-1873 history is to raise the issue of Marxism *per se*. Not the question of the workers' movement or of socialism, but of Marxism. This is not posed later, in 1938 (the founding of the Fourth International) or 1933 (the failure of Third International to stop Nazism), or 1923 (the definitive end of the post-WWI revolutionary wave) or 1919 (the crushing of the German Revolution) or 1917 (the October Revolution as revolutionary split in Marxism) or 1914 (the collapse of the Second International in WWI). The question of Marxism is posed already at the outset in the 1870s. Why was the SPD necessary? Why does the SPD take the form it does? Why did Marxists join a Lassallean party?

So, there is the issue of the SPD, founded in 1875, being what Moishe Postone, for one, has called a "Lassallean party with Marxist verbiage." Wasn't it always a Lassallean party with "Marxist" window-dressing? My question is, is there such a thing as a "Marxist party?" Or, is there, rather, a socialist party with Marxists participating in it? Marxism was the "historical consciousness" of the socialist workers' movement. There's a famous photograph of Rosa Luxemburg, flanked on stage by portraits of Lassalle and Marx. Now, what did that mean? Certainly, Luxemburg was aware of Marx's critique of and political opposition to Lassalle. So, what did it mean for an avowed "Marxist" such as Luxemburg to participate in a socialist workers' movement and political party with a strong tradition of Lassalleanism?

But the history of Marxism was always characterized by the critique of socialism, starting with Marx in the 1840s, but carried forward, for instance, in Lenin's critique of Narodnism, "Legal Marxism," and "Economism." Or, more generally, in the Marxist critique of anarchism, whether of Proudhon or Bakunin, et al. There is also the "Revisionist Dispute" within Marxism itself in the 1890s. What would it mean, then, to speak of Marxism as a form of politics *per se*?

Just as Marxism as a philosophy or theory is peculiar, as a political practice it is also quite peculiar. If, for Marxists, the socialist workers' movement always shades off into liberalism and anarchism, is always overlaid with anarchist and liberal ideology, then Marxism is always in a constant struggle against these. But this is not a struggle merely of opposition but of critical *recognition*.

About the "maturity" of Marxism, there is a question. I don't think of the "mature Marx" as the writer of *Capital*, but also and perhaps more importantly as a political figure. In the critique of Korsch's "Marxism and Philosophy" (1923) by Kautsky that we published,[8] Kautsky accuses Korsch, along with Lenin and the Bolsheviks (including Trotsky), for being enamored of "primitive Marxism," i.e., that of Marx and Engels in the 1840s, and ignoring subsequent development.[9] Both Korsch and Kautsky have some points to score in that debate. What's the difference, for example, between Marx in the *Manifesto* and in the "Programme of the Parti Ouvrier" (1880)?[10] These differences are potentially vital. But can they be considered simply as *development*?

There is, for instance, the issue that Marx himself was accused (in the 1860s) of being right-wing or opportunistic, in his endorsement of unions and workers' consumer cooperatives, etc. Lukács is good at pointing this out (in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, 1923), that is, the symptomatic character of Lassalle's criticism of Marx for supposedly being "economistic" and neglecting politics. But Lassalle criticized the "economic" struggles of the workers more generally, going so far as to call this the mere struggle of economic "objects" as objects (of capitalism). But Lukács's point was that Marx recognized a dialectic of economics and politics, or, of the workers as both "objects" and "subjects" of capitalism. Marx didn't take unions or cooperatives as good in themselves, but rather as historical (and symptomatic) forms that the workers' movement was taking, to be pushed through. They are the forms through which the possibility for socialism can be grasped. They can't be accepted in their own terms, but they're also not to be criticized, let alone rejected as such.

That's why I emphasize this period of the collapse of the First International and the birth of the SPD in the 1870s, to bring out the issue of Marxism as such.

What about the crisis of liberalism? When does the crisis of liberalism become the necessity for Marxism? When was this shift?

For Marx, certainly liberalism was "dead" as an *emancipatory* politics already in 1848. It was liberals, after all, who put down the workers in June 1848. Liberalism dies several deaths. The death of liberalism in 1848 is different from that in the 1870s (for example, with the failure of Reconstruction in the U.S.).

This raises the question of historical "progress." The necessity for socialism grows between 1848 and 1873. Engels, for example, in his 1895 Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France,*[11] discusses the still not exhausted potential for capitalist development after 1848. But this wasn't for Engels merely "economic" but *political*. Capitalism continues to grow, economically, in a sense. The question was whether such growth was a political advance. The evidence of "progress," for Engels, was the growth of the socialist workers' movement. What Marx and Engels had "underestimated" was the potential for capitalism to contribute to the growth of the workers' movement for socialism. But that is precisely what we have *not* seen since 1973! Perhaps not since 1919.

What about Marx's (infamous) Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy *(1859), about "productive forces" and "relations of production?" To call the 20th century one huge ball of unnecessary suffering seems to belie Marx's sense of contradiction. This is part of the continuing strange character of "what it means to live." Chris, I've heard you address, for instance, financial techniques as forces of production, still contributing to the development of social possibilities. The 20th century as unnecessary suffering fails to get at that aspect of history. Capitalism hasn't shut down yet. On the other hand, Marx and Engels, in the* Manifesto, *project the rest of the 19th century as unnecessary. So, the 20th century could be seen still as necessary, while the 19th century could also be seen as unnecessary.*

The reason I put it this way, highly tendentiously, is to focus the question of Marxism. In other words, will Marxism play a role in emancipation? If it does, then the

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to confront the relics of the *ancien régime*. Throughout Europe, there was a seemingly spontaneous eruption, but its epicenter was Paris where the European political opposition was strongest and most organized.

After the Parisian "street" had risen up and forced the French king to abdicate, a republic was declared in France. Within days, Marx was given 24 hours to leave Belgium, where the king feared he would stir a Parisian-style revolt. He and his family quickly went to Paris, and then on to Prussia where Marx hoped the revolution might deepen. Once in Cologne, he resumed his work as a newspaper editor. At this time he was more of a propagandist than a revolutionary, because he felt it was the quickest and easiest way to reach the greatest number of people. Sometimes I wonder what Marx would do in our day with the Internet. The written word was always his most powerful weapon, and also a great source of frustration because he could not distribute his writing quickly or widely enough. He would have been thrilled to have had today's technology at his fingertips.

Though the old order had been initially thrown off guard by the revolts, it quickly recovered and the counter-revolutionary backlash that ensued was swift and brutal. Kings were able to enlist the support of the industrialists and capitalists who were terrified that the lower class was demanding its rights. Marx watched this revolution unfold, and it was during this year, 1848–1849, that his *political* ideas took definite shape. He recognized then that working men could only achieve their goals when they did it themselves. They could not rely on liberals or beneficent industrialists, but had to organize as a class.

SL: Comment on Marx's inner life of the period from 1871 to 1875 and, in particular, on the Paris Commune and the struggles within the IWA. How had socialist revolutionary politics changed in the decades after 1848 and what is the significance of Marx's leadership in this later period?

MG: It was not until 1871 that the name Karl Marx became widely associated with revolution. Prior to that year, Marx had been watched with suspicion by the German government, against which he had been writing and agitating for 25 years. He was also recognized by opposition and labor circles from Russia to America. And while that territory was vast, the number of people engaged in opposition activity, and thus aware of Marx, was not. The Paris Commune of 1871, however, changed all that. Through the Parisian revolt against the French bourgeoisie, Marx (much to his delight) became internationally infamous.

What drew the world's attention to Marx was a pamphlet he wrote called *The Civil War in France*. In it Marx heartily praised the bravery of the communards and linked their struggle to the capitalist West's growing labor movement—that army of workers who had finally recognized the extent of their exploitation and were demanding (sometimes violently) their rights. Translations of Marx's pamphlet flew off printing presses around the world. Documenting the Paris slaughter that killed at least 25,000 people and the fighting that left the city in ruins, *The Civil War in France* became Marx's most widely read work to date. The pamphlet appeared at the very moment when the French, indeed when western leaders and their financial backers, were trying to find someone to blame for the Commune uprising. They did not want desperate workers and citizens in their countries to be inspired by the French workers' attempts to win basic freedoms. They needed to change the narrative, and demonizing Marx gave them just such an opening. Marx was portrayed not as a chronicler and champion of the revolt, but as its nefarious Prussian mastermind. In this scenario the French working-class was said to have been manipulated and deceived by a German outsider living in London whose goal was to extend control over workers and gain support for his IWA. Alarming stories in London, Berlin, Chicago, and New York described the future carnage being plotted by Marx and the IWA: No city was safe, they said. Everyone among the lower ranks of society was susceptible to his malign influence.

The propaganda succeeded in heightening social tensions, which always swells the ranks of reactionaries who fear nothing so much as instability. But it did not dissuade workers from joining the IWA. Quite the contrary: After the Commune, the organization sprouted branches wherever industrialization had created disgruntled workers. The anti-Marx, anti-IWA propaganda showed how much labor solidarity terrified governments and capitalists. So workers recognized it for what it was, a powerful tool, and they flocked to join.

Ironically, just when the group was seen as a real force by the outside world, internally it was dangerously divided. Since its inception in London in 1864, Marx had held IWA together by sheer force of his personality. He had tricked, cajoled, threatened, and seduced its multinational leadership into cooperation. But, by 1872 he was exhausted, and the Commune had produced further disputes within the organization. Some moderates vehemently disagreed with Marx over his embrace of the communards. Others, mostly anarchists aligned with Mikhail Bakunin, wanted to turn the IWA, which had so far only supported workers' struggles and negotiated on their behalf, into a workers' army. Marx recognized that the path to reform was different in each country. In some cases, change could be achieved through the ballot box, protests, or strikes. But in other cases, only violent revolution would win the greatest number of people their rights. Everywhere he thought the struggle essentially political, not military. He formally left the IWA in 1872 to return to writing and theory, fully convinced that the immediate fight would continue on its own course without his leadership. He thought it much more important that he get his ideas into print for future generations.

SL: At Marx's funeral in 1883 where Engels delivered his famous eulogy of his lifelong friend there were only 11 people in attendance. Most of Marx's books were out of print and obscure. Yet, on the anniversary of his death the following year some 6,000 workers marched to his grave to honor his memory. For, by the early 1880s the workers' movement had begun to assume a decidedly new character, as evidenced by the emergence in this period of the New Unionism in Britain, the Socialist Labor Party in the United States, the French Workers Party, and, of course, the Social Democratic Party in Germany. In Russia the Emancipation of Labor Group formed just months after Marx's death. Working class demonstrations and strike actions also grew to an unprecedented extent in this period. Thus, while Marxism obviously and with reason bears Marx's name, it was Engels who really lived to see and direct the international socialism that came together on the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution to form the Second Socialist International in Paris in 1889. Describe Engels's role in this process and, more generally, the activities that characterized the last decades of his life. What were key services Engels performed to perpetuate Marx's legacy in this critical seedtime of modern, party political socialism?

MG: Immediately after Marx's death, Engels, Marx's youngest daughter Eleanor, and the family helper Helene Demuth began the arduous task of sorting through Marx's papers. As discussed earlier, it fell to Engels to organize Marx's unfinished works and get them into shape for publication, and translate his many published pieces for audiences throughout Europe. That job would have been enough to keep a small library of scholars busy. Engels, Helene, Eleanor Marx and their wider circle

Jenny von Westphalen (1814–1881) in 1840.

made certain that Marx's *Capital* manuscripts were edited and his published works reprinted. That was crucial.

Engels also inherited Marx's role as elder statesman of the European socialist movement. Young radicals from throughout Europe made pilgrimages to his London home seeking advice, shelter, and direction. When French socialists decided to inaugurate a Second International to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, Engels was charged with settling disputes among the various national parties so that all would be in agreement when they arrived in Paris. Against all odds, they were. This was partly because of Engels's leadership, but also because the working class and socialists of the late 19th century were much more mature politically than those involved in the First International. They had seen the strengths and weaknesses of that earlier organization and, significantly, during the intervening years many of the socialists and labor groups had become political organizations in their own right. They had produced strong leaders from within their ranks. It was these young leaders—men *and* women—whom Engels was able to guide and advise from his unique position of having lived the struggle from its inception. Critics often blame Engels for much 20th century misinterpretation of Marx's work, or misdirection of the movement, but I believe this is both inaccurate and unfair. Without Engels, Marx's literary legacy would have been a single volume of *Capital*, and a handful of earlier publications largely written in German. Engels had protected Marx in life and preserved his work for future generations in death. There would have been a Friedrich Engels without Karl Marx but I often wonder if there would have been a Karl Marx without Engels.

SL: In many ways, Marx's relationship to Eleanor, as to his two elder daughters, was similar to his relationship to his wife and to his close friend Engels in that, in addition to being deeply loving, it was deeply intellectual. All three daughters assisted him with his work and all become hopelessly radicalized themselves at a very young age. Could you describe their trajectories, particularly that of Eleanor?

MG: You're right about the intellectual dimension of the family's life. Of course, the daughters received the education of any other middle class British girl. They learned languages, music, painting, etc. But they also had an incredible education at home from one of the greatest minds of the 19th century. Marx raised them as he would have raised sons—as revolutionaries. He discussed everything with them. All three were committed to Marx's work and were employed by him at various points as his "secretaries," transcribing and translating his words, corresponding with labor and social agitators around the world on his behalf. But each of the three also had their own role in his revolution.

Marx was proud of their collaboration, but also worried. He wanted them to have a married life outside of revolution, because he felt his wife's life had been wrecked by his chosen path. He had watched her suffer as they buried four of their seven children. He didn't want to see his daughters suffer that same fate, and yet there could have been no other possibility, because that was the world they inherited. They wouldn't have been satisfied with a bourgeois existence.

Often in describing Marx's relationship with his daughters, critics focus on the material sacrifices the women made because Marx had decided to dedicate himself to a greater good at the expense of his family. It is true they lived extremely difficult lives by normal middle class standards. But I was struck throughout the project not by their poverty, but by their wealth. From the time of their birth the Marx daughters lived lives of high drama in a world of ideas, among some of the most important thinkers of their time. They experienced the thrill of being at the epicenter of a brewing social, political, and economic revolution. And they did so with relish.

Marx's eldest daughter, Jenny, was a journalist. She worked with three Irish prisoners who were being held for political crimes in British jail. Her articles resulted in a parliamentary inquiry, and the prisoners' eventual release. Her work ended when she married a French socialist journalist and former communard, who abandoned her and their brood of boys to agitate in Paris.

Laura was the most traditional. She married a Cuban-born doctor and future Marxist who was of French descent. He was a wonderful character because he was very high-spirited and very melodramatic, but he never did anything well. So she suffered the fate that her mother did, only worse, because while Marx was at least brilliant and shared his life with his wife, Paul Lafargue was not a brilliant man and a chauvinist. So this woman, who had been trained as a radical, who knew the ins and outs of every economic theory, who could talk about any political situation in Europe, was left at the sidelines to raise children who then died within two years while she and her husband were on the run after the Commune. She spent much of her later life translating her father's and Engels's works.

The third daughter, Eleanor, is as you say the most important historically. From the time she was eight years old, she was writing to people about French Revolutionaries and the Polish rebellion. I came across a notebook she kept as a girl, where she had written the phrase "tutti-frutti" on the cover, and inside long articles about sewage systems and industrialization in France. Even as a child she was immersed in the world of the workers' movement, and became infinitely more so as a woman.

In the larger social and political evolution of the nineteenth century, a change had occurred after about 1860. Working men no longer needed intellectuals to lead their movement. They were organized enough to defend themselves. So the battle Eleanor became involved in was a trade union fight. She was a committed and passionate advocate. She even traveled to the United States to introduce Marx's ideas to an American audience. Unfortunately for her, she became involved with a very disreputable man who was a socialist and an aspiring playwright, but also an absolute scoundrel, Edward Aveling.

Indeed, the three younger Marx women's endeavors were all disrupted, if not destroyed, by unions with men they believed would be like their father but who all proved to be lesser in every way. Their personal lives were bitter disappointments. Eleanor committed suicide. Laura and Lafargue died in a suicide pact. (Lenin gave a eulogy at their funeral.) Jenny died of cancer, but it was nothing short of suicide. She had known she was ill but did not seek treatment until it was too late. None of them lived to see the recognition Marx would receive or his theories become political reality.

SL: Allow me to return to the question of biography. The political context in which these actors lived, and their ability to participate in the ongoing modern revolution, seem to us quite distant now. There is no international political project of any significance that directly builds on the gargantuan sacrifices and formidable efforts of Marx and Engels. Given these circumstances, how have you sought to deploy the genre of biography?

MG: One of the reasons I wrote the book chronologically, which is an old-fashioned method, was because I wanted to give the reader a sense of living the lives of Marx, Engels, and Jenny. I actually came away from this book very deeply respecting Marx and Engels and Jenny and the sacrifices they made for people they didn't even know. They could have had a very comfortable existence. Marx was born into the middle class in Western Prussia; his father was a lawyer. Jenny's father was a baron and a Prussian official. But early on, both Marx and Jenny gave up the trappings of the bourgeoisie—or, in her case, the aristocracy—and committed themselves to the most difficult path, working against a system that had been entrenched for centuries. It wasn't just that they were trying to get someone out of political office. They were working against absolute monarchs claiming to be God's ambassadors on earth. After looking at their daily lives over the course of 80 years, I could only come away with a great deal of respect for them.

The American journalist I. F. Stone used to actually go to congressional hearings to hear what was being said instead of reading the summaries or press releases produced by congressional aides afterwards. He said the difference between actually experiencing something—or reading an original letter—and hearing an interpretation, is enormous. And that is the case with Marx, too. If anyone has any questions about Marx, they should go to the source and read his writings. I offer this book as a biography of Marx so that when you read *Capital* or the *Communist Manifesto*, you can understand what he was experiencing at the time, who he was, and the milieu in which he lived. That's the difference. That's the approach to biography that I took. Marx's revolutionary context is obscure to us now. That's the reason why I thought it was important to write a biography of Marx.

If it is claimed that theirs were particular times, that Jenny and Marx were involved in a revolution we could never fight, I think, on the contrary, that we're at that same moment again, the same crucial juncture. We are entering the third industrial revolution, where everything is changing, and must change, but the entrenched interests in government and business, like the absolute monarchs and the aristocrats of Marx's day, don't yet see it. And if they do see it, they are too frightened at the prospect of their own loss of power and wealth to allow for the change that is not only necessary but inevitable. There are people like Marx and Jenny out there today who are working to chart this change, and provide alternatives to the systems that no longer serve the needs of society. But these things take a long time, and that's something that Marx understood. Revolution is not something that happens in a day or a week. It takes decades. And when you're in the middle of those decades, sometimes it is difficult to recognize. It requires something Marx cherished but did not himself possess: patience. |**P**

Transcribed by Pac Pobric

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20th century was unnecessary. If it does not, then perhaps the 20th century was necessary, in getting beyond, and transcending, Marxism. If the history of actual Marxism as politics plays no role, then the New Left was right, revolution in 1917 had been premature. If this history still has a role to play, however, then perhaps 1917 was not so premature, and what came later was not so necessary.

We must ask, in what ways might the history of Marxism play a role? As practical politics? As theory? How? As a relation of theory and practice, as Adorno puts it in "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" (1969)? In what way was and is Marxism necessary?

Why should a project such as ours, beginning in the 21st century, be "Marxist?" Why shouldn't we be "post-Marxist?" Why can't we say, simply, that the history of Marxism has some contributions to make, but look at all these other things, anarchism, etc.?

How is it that Stalinism, Maoism, etc., weren't Marxism? Is it because they abandoned an emancipatory vision? Is it because they became one-sided in their opposition to capitalism, and denied its contributing to emancipatory possibilities? So that, today, it doesn't seem that capitalism holds such possibilities. What would it take to make that possibility active again? It would seem that the only way to do that would be to work through the history of the 20th century.

I'm not exactly saying that (about Stalinism and Maoism, etc.). To get back to the issue of Trotskyism, yes, Trotskyism was farcical in a sense. It was not the Marxism practiced by Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky himself in an earlier period. It was not the relation between theory and practice that Marxism once was. This is what makes the history of Trotskyism, including Trotsky's own in the 1920s and '30s, farcical, in a sense.

Why isn't Trotsky a tragic figure, why is he farcical? Well, because the real tragic figures of Marxism, to my mind, are Lenin and Luxemburg. Lenin, to me, was a tragic figure. Also, Marx and Engels themselves. Marxism was the tragedy.

The ambiguity of the 20th century raises the issue of ideology. Could Marxism again become a guiding ideology?

There is the difference of the dialectic of history, as expressed by Marxism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the exhaustion of history in our present period. That's what Fukuyama meant by the "end of history." While untrue in a certain sense, it is symptomatically expressive in another sense.

What is the possibility of the recovery of the memory of Marxism? I think that the casualty of the death of Marxism was the workers' movement itself, despite the 1930s, let alone the '60s and '70s. The "class struggle," as previously found in history, ended. Not labor militancy, but class struggle. The failure of Marxism is the failure of the socialist workers' movement. Stalinism was not only the farce of Marxism but also of the socialist workers' movement. This is related to social democracy and even fascism. When Friedrich Hayek, in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), said that the roots of fascism are to be found in pre-WWI social democracy, even a benign case like Austrian Social Democracy, he had a point. Horrific if true, still, there is the problem of the *plausibility* of Hayek's account, which was influential. Hayek, after all, is a key progenitor of neo-liberalism, that is, 20th century liberalism.

The 20th century was the rehash of 19th century ideology. There's nothing new. Hayek, for instance, doesn't come up with anything new, but rather goes back to liberalism, to ideology before socialism. The recrudescence of old ideologies is indicative. The 19th century, by contrast, was very new at the level of ideology.

What about fascism? What about fundamentalism? Aren't they new in the 20th century?

Well, fundamentalism might be new, but I am emphasizing the Left. Fundamentalism is obviously conservative, and reaches back well before the 19th century. Fascism has roots in the 19th century, specifically in history after the 1870s. But, on the Left, liberalism and anarchism, as forms of anti-Marxism, still claim to be emancipatory, not conservative ideologies. They, like Marxism, originate in the 19th century. They are still with us today. The question is whether and how Marxism still is. |**P**

Transcribed with the assistance of Nikolas Lelle

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1. See Chris Cutrone, "The 'anti-fascist' vs. 'anti-imperialist' Left: Some genealogies and prospects," available online at <http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org/?p=1203>.
2. Jim Creegan, "Hot Autumn in New York," in *Weekly Worker* 886 (October 20, 2011), available online at <http://www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?article_id=1004580>.
3. See Cutrone, "The Marxist hypothesis: A response to Alain Badiou's 'communist hypothesis,'" in *Platypus Review* 29 (November 2010), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2010/11/06/the-marxist-hypothesis-a-response-to-alain-badous-communist-hypothesis/>.
4. See Karl Korsch, "The Marxism of the First International" (1924), available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/korsch/1924/first-international.htm>.
5. See Cutrone, "Lenin's liberalism," in *Platypus Review* 36 (June 2011), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2011/06/01/lenin's-liberalism/>. See also Cutrone, "1917," in *Platypus Review* 17 (November 2009), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2009/11/18/the-decline-of-the-left-in-the-20th-century-1917/>.
6. Cf., Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage, 1994).
7. See "The Occupy Movement, a Renascent Left, and Marxism Today: An interview with Slavoj Žižek," in *Platypus Review* 42 (December 2011–January 2012), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2011/12/01/occupy-movement-interview-with-slavoj-zizek/>.
8. See Karl Kautsky, "A Destroyer of Vulgar-Marxism," in *Platypus Review* 43 (February 2012), available online at <http://platypus1917.org/2012/01/30/destroyer-of-vulgar-marxism/>.
9. Ibid.
10. Jules Guesde and Karl Marx, "The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier," available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm>.
11. See Friedrich Engels, "Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*" (1895), available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/03/06.htm>.

The birth of a revolution?
An interview with Mary Gabriel

Spencer A. Leonard

On February 28, 2012, the radio program Radical Minds *broadcast an interview with Mary Gabriel, the author of* Love and Capital: Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution *(New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011). The interview was conducted by Spencer A. Leonard of the Platypus Affiliated Society. What follows is an edited transcript of their conversation.*

Spencer A. Leonard: *Love and Capital* is a biography not only of Marx but of his family and intimate circle, above all Friedrich Engels. Why write this biography today? And why write biographically about great revolutionary intellectuals about whom so much is written interpretively?

Mary Gabriel: Up until 1989, it was difficult to talk about Marx, to examine his life, and not have it be part of a political debate. (Things have since calmed down, though I must say I am shocked by some of the responses to this book, and how rabidly some people still oppose any discussion of Marx.) Before the fall of Soviet communism, many books about Marx were used as Cold War propaganda: Communists made him out to be a hero he might not have been; opponents made him out to be the demon responsible for mass repression and bloody wars from Asia to Africa to Latin America. Lost in all this hyperbole was the real Marx. I thought it was time, given the increasing relevance of his ideas, to calmly and dispassionately find him, and I decided the best place to do that would be among his family and closest friends. There I hoped to discover Karl Marx, the 19th century economist, social scientist, philosopher, revolutionary, and family man whose ideas changed the world.

Of all the libraries of books about Marx, I did not find any that covered his life among his family in detail, despite the fact that they lived and breathed social revolution alongside him. Thus, I began my hunt for Marx by examining stacks of previously neglected material, in particular the correspondence between the women in Marx's life: his wife Jenny, the three daughters who survived to adulthood, their husbands or partners, and the intimate circle around him. I was pleased to find these letters also contained a rich and powerful picture of the "Marx party's" common political and intellectual pursuits. There is a huge amount of material in the Russian State archives in Moscow and the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. With the help of some friends and scholars, I was able to discover or rediscover a genuinely wonderful correspondence within the Marx circle, which allowed me to look at events—even a single day—from many different perspectives. Those divergent viewpoints help us see Marx's life clearly and honestly, devoid of political manipulation.

SL: As you say, Marx is a figure people still have a great deal of difficulty with. One way your reviewers have dealt with your book is to write as if Marx and his family were simply quintessential 19th century bohemian, cosmopolitan intellectuals. But it seems that, in some ways, Marx and his family really are not the most representative of that type. Also, while Marx is arguably the most important intellectual of his age, any attempt to specify that claim and thus Marx's legacy today is highly fraught. So if the Marxes are an atypical case, if they are very bourgeois in their bohemianism and if Marx's legacy is difficult to specify, how does your book negotiate these problems?

MG: I tried to delve as deeply as possible into the Marx family story, using their own voices in direct quotes as often as I could, in order to let the reader hear and see them as they were—unadorned, unedited, unscripted. With that information the reader could then decide for themselves whether the family was bohemian or bourgeois, whether their intentions were to rule the worker or to help him. I also tried to anchor the story firmly in the times in which the Marxes lived in order to help the reader understand the importance of Marx's work compared with other activists of the era, and the impact he had on younger generations.

I found the focus of some reviews to be odd. To me this book is primarily the story of what a group of people, faced with the realization that the existing political and social system no longer worked, did to change it. It is a book about revolution—not just *a* revolutionary, or a family of revolutionaries, but revolution itself. It's about the social revolution that began in 18th century France, spread in the 19th century as it was shepherded by the growing democratic, socialist, and labor movements, and finally took hold throughout the West in the second half of the 20th century until the counter-revolution led by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher began. It is the story of where we, today, come from. The liberal freedoms that we take for granted—mass education, the vote, freedom of speech and the press, labor and women's rights—are rooted in the tale this book tells. Marx and his family waged a life-long battle for those rights, which regrettably are now at risk.

SL: Taking the old slogan "the personal is political" literally, is the biographical aspect of your book about the politics of private lives? For instance, at a couple of points you describe revolutionary activity as the Marx "family business." As you point out, the fact that the children were Karl Marx's daughters shaped them fundamentally. But, was the manner in which Marx, Engels, and Jenny and their daughters sought to realize themselves—as husband, friend, wife, and children—political? Is something lost in thus conflating ethics with politics? Hegel somewhere says, and I paraphrase, that world history is no place for happiness. Would not Marx think of himself as an individual—a friend, a husband, and a father—in a way that had little to do with himself as a historical actor?

MG: I did not look at the Marx family with the 1960s–70s notion of "the personal is political" in mind. That said, *Love and Capital* does describe the role of women through the experiences of Marx's wife and daughters, as well as the expectations and traditions of 19th century European society. I did, however, stress throughout the book the inseparability of the personal and the political in the Marx household. Politics shaped their lives on every level.

The Marxes were a family like any other, fully engaged in the concerns of daily life, but even their most banal events were overshadowed by politics. That is because Marx, as a 19th century husband and father, dominated the house. His decision to live outside society, to commit himself to social reform, to oppose the class he was born into, indeed to work toward its demise, meant that his family experienced the consequences of that difficult path. The result for Marx's wife and daughters was, on the one hand, poverty, ill health, depression, and, for most of their lives, a lack of all but the most basic material comforts. On the other hand, they enjoyed rich intellectual lives, self-respect, and the belief that their sacrifices on behalf of Marx's work would benefit all mankind. They had the satisfaction of knowing theirs was not the frivolous existence of their Victorian peers. The fact that the family home was political through and through did not mean it was joyless, or that Marx was always "in character." He *did* think of himself as a husband, father, and friend. He famously said the "microscopic" world of the family was more interesting than the "macroscopic" world of politics. For me, part of the joy of this project was to get to know Marx as his family knew him, to witness him at his most vulnerable and at his most triumphant, to watch him experience the small joys and sorrows we all do: In short to see him, as one young associate feared he would be revealed to be, a man, a mere man.

SL: What was the significance of Marx's relationship to his father, his future father-in-law (the Baron von Westphalen), and of his early university training? How was his wife-to-be, Jenny von Westphalen, central to his early formation as a revolutionary intellectual?

MG: Marx and his wife were both from Trier, a town in Prussia's westernmost province, the Rhineland. After the French Revolution, and from about 1806–1813, that region was dominated by France under Napoleon. So people there had been introduced to Enlightenment philosophy and French Revolutionary ideas of freedom of assembly, speech, religion, fair taxation, etc. That was the milieu that Jenny's and Marx's parents were raised in. After 1813, the French were driven out and all the old repressive measures reinstated. But Karl and Jenny's fathers had both been exposed to the vast potential a man had if he exercised the rights that the French Revolution enshrined. Jenny's father, Ludwig von Westphalen, openly served the Prussian crown as the highest-ranking government official in Trier, but intellectually he was not only reading French Enlightenment thinkers, but French socialists such as Fourier and Saint-Simon. Theirs was a new philosophy that responded to still-nascent industrial conditions. Baron von Westphalen began teaching teenaged Jenny and Marx about the socialists who believed that men had a responsibility toward one another, especially for those less fortunate.

In 1830, there had been another revolt in France, in which the monarch was overthrown and replaced by Louis-Philippe, the so-called "citizen king." The events shook Prussia's king and his aristocratic supporters because it was a revolt by a new class of people who did not inherit their money as they had, but earned it. This new breed pressed government to institute freedoms and abolish tariffs between territories, which they said inhibited trade. They also thought that, in order to compete in the new industrial world, they needed a voice in government. Louis-Philippe, who actually enjoyed business and who saw the scale of the wealth it could generate, came increasingly to favor the moneyed class, the grand bourgeoisie.

The Prussian aristocracy was unprepared for the kind of change taking place in France and the king instituted quite repressive measures. Around the time that Marx was to graduate from high school, his father was accused of giving a subversive speech to his club in Trier. Around the same time, a teacher in Marx's school was sidelined for being too radical and a student was arrested for writing "political poetry." So Marx felt in Trier the restrictive power emanating from Berlin. He understood that the freedoms he had been taught by Jenny's father were meaningless as long as someone as powerful as a king who claimed to be God's emissary on earth was in place. It was the beginning of Marx's political education.

He eventually went to Bonn and then on to the University of Berlin. It was while he was studying in Berlin that he and Jenny became engaged. They were young lovers, but there is no doubt Jenny also found her political goals fulfilled in her union with Marx. He could be what she, as a 19th century woman, could not: a political player who might help change society for the better. All she could do was provide emotional and material support for him. And that was the path she chose. Through the years, her role developed into one of real intellectual partnership.

SL: Historians sometimes speak of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as though they were finished by the 1830s and 1840s. But, the genie was out of the bottle in a way that no restoration could reverse. In that sense, the Revolution and the Enlightenment could be said to have done their work. On the other hand, the French Revolution was defeated, both from within and without, and Britain emerged as the dominant partner in a conservative alliance then dominating Europe. In this sense, both the Enlightenment and the Revolution remained burning questions.

MG: That's right. Marx began with the ideas of the French Revolution. One man's new idea is based on another man's old idea, and it is no different in Marx's case. Somewhere at the bottom of his thought were the ideas of the French Revolution that he had imbibed in his youth. As for Britain, he saw in its industrial society a laboratory in which to study modern society as a whole—its needs, how it might be reshaped to benefit those who were doing the work, and the political significance of a mass industrial army that had scarce anything in the way of wealth or rights.

SL: What about Engels? One of the strengths of the book is the way in which it treats "Marx" as the project of an entire family, or even a body of associates. In this sense, to fully understand Marx one must recognize how distinct he is from other thinkers in this crucial respect. Above all, the intellectual collaboration with Engels stands out as historically unique. How did Engels and Marx first meet, and what were the key phases through which their friendship passed?

MG: It is hard to imagine either of those two men having the historical impact that they had without the other. At various points, people would accuse Marx of having ruined Engels, or Engels having ruined Marx. Marx's family would try to wrest Marx from Engels's malign influence, and vice versa with Engels's family. But in fact they were truly *of one mind*.

Engels's father owned a factory in Prussia and was a partner in a Manchester textile firm with a pair of English brothers named Ermen. Engels's father sent Friedrich there to learn the business. Engels, who already had a reputation as a radical writer (under a pseudonym) describing the industrial ills in the Rhineland, was eager to see Manchester, the industrial heart of Europe. He spent nearly two years there, beginning in 1842. On his way back to Prussia, in August 1844, he stopped off in Paris where Marx was working as a newspaper editor. He and Marx met at a bar on the Right Bank of the Seine and that is when they hit it off. The story is they talked for ten days and ten nights straight.

What they found was that each in his different way had come to the same conclusions concerning society, industrialization, the working class, and the needs of humanity. Marx had learned about it through books and his contact with clandestine socialist organizations in Paris. Engels had learned about it on the factory floor. Their partnership would become so close that Marx would call Engels his alter ego.

In 1845, at the age of 24, Engels became Marx and Jenny's devoted friend. He demonstrated the extent of his loyalty and willingness to sacrifice on Marx's behalf about five years later, in 1850. They were all in London, all the refugees who had escaped the 1848 revolt and the counter-revolution in 1849. The British ruling elite felt their system so sound that it would not be threatened by a shabby bunch of foreign revolutionaries waiting anxiously for the next big revolt. Perhaps not surprisingly, few of these refugees could find work in London—including Marx and Engels. So Engels fell on his sword, so to speak. He quit the capital, leaving the business of revolution and theory to Marx, and went back to Manchester to work at his father's factory, where he stayed for the next 20 years, supplying the Marx family with the money and support they needed to survive. Undoubtedly, Engels would have written much more had he stayed on in London, but he became a factory owner, and from that time until the end of his life in 1895—even beyond—he supported the Marxes. He was the family's primary breadwinner and gave Marx the means to write his masterwork, *Capital*.

Eleanor Marx (1855–1898) in 1870.

Incidentally, Engels had one more function in Marx's life: ghostwriter. When Marx first moved to England, he got a job working as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Daily Tribune*, but he couldn't write in English, so Engels—a master of languages—penned his articles. There are many instances of Engels writing in Marx's name, so much so that after Marx's death, there was a lot of confusion as to who was the author of what.

SL: Oftentimes, Engels and Marx worked together in such a way that it is truly impossible to trace the provenance of ideas to one or the other. The *Communist Manifesto* is the ultimate example of that.

MG: Engels wrote several first drafts of that in a catechism form. Eventually, Marx wrote the final draft in Brussels after Engels had suggested a changed format and left Marx to complete it. (Engels returned to Paris from Brussels to try to organize French socialists.) When the *Manifesto* was published, though originally it bore neither of their names, they claimed authorship jointly. Engels would say that it was actually Marx's work, but that was a bit of modesty on his part.

That was their first important joint work, but I think the more important work done by both men was their virtual collaboration on *Capital*. In 1870 Engels moved back to London. By that time Marx had published *Capital Volume I* in Germany, but to little or no acclaim. Soon it was translated in Russia, where it did better. Marx was beginning to slow down by this time, partly because of political demands that took him away from his writing.

The Paris Commune had erupted and Marx was the head of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), which was accused (and Marx also, directly) of orchestrating the Commune. So there was not only a lot of correspondence with newspapers needed to shoot down rumors and accusations, but also work with refugees escaping the Commune, and mounds of correspondence. Engels had arrived in London just in time. The two men could now split the work evenly: they were both politicians, both theoreticians. Above all, they were both revolutionaries. This was also the period in which Marx's daughters began to take a very active role in the family business.

Marx died in 1883. Before his death he had promised to have three volumes of *Capital* ready for his publisher. There was also a notion of a fourth volume. No one knew how far along Marx was on these volumes until Engels found, in sifting through Marx's papers, several versions of volumes two and three, in various stages of completion. He also found a hopelessly rough volume four. Once again, Engels put aside his own work in order to make sure that Marx's last two volumes of *Capital* were published. He also set about translating and editing dozens of earlier pieces, because after Marx's death socialism had become more a part of the political mainstream in Western Europe, and there was a growing demand for Marx's writing. Engels ensured that volumes two and three of Marx's masterwork were edited with the care and attention they demanded—a project he began in 1883 and did not complete until 1894. Those volumes are very much a Marx-Engels work.

SL: Marx and Engels took little part in the Revolution of 1848 in Paris, but they did engage the Parisian left prior to the revolution. Give us some more of a sense of this time in Marx's life in Paris, with his young bride, and his budding relationship with Engels and also with the poet Heinrich Heine. What sort of initiation into socialist politics did Marx receive in these years? How did Marx and Engels experience 1848 and what did it mean to them later on?

MG: Marx was not involved in the Paris revolt of February 1848 because he had been tossed out of France three years earlier for subversive writing. He had, however, never lost touch with the Parisian radicals, particularly the socialists and communists, whom he counted as his closest friends while living in Paris from 1843 to 1845. It was through these men (at this point they were all men) that Marx initially learned about communism, and it was the combination of their influence and the books he studied during his time in Paris that really provided the foundation for Marx's life work.

Marx and his new bride, Jenny, had arrived in Paris in 1843. He had been the editor of a "democratic" newspaper in Cologne. This meant that the paper was funded by businessmen, and had been giving voice to the notion that in order for business to grow, people had to have greater freedom, and that monarchs had to allow for constitutions and parliaments with actual power. But, of course, Marx's ideas evolved and came to exceed this narrow compass. A fellow intellectual who was then editing a paper in Dresden, Arnold Ruge, had the idea of opening an opposition newspaper in Paris featuring German and French radicals. This short-lived publication was called the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher.*

In Paris at the time, there was relative free speech, as long as one didn't directly threaten the government of Louis Philippe. The city was wild and vibrant with ideas: nationalism, socialism, democracy. Paris at that time was the city of the revolution. It was the seat of political philosophy and revolutionary politics and, unlike Prussia, one could say virtually anything and do whatever one liked. The city was filled with radical workers exiled from Germany and other places throughout Europe. There were a lot of underground organizations building on French Revolutionary ideas, as well as elaborating new ideas about communism, which was basically seen as socialism paired with the demand for the elimination of private property. Marx attended the radical workers' meetings and he also attended salons with writers such as Victor Hugo and George Sand, and the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres.

Marx began by working for the *Jahrbücher,* but it went under after only one issue. The opinions it advanced were so radical that in Prussia charges of treason were brought against Marx and several others. Marx used his jobless status to immerse himself in opposition politics, meeting and working with many of the figures we still recognize as critical to the nineteenth century social revolution—most significantly Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin, who had made the leap to anarchism. Marx also formed a critical personal relationship with the poet Heinrich Heine. At the same time, Marx initiated his study of the great economists. 1844 is the year that Marx's economic ideas were first formed. They were honed over the years, but that was the year that marked their basic crystallization.

A year later Marx was thrown out of Paris for supposedly advocating the regicide of the King of Prussia in another publication Marx had joined. So he and Jenny went to Brussels where a circle began to form around Marx that became known as the "Marx party." This was the nucleus of his international organization, a combination of intellectuals and proletarians, mostly artisans of German background.

He was still in Brussels when Europe exploded in 1848. These revolts were (and still are) the only Europe-wide revolts by the people against their governments. They were not unlike the Arab Spring. People hitherto thought powerless rose up against kings who not only denied them political freedom, but also denied them a political future. The monarchs and aristocrats of Europe could not, of course, see that the world was changing around them. Europe was suffering famine at the very time industrialization was revving up and political corruption spreading. The people who were getting jobs were the women and children who could work for very little. Displaced peasants did not necessarily find jobs in industry. A social safety net that existed in village life was gone. People who moved to the city were desperate. They had no food, no hope, no future.

In 1848, intellectuals like Marx, skilled artisans, students, and even businessmen who thought that the old monarchical system was not meeting the needs of society, joined forces with millions of disgruntled workers

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