

Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Society

Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Society

By

R. G. Williams

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Society

By R. G. Williams

This book first published 2025

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2025 by Rhys Glyn Williams

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN: 978-1-0364-4208-8

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-4209-5

I rest not from my great task! To open ... the Human Imagination
—William Blake

CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Chapter I	1
Radicals and Society	
Chapter II	14
Radicals	
Chapter III	22
Radical Workers	
Chapter IV	30
Revolutionaries and Counter-Revolutionaries	
Chapter V	39
Socialists	
Chapter VI	52
Communists	
Chapter VII	66
Anarchists	
Chapter VIII	80
Ideas, Struggle, and Agency	
Chapter IX	92
Revolution	
Chapter X	127
Revolution and the Modern World	
Chapter XI	164
Rebels vs. Revolutionaries	

Chapter XII.....	170
The Ideal Revolutionary	
Bibliography.....	173

PREFACE

This book is a study of radicals, rebels, revolutionaries, and society. Specifically, it is a study of how radicals help to make and change the world. It tries to look at the struggles of radicals in creating modern revolutionary politics – since the French Revolution of 1789. It also tries to argue, practically, that we need radicals, and revolutionaries, in our politics today – people who are committed to changing our society. We all need to be good radicals and revolutionaries today – people who both interpret the world and always try to change it, hopefully for the better, and always for a democratic, Humanist, and Socialist world, for a free world. The book, ultimately, is a Socialist study of radicalism – e.g. a Socialist argument for the vital political role played by radicals and revolutionaries in changing the world.

What is a radical? A radical, today, is anyone who actively seeks to really change our society – someone who challenges the root causes of exploitation and oppression, who stands against inhumanity and injustice, and who works to build a better, free, democratic, and Socialist world.

What is a revolutionary? A revolutionary is a radical who understands that true social change can only come by overthrowing existing society – someone who is committed to permanently transforming society, in a revolutionary way, in order to revolutionise, free, and liberate all of humanity.

Radicals and revolutionaries, today, always fight for a positive, revolutionary, ideology – for an ideology based on actually trying to improve humanity and the world. The main revolutionary ideology in the modern world is Socialism. Socialism is the idea that society should be based on the free development of each and the free development of all. All of the different types of radicals and revolutionaries covered in this book believed in some form of Socialism. Socialism – the struggle to achieve the free development of each and the free development of all – is the only revolutionary, radical, and human struggle today. That commitment, as a radical commitment, is a commitment to building a free world – a world of a free humanity.

This book is a Socialist study. It is a Socialist Humanist study, in the tradition of Democratic Socialism. I wrote this book, as a Socialist, because I really believe radicals change the world – for the better. As a committed Socialist I obviously support anyone who actually struggles for Socialism – for a society based on human freedom. The best radicals and revolutionaries fight for Socialism – for the free development of each and the free development of all. A good radical is a Socialist. A good Socialist is a radical. For me, this is a simple fact. The struggle, today, for a free world, depends on radicalism and revolution – it depends on radically changing the world. It depends on both radicalism and Socialism. It depends on Socialists and radicals. It depends on radically building a radically better world.

R.G. Williams

(2025)

CHAPTER I

RADICALS AND SOCIETY

This short essay is a study of radicals and society. Radicals are people who want to fundamentally change society. Radicalism, as a broad modern ideology, is about trying to fundamentally change existing society. It is about both interpreting the world and changing the world. A radical, by definition, wants to change things. They are people who want to fundamentally change society. Most radicals want a better society. They often want a society which is based on improving society, on overcoming the real problems of society, and real human freedom – freedom for each human being, freedom for every human being. This often means that radicals have always had an uneasy social relationship with society – because they fundamentally want to change or alter society, in order to make it better. This means that radicals have usually been mistrusted by class societies – e.g. societies based on exploitation, oppression, class, and class structures, like Ancient society, Feudal society, and Capitalist society. Radicals have often been distrusted by society – even when they are struggling for an objectively better form of society. Despite this, radicals are crucial to actually achieving human progress. Indeed, the history of humanity shows that it is because of the social struggle of radicals that humanity has actually achieved social progress. Every major struggle for human freedom, in the modern world, has always relied on radicals – and on the struggle of radicals. Whenever humanity has achieved social progress, or human freedom, it has usually been because radicals fought for it. Struggles for a better society have always relied on the struggle, and commitment, of radicals. Radicals might be mistrusted, hated, or despised, by class societies, but in reality, they are crucial to the long struggle for human freedom. Without radicals nothing can change. Without the struggle of radicals, humanity cannot achieve progress.

Radicalism is about changing society – through major social change, structural change, revolutionary change, political revolution, and social revolution. Radicalism emerged, as an idea, in the 1700s and 1800s, to describe the various forms of radical politics which emerged following the French Revolution of 1789. Radicalism also emerged, as a term, to describe

the various types of politics which try to transform modern society – in order to make modern society better, and to achieve modern ideas like democracy, liberty, equality, fraternity, and Socialism.¹

Radicalism, as an idea, ultimately, is about major social change. It is about creating major social change. It is the push for radical systemic social change which defines radicalism and radical politics. Radicalism, ultimately, is about trying to fundamentally change society and the world. It is the desire to change society, to make society better, that makes a radical person a radical.

Radicalism emerged out of the rise of modern society. Indeed, radicalism and radical politics specifically emerged out of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Radical politics, since the 1800s, have always been defined by the attempt to achieve the ideals of the Enlightenment – e.g. liberty, equality, fraternity, democracy, and Socialism.

Radicalism, as a type of politics, is about trying to get to the root of a social problem – and trying to solve it through major social transformation. Radicalism, as a movement, is about trying to achieve a better society – through major social transformation. In modern politics, the purpose of radicalism is to change society to make it better – to make society more democratic, more equal, and free. Radicalism, as a type of politics, is about struggle – social struggle to achieve a better humanity.²

Radical politics, today, in the modern world, is about trying to create a better society. The world, today, is a world which is still dominated by the reality of exploitation, oppression, and human misery. Radicalism, as a form of politics, is still about struggling to achieve a better society.

‘Radicalism’, as a political term, has a very long history – going back to the 1800s. The word ‘radical’, as a political term, comes from the Latin word ‘radix’ (‘root’) – as ‘radicalism’ seeks to change the ‘roots’ of society – to change the very basis of society itself. Radicalism, as a form of social change, is crucial for understanding modern politics and modern society – because radicalism has often helped to drive the revolutionary struggles and developments of modern society.

Radicalism covers a wide spectrum of politics. Indeed, there are many political movements and ideas, in history and politics, which can be described as ‘radical’. What unites most radical politics, in the end, is the commitment to the idea that modern society needs to be fundamentally changed in some way – in order to create a better society. Radicalism

might include a wide spectrum of ideas and politics but what unites radical politics is the idea of fundamental social change – specifically through social revolution.

Of course, radicalism is not a static form of politics. It changes over time. It evolves over history. Radicalism can be relative. What is radical in one period of history might not be radical in another. What is a radical idea in one period in history can be a basic social principle in another. For example, democracy, the ideal of democracy, was once a very radical idea – especially in Ancient society or Feudal society – but today, in most Capitalist societies, the idea of democracy is relatively mainstream. Radical politics, today, such as Socialism, Democratic Socialism, Anarchism, or Marxism, might yet become mainstream ideas in the future – e.g. in a future, better, society. Radicalism is always an evolving political term – depending on the level of social struggle within any human society. The politics of radicalism usually depends on the specific historical, social, and political context. In modern times, for example, radical politics is about trying to achieve fundamental social change – change that really changes society. What is constant, however, in radical politics, is the view that social change can only be achieved by social struggle. It is commitment to social struggle, to transformative social struggle, which makes radicalism really radical. It is a common commitment to positive social transformation which usually unites most forms of radical politics – since the 1800s.

Radicalism, as a type of politics, is ultimately about trying to achieve a free, humane, and democratic society.³ This is the core idea that unites together all forms of Left radical politics – from the 1800s to the present day. The evolution of radical politics, from Liberal-Radicalism to Democratic Socialism, has always been based around the ideal of trying to build a democratic society – a free society.

Radicalism is part of modern politics. Indeed, it is a key part of modern politics. As a type of politics, radicalism is about trying to fundamentally change the world in serious, effective, and revolutionary ways. There are many different types of radical politics, in history and in society, but radicalism as a form of modern politics is effectively about the attempt to use politics to really transform and change society – to change the very social basis of modern society. Most modern ideologies, like Liberalism, Anarchism, Socialism, and Communism, all emerged from the rise of early radical politics – in the 1700s and 1800s.

Radicalism, as a modern form of politics, really emerged from the experience of the French Revolution of 1789. Indeed, radical politics really emerged with the revolutions of the 1700s and 1800s – which led to modern ideas about Enlightenment, democracy, and Socialism. The French Revolution, as a radical revolution, sought to completely transform French society – in order to overthrow Feudalism and the Ancien Regime, and to form a new society based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The most radical ideas of the French Revolution were crucial to helping to establish the basic ideas of modern radical politics – e.g. the need for major social struggle in order to transform and improve society. Radicalism, and radical politics, began with the experience of the French Revolution – a revolution which showed that it is possible to fundamentally change society. All modern politics, since the 1800s, in one way or another, are connected to the example of radical politics following the French Revolution. Indeed, all modern politics, in one way or another, can be traced back to the example of the French Revolution – as the beginning of modern politics.

Radicalism continues to shape modern politics. Indeed, the basic divide in modern politics, between the Left and the Right, has been shaped by the basic divide between radical and conservative politics. The Left wants to change society. The Right wants to keep society as it already is. The Left is radical. The Right is reactionary. This has been the basic divide of most modern politics since the French Revolution – and since the development of the modern Left-Right divide. This means that modern politics, between the Left and the Right, continues to be shaped by the divide over radical social change – between revolution and counter-revolution, between progress and reaction, between freedom and tyranny.

Radicalism is a form of Left politics. This is because the Left seeks to change society – sometimes in quite radical ways. Indeed, radicalism, as a form of politics, has shaped many modern Left ideologies. Clearly, most of the modern ideologies of the Left, such as Anarchism, Socialism, and Communism, emerged as modern ideologies out of the early radical politics of the 1700s and 1800s. Radicalism, in the 1700s and 1800s, was the original basis of most modern forms of Left politics – from Liberalism to Socialism. All major Left ideologies, ideas, movements, and parties, since the 1800s, have emerged out of the original radical politics of the early 19th century – out of the radicalism of the French Revolution.

Radicalism is not a form of Right politics. This is because the Right, since the rise of modern politics, has always been defined by the desire to

keep society the way it is – based on hierarchy and domination. Of course, there have been quite extreme forms of Right politics, such as Fascism and Nazism, but these movements were not ‘radical’ – as they did not really want to change the root basis of modern society, despite their extremism. Fascism and Nazism were extremist ideologies, but they were not ‘radical’ – they were ‘reactionary’. Sections of the Right might claim to be ‘radical’, but the politics of the Right have always been about ‘conserving’ society – not changing society.

Radicalism is ultimately about major social change – but it is also about positive social change. Radicalism, as an idea, is about trying to change society in positive terms – to make society better, to make humanity better, to make human beings free. The most radical forms of radical ideas are about positive social change – radical social change to make society better, to make all of humanity better off, to make all of humanity free. Ideas like democracy, liberation, abolitionism, liberty, equality, fraternity, solidarity, and Socialism, are the most radical ideas in human history – because they are about changing society, radically, for the better. Radicalism is always about positive change – not destructive change. Radicalism is about freeing people – not oppressing people. Radicalism, as a humanist form of politics, is about positive social change. Radicalism, as positive social change, can be clearly distinguished from other forms of politics – such as right-wing extremism. This is because radicalism, in terms of most radical politics since the 1800s, is about achieving the goal of positive social change – change which achieves a better, freer, society.

Radicalism, today, is a product of modern class society. It is a product of the inhumanity of class society.⁴ Indeed, most forms of radicalism emerge from the reality of exploitation and oppression in class society. If there is a reality of exploitation and oppression, in a society, then radicalism will always develop – as a response to that reality, as an attempt to overcome that reality, as an attempt to build a better society. Most human beings, in modern class societies, are exploited and oppressed. This reality generates social conflict and social struggle. It also produces the real human need for radical change – because all human beings want to be free. As long as people are exploited and oppressed, they will always struggle against that social reality. This, inevitably, produces radicalism, radical ideas, and radical struggle – to change society.

Radicalism is about ideas and struggle. It is about trying to put good ideas, e.g. radical ideas, into practice – through social struggle. Some of the best ideas in human society started out as radical, impossible, ideas –

ideas like democracy, liberation, abolitionism, liberty, equality, fraternity, solidarity, and Socialism. Indeed, even today, some of these ideas remain radical ideas – because human society has yet to achieve some of these ideas in practice. Despite this, human history shows that radical change, towards human freedom, is inevitable. As long as people struggle, for a better world, the best radical ideas will eventually triumph – and will transform society into a better society.

Radicalism, today, is about achieving a better society. It is clear that existing society, e.g. Capitalist society, is a society based on exploitation and oppression. This reality is inhumane. This reality needs to change. The only way to change society, today, is to radically overcome Capitalism – to replace Capitalism with a different form of society, hopefully a society based on human freedom. The most radical form of politics, today, is politics which seeks to overcome the exploitation and oppression of Capitalist society.

Radicalism, today, is about opposing existing Capitalist society. Since radicalism is about changing society, to make it better, the only really radical form of politics, today, is politics that opposes Capitalist society – because Capitalism is the dominant society in the world today. The best radicals, today, are those radicals who want to achieve positive social change – in order to build a new, better, and freer society. In modern history, since the rise of modern politics, the best radicals have been those radicals who have been opposed to the exploitation and oppression of Capitalist society. The best radicals, today, are Socialists – e.g. people who believe in the need for a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all.

The most radical social struggle, today, is the struggle for a society based on the free development of humanity – e.g. Socialism. Today, the most radical form of radical politics is obviously Socialism. Socialism is the most radical form of politics in human history, and in human politics, this is because Socialism is about fundamentally transforming society – in every way. While other forms of radical politics, in the past, such as Liberal-Radicalism, sought only a limited form of radical change, Socialism is about achieving a total transformation of society – a permanent transformation of society. Socialism, as the ideal of the free development of each and the free development of all, is the pinnacle of radical politics – because it will overcome all forms of exploitation and oppression. Socialism, as the highpoint of radical and Enlightenment politics, will achieve the most radical ideal of radical politics – a society of human freedom.

Radicalism, today, is about achieving Socialism. If we are serious about achieving a better society, today, then we have to face the fact that Capitalist society is incapable of reforming itself – or changing itself. This fact means that radicalism is required in order to actually change society today – in the form of radical struggle. If we are serious about building a better society today, we need both radicalism and Socialism. We need to achieve Socialism – through radical political and social struggle.

Social revolution is the most radical form of radicalism. Social revolution is when a society is fundamentally transformed by radical change – in historical, economic, social, and political terms. Social revolution, of course, is when a society is fundamentally changed – from one type of society into a new form of society, such as the rise of Capitalist society or the possibility of Socialist society. Radicalism is a vital part of that process of social revolution. Indeed, every major revolution in modern human history produced certain types of radical politics and radical ideas. Revolutions like the English Revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution, were crucial revolutions in human history because they were about trying to achieve radical ideas – ideas like liberty, equality, and fraternity. The most radical social revolutions are always those social revolutions which are about achieving real social change.

Radicalism is part of human society. Every society has produced radicals. Every society has produced radical struggles for social change. This is because of the fact that most human societies, since the Urban Revolution and the invention of agriculture, have been class societies. Class societies, because they are class societies, based on exploitation and oppression, produce radicals. They produce radicals because human beings want to live in better types of societies – societies without exploitation or oppression. The reality of exploitation and oppression, within a class society, produces the need for social change – for radical social change. This need for radical social change produces radicals and radical ideas. Radicalism is not an outlier of politics – it is a major and important part of politics. Most forms of social change require some form of radicalism, at some point in history or politics. Every major advance for human progress, from democracy to equality, has often depended on radical struggles.

Social struggle is also part of human society. Indeed, the struggle for radical change has always been part of human history – especially in times of class conflict, class struggle, and social revolution. Indeed, class struggle, as a reality of history and politics, is a powerful form of radicalism. Every

class society, based on class, inevitably, produces social struggles – and the need for radical change. No society, in human history, can remain the same forever. This fact means that social struggle, and radical change, is inevitable as a part of human history.

Karl Marx, the great German revolutionary Socialist, always understood the importance of radical social change for achieving human freedom. He always understood that radical change, in the form of social revolution, is the basis of achieving real human progress – in history, in politics, in society. His theory of history, the theory of historical materialism, places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of radicalism, and radical social struggle, in the form of class struggle, to achieve positive social revolution. The reality of class struggle, as a form of radical struggle, is a key part of understanding human history – as Marx wrote in 1845: ‘the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’. In order to understand the major class struggles, and revolutions, of history it is vital to understand the importance of radicalism – of radical social struggle.

Radical people are the basis of any radical movement. They are the people who really struggle in order to achieve the goals of any radical movement – the goal of a better society, the goal of a more democratic society, the goal of a more equal society, the goal of a Socialist society. Within any radical movement there are often people – radical people capable of changing the world.

Radicals are people who fight for radical change. Ultimately the struggle for social change is always made by real, living, human beings – human beings who want to change society and make it better.⁵ Radical change in history is not an abstraction or an inevitable development – it is a development which is created by the struggle of radical people. It is radical people who make radical change – just as it is ultimately people who really make history. Radical people are crucial to the process of people making history.

Radicals seek to change society. They change society through their ideas, their writing, their action, and their struggle.⁶ Radicals seek to change society because they wish to achieve a better society – a changed society, a society which is fundamentally different to the society which they are struggling against. The fundamental aspect of radicalism, in political terms, is the attempt to fundamentally change society. This desire for a better society is what drives a radical.

History is full of radicals. It is full of people who have recognised that human society needs to be changed, and improved, through major social struggle. These people, the radicals of history, always understood that in order to improve society we need to fight and struggle for social change. It is these people, the radicals of history, who have really contributed to real human progress.

Radicals are part of society. Indeed, they emerge from within their society, and they try to change it. They emerge from within their society because they recognise the need for major social change – for social change to improve or transform society. Radicals both interpret society and try to change society. The relationship between radicals and society is both historical and political. It is historical because radicals have been crucial to achieving the real historical progress of human society – through struggle, through conflict, through agitation, through ideas, through revolution. It is political because radicals can only really change society through direct political struggle – through politics. Radicals always have to balance their struggles, historically and politically, in order to achieve their goals – a better society. Radicals are crucial to actually achieving real social change in a society. While radicals might be dismissed, ignored, oppressed, imprisoned, or killed, by their society, they are still crucial to the overall struggle for human freedom.

Radicals, as people, are people who fight for social change. The best radicals, in history and in politics, fight for radical social change which attempts to improve society – to achieve greater levels of freedom. Radicals, as people, tend to be committed, dedicated, and disciplined people. They tend to be people who understand that human freedom and progress can only be achieved by real social struggle. Radicals, as people, operate in existing society. They try to change society. This means that they are always going to have enemies in society – people who benefit from existing society. This fundamentally means that radicals will always have to struggle to change society. A radical, as a radical, always understands that struggle, itself, is crucial to actually achieving social change.

Radicals are usually committed people. They are usually very committed, motivated, and disciplined. They are committed to the cause – and sometimes completely committed. Radicalism, ultimately, is about commitment. It is about commitment to trying to change the world. A radical knows, deep down, that there is something wrong or unjust about the world as it is – and that this must be corrected through serious social change. What makes a radical a radical, in the end, is a commitment to the belief that the world

must be changed – and that the world can be changed. A radical person is ultimately committed to the cause of trying to change the world in a positive way. Politics, ultimately, is about commitment – and radical politics is about a total, radical, commitment to trying to improve society through serious social change. A radical is a committed person. A radical is a totally committed person. A totally committed person can change the world – because they have the commitment necessary to act.

There have been many great radicals in history – men and women who actively struggled for a better world. People like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Connolly, Allende, Guevara, Orwell, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Sacco and Vanzetti, John Ball, Paine, Jefferson, Robespierre, Marat, Shelley, Wollstonecraft, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Pankhurst, Goldman, Mandela, Nehru, and Gandhi were all radicals – fighting for a better world. Some of these people were revolutionaries – people who completely transformed the world through their ideas and their struggles. Some of these people were simply part of mass movements which also changed the world. When we look back at history, we can usually admire those radicals who really committed themselves to actually changing the world. These people actually had the commitment, the drive, and the dedication to actually change the world. These people not only interpreted the world – they changed it.

Radicals are often heroes. Indeed, some of the best heroes of human history have been the radicals of human history – the radicals who thought, fought, suffered, and often died, for social progress. We all admire some radicals. If we look back at history, we all tend to have some radicals that we admire or agree with – because of their ideas, because of their actions, because of their lives. This is because of the fact that radicals are vital to social and historical progress. Without radicals, and the struggles of radicals, social progress is impossible. Radical people might not be perfect people, and indeed they are often very flawed people in human terms, but they are still crucial to human freedom. The radicals we like, and the radicals we dislike, might be shaped by our politics but the fact remains that radicals are crucial to the development of society.

Radicalism is a necessary part of human societies. In certain points of human history, in order to improve society, human beings have to be radical – they have to turn towards radical politics, and even revolutionary politics. This is especially true in societies which lack democratic politics – such as pre-revolutionary France or Tsarist Russia. During times of crisis, or in societies without legitimate forms of democratic politics,

radicalism becomes not only an option for politics but a necessity. If you cannot reform an existing society into a better society, due to crisis or authoritarianism, it becomes necessary to turn to radical and revolutionary politics. All of the great revolutions of human history were based on this logic – of this need to turn to radical and revolutionary politics, in times of crisis.

Radical politics often have to confront the reality of violence – and violent political change. Radical change can, sometimes, be violent. Sometimes the level of radical change, required in a society, requires violence. Of course, no one likes violent change – but sometimes violent, revolutionary, change is necessary – both in politics and in history. In order to achieve social progress, at some points in history, it is necessary to turn towards radical politics – simply because of the social reality which exists at that specific time. Some societies in history could not be reformed and they required violent revolution to change them – simply because of their political reality. Societies like pre-revolutionary France or Tsarist Russia could not be peacefully reformed – they required radical change, they required revolution, they required social revolution, they required violent revolution. In those circumstances radical, even violent, struggle becomes necessary – and justified. Violent revolution is justified – when history, politics, and society demand fundamental social change. Violent revolution is justified – if or when peaceful revolution is clearly impossible.

Radicals, and radicalism, usually emerge in societies which refuse to change. They emerge in societies which have become undermined by crisis and oppression. Usually, radicalism is a product of a society which clearly does need major change – because of crisis, because of war, because of tyranny, because of exploitation, because of oppression. Usually, radicalism also emerges in a society which lacks the means to reform itself – such as through democracy or political/social renewal. Every radical struggle, for social change, has always emerged in a society which refuses to change, alter, or reform itself. Societies like pre-revolutionary France or Tsarist Russia generated revolution, in the end, because of their real need for radical change – and because of their refusal to accept or allow radical change. It is unjust societies which tend to provoke radicalism – because injustice inevitably produces social resistance to injustice. Radicalism, and the need for radical change, only really occurs when an existing society refuses to change itself for the better. Radicalism, historically, emerges when a society needs to change – and yet refuses to change. It is the need for serious social change which often drives radicalism – and the need for radicalism. People only become truly

radical, in historical and political terms, when all other options for change have been exhausted. When reform fails to achieve positive social change, that is when radicalism emerges as a major social force in society. A society which refuses to reform itself will, inevitably, be transformed by radical social change – e.g. social revolution.

Radicals are not alien to their societies – indeed, they are usually organic to their societies. They emerge from within their society – and then they transform their society, through their struggle. Most radicals, in history and politics, usually come from within the societies which they seek to change and transform. Radicals do not emerge out of nowhere, in a society. They emerge organically because of the obvious need for major social change within a society, and usually because of the lack of reform in a society. It is the concrete, material, and social conditions of an unjust society which ultimately produces radicalism – and the need for social revolution. Radicals cannot be ignored, in the long-run, in any society – because they are usually a crucial part of their society. This understanding of society means that the best radicals have the ability to interpret and change their society. This basis in society means that the best radicals have the power to really change their society.

Radicalism, today, is about achieving Socialism – e.g. a society based on the free development of humanity.⁷ Radicalism today has to be about achieving Socialism – because Socialism is the only radical alternative to Capitalism, and to existing society. If you really want to change society today, in serious terms, you have to be a radical. In order to be a radical, today, and to change society, you need to be a Socialist. You need to stand up for what is right. You need to oppose what is wrong. You need to say no to oppression. You need to say yes to human freedom.⁸

Societies change. They change over time. History, politics, social evolution, and social revolution, shows that societies change. A static society is an impossible society – in the long term. Hopefully, over time, all societies will become better societies – freer societies, happier societies, democratic societies. Hopefully, one day, through social revolution, modern society will become a truly free society – a society based on the radical principle of the free development of each and the free development of all, e.g. Socialism. Radicals, through their struggle, are part of the process of this change – hopefully towards a better society. Social change is inevitable, but social progress, towards a better society, does not happen by itself. It has to be struggled for – through determined social struggle to make society better. Radicals, as part of a wider social movement of the working class, are

crucial to this process. In our society, today, with its classes and class antagonisms, radicals are crucial to actually creating a better society – because they struggle, every day, to actually achieve social progress. If we want a better society, we need to fight for it. If we want a better society, we need to struggle for it. Radicals, and radical people, are crucial. Radicals, and radical people, can change the world. Long live the radicals!

Notes

1. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (1848)
2. A. Camus, *The Rebel*, (1951)
3. A. Camus, *The Rebel*, (1951)
4. E.P. Thompson, *Socialist Humanism*, (1957)
5. E.P. Thompson, *Socialist Humanism*, (1957)
6. G. Orwell, *Why I Write*, (1946)
7. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (1848)
8. A. Camus, *The Rebel*, (1951)

(2015)

CHAPTER II

RADICALS

This short essay is a study of radicals. What is a radical? A radical is any person who opposes exploitation and oppression. A radical is any person who struggles for a better world. A radical says No to exploitation and oppression. A radical says Yes to a better world – a world based on the free development of each and the free development of all. A radical fights – for the rights of all.¹ A radical struggles – for a better future.² A good radical knows how to fight. A good radical knows how to struggle.

Radicals are people. They are radical human beings who believe that humanity can be better than it currently is. They believe that humanity can achieve more than simply class society – with its classes and class antagonisms. A radical is committed to achieving a better society – for all human beings. A radical is committed to achieving a better free society – a Socialist society. A real radical is driven by a real feeling of commitment – a commitment to the idea that human beings should be free and equal, a commitment to the idea that society should be organised on the principle of the free development of each and the free development of all. All of this means that most radicals are driven by a specific form of Socialist Humanism – the idea that human beings can be better and can be free. In the end, radicals are simply human beings who believe in humanity. They believe in the possibility of humanity – that humanity can be greater than it currently is, in terms of human freedom. It is a commitment to human freedom which is at the core of every radical. A radical is a human being who believes in the real struggle for human freedom.³ A radical is a human being who is prepared to struggle for a better humanity.

Radicals have causes. Indeed, a radical always has a cause. A cause is the ideal that generates struggle, and commitment, from a radical. It is a cause, for a radical, which justifies everything that they do in economic, political, social, historical, and intellectual terms. The cause, for a radical, is what makes a radical a radical. A radical cause is a cause that is really about trying to change the world in fundamental terms – such as achieving liberty, equality, and fraternity.⁴ A radical knows what their cause is – and

they know how they are going to achieve it. The causes of radicals have changed over time, such as the struggle for democracy, the struggle for national liberation, the struggle for civil rights, or the struggle for Socialism, but what always unites the causes of radicals is the commitment to a human cause – a cause that is about achieving good change that achieves human freedom.

Radicals fight for a better society. They emerge, as individuals, groups, organisations, and parties, to challenge existing society – and to change existing society. It is through changing society that radicals seek to actually achieve human freedom. It is through struggle that radicals seek to achieve change. Radicals, as human beings, look at the reality of existing class society, with its exploitation, oppression, Imperialism, and anti-humanism, and demand radical change. They look at the reality of class society and they struggle against it, in a positive way, to change society. They see the reality of exploitation and oppression and they become determined to oppose it – simply because exploitation and oppression is completely incompatible with human freedom. The best radicals, in history and in society today, are motivated by the desire for a better world. They are also motivated by the desire for a better humanity – a free humanity. They want a humanity that is based on the freedom of each and the freedom of all. The best radicals tend to want Humanism and Socialism – a Humanist Socialism. A radical wants to change the world. In order to change the world a radical must also be a revolutionary. The best radicals not only interpret the world – they struggle to change it. A radical person is a person who is prepared and committed to take political action in order to actually change the world – in order to create a better world. It is radical commitment which makes a radical a real radical.⁵

Radicals have a radical ideology. They have a radical way of seeing the world. They have ideas about how the world can be made better – through achieving human freedom. It is these ideas which help to shape the struggle, organisation, and activity of radicals.⁶ Radicals are radical because they have a radical ideology. Radicals, in order to be radicals, have to have a radical ideology. A radical has to have radical ideas. They have to have a set of principles, ideas, and hopes, for how humanity can improve itself – through practical social struggle. These ideas also shape their politics – their practical social struggle. The best radicals have an ideology which is committed to human freedom, through human emancipation. Over time, radicals have shaped their politics – in line with the development of the radical struggle for human freedom. In the past the most radical ideology was the struggle for democracy. In our times, the

most radical ideology is Socialism. Indeed, Socialism is the only effectively radical ideology in the world today – an ideology which is actually committed to changing the world in a truly radical way. Every other ideology, today, is simply reactionary when compared to the radicalism of Socialism. Socialism is about achieving a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all. Socialism will achieve freedom through working-class emancipation. Socialism is radical because it is about achieving a society based on real human freedom – for everyone. Socialism is radical because it is about really transforming, changing, and liberating society – through working-class emancipation. Socialism is about freedom. It is about achieving freedom for all. This vision of freedom is radical – because it opposes the reality of class society, which dominates most of modern society. This means that Socialism is radical. The radicalism of Socialism comes from the fact that it is about trying to achieve freedom for all. Socialism is the most radical ideology because it seeks to actually achieve the full liberation of humanity. Socialism, in terms of consistent, democratic, and Humanist Socialism, is about achieving a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all. It is about achieving a society which has overcome the exploitation and oppression which is inherent to all class societies. Socialism, in its most radical form, is about achieving freedom – universal freedom, for each and for all. Socialism, at its most radical, is about achieving freedom for everyone, for every man, every woman, every child, every nationality, every race, every sex, every gender, every class, and every person. This determination to overcome exploitation, and to achieve freedom for all of humanity, is what makes Socialism really radical. Socialism, in the form of Democratic Socialism, Humanist Socialism, and Revolutionary Socialism, is the only ideology in the world today which is truly radical – because it fundamentally wants to change human society, to make it better, to make it free. In modern times, the only ideology which can radically transform our society for the better is Socialism. Any radical alive today, in order to be a good radical, has to be a Socialist.⁷

Radicals are for freedom. Radicals believe in freedom. The struggle for freedom is the struggle of the radical – because freedom is the only way to actually achieve major social change which liberates humanity. The ultimate radical struggle of a radical is for freedom. A radical also knows that freedom is universal – it must be universal for all of humanity. This means that the radical struggle for freedom is the struggle for the freedom of each and the freedom of all.⁸

Radicals are democrats. Radicals believe in democracy. They want a democratic society – where the vast majority of the population have a say in shaping society, through democracy. It is the struggle for democracy which defines a key part of the overall struggle of a radical – as achieving democracy is crucial to achieving freedom. Democracy, as the expression of the will of the majority, is a crucial part of the overall struggle for freedom.⁹ This is why radicals support democracy – because democracy is an expression and a reality of universal human freedom.

Radicals are Socialists. Radicals are Socialists, today, because Socialism is about achieving universal freedom – freedom for each and freedom for all. The only way to achieve both universal freedom and a democratic society is to achieve a society based on Socialism – because Socialism is about achieving a society without exploitation and oppression, and because Socialism is based on the emancipation of the majority. Socialism is the social, economic, and political basis of achieving modern freedom. Radicals are also Socialists because Socialism is the cause of the working class – the overwhelming majority of humanity. Radicals believe in the freedom of the majority – and Socialism is about the emancipation of the majority.¹⁰

Radicals are humanists. Radicals believe in human agency – in the ability of human beings to achieve a better world, through their struggle. It is humanism, and a commitment to a real practical human freedom, which drives the philosophical and social struggle for freedom. Humanism is also crucial to actual human liberation. Humanism, when combined with Socialism, in the form of Socialist Humanism, is unstoppable as a radical force. Socialist Humanism is the most radical set of ideas in human history – because it is about achieving the ultimate universal form of human freedom: the free development of each and the free development of all.¹¹

Radicals are revolutionaries. This means that they oppose existing society and want to change it – for the better. This means that the best radicals often become revolutionaries – people who seek to achieve the revolutionary transformation of society through revolutionary struggle. Some of the best radicals in history were often revolutionaries as well – people like Paine, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, etc. The radicalism of a radical is always based on their radicalism being a positive social force – in the long run. This often means that the best radicals understand the importance of achieving revolution in order to achieve major social change. Revolution, as a form of radical change, is vital to actually changing society – to actually achieving a better society. Revolution can be either peaceful or

violent, democratic or violent, but revolution is always vital to actually achieving social change – because every society requires some form of radical revolutionary change, at some point, to actually achieve real social transformation for the better. Radicals are revolutionaries, not because they are naturally destructive but because revolution is the best way, in the long run, to actually change society for the better – as shown by the history of revolution. No society can ever really become a better society without some form of revolution – as shown by the example of the English Revolution, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution. Radicals, and revolutionaries, understand that revolution is an inevitable, and positive force, in human history – even when it results in social tragedy. In the long run, revolution always improves society – towards the goal of human freedom. A radical always understands the role of revolution in human history – as a revolutionary tool for achieving human freedom.¹²

Radicals are effective. The best radicals actually achieve results. The best radicals care about actually achieving a changed society – through their struggle. The best radicals support revolutionary actions which actually change society. A radical supports mass, democratic, actions which can achieve social change – such as democratic revolution, Socialist revolution, and working-class struggle. The best radicals oppose any actions which are counter-productive to changing society. This means that the best radicals support mass social struggle – and oppose ineffective social struggles. This also means that the best radicals support positive social change – not negative social change, like terrorism, counter-revolution, genocide, or war.¹³ The radicalism of a radical is always about the positive outcomes that they seek to achieve – such as freedom, democracy, human rights, and Socialism. A good radical always keeps the values that they are fighting for at the front of their struggle – their strategy and their tactics for positive social change. A bad radical forgets about those values – or does not understand them in the first place. Radicalism, in the end, is always about trying to achieve a real radical goal – a changed society, a better society, a free society. A radical always acts in a way to actually achieve social change. A good radical is an effective radical.

Radicals oppose extremism. Radicalism and extremism are not the same thing. Radicalism is about actual radical change, while extremism is about blind hate. Radicals oppose extremism because they understand the difference between radicalism and extremism. Radicalism is about struggling effectively for major social change – and fighting for the rights of others. Extremism is about struggling ineffectively for major social

change – and often at the expense of the rights of others.¹⁴ The best radicals are not extremists. Extremism is always counter-productive to any social cause – and the best radicals know this. Of course, a radical is willing to fight, live, die, and struggle for the cause of human freedom – but an effective radical knows that extremism is not really effective for achieving social change. A good radical knows the difference between radicalism and extremism. Radicalism is about achieving positive social change. Extremism is about preventing positive social change. Radicalism is about using violence only when necessary. Extremism is about allowing violence to dictate everything. Extremism is about allowing emotion to distort positive social change. Indeed, a true radical knows that extremism is usually counterproductive to achieving social change. The difference between a radical and an extremist is that a radical cares about human freedom and an extremist does not. The difference between a radical and an extremist is not just a difference of strategy or tactics – it is a fundamental difference in terms of the struggle for human freedom. A radical might be destructive, in certain social struggles, but deep down a radical wants positive social change – and will struggle for human freedom. An extremist, on the other hand, is only destructive. In history, and in politics, it is the radicals who actually achieve real change – not the extremists. The issue of violence, and violent struggle, really divides radicals from extremists – in the struggle for a better world. A radical only uses violence only when it is necessary. An extremist always uses violence – even when it is not necessary. This is a key difference – both in history and in politics – for the radical struggle for a better world. A good radical is not an extremist. A good radical hates extremism.¹⁵

Radicals ultimately believe in certain goals, ideals, views, aims, and hopes which make them radical. They believe that these concepts can be achieved in reality. Radicals believe in emancipation, universalism, acceptance, tolerance, freedom, liberty, and Socialism. Radicals also have a specific view of violence – that violence is only acceptable, for a radical cause, when it is absolutely necessary for achieving a major social struggle and when all other forms of struggle, revolution, and resistance, have been exhausted. Violence, for a radical, is always about trying to avoid violence – unless it is impossible to avoid. Radicals hate violence – unless that violence is about defending human rights from Fascism, Absolutism, or Barbarism. A radical wants to avoid violence – in order to achieve real social change – but a radical also accepts violence when it is necessary to defend or expand human freedom. A radical, ideally, is a pacifist – except when dealing with Fascism. For a real radical, violence can only be justified when the struggle for human freedom really requires it. Violence

is wrong – but violence is still a possible tool for human freedom, in the right social and historical circumstances. A radical knows when violence is right and when violence is wrong. A radical always knows when using violence is necessary and when it is not. A radical tries to avoid violence – but will fight, with violence, when necessary, for human freedom.

Radicals believe in love. Love is the ultimate motivation of a radical. It is love of humanity, as Che Guevara, the Argentine radical, pointed out, that really motivates a radical. A real radical is motivated by a love of humanity – a love of human freedom. A real radical fights for love – for universal human love. Love is a powerful emotion – but it is also a powerful force for human freedom. With love, humanity can achieve anything. With love, humanity can achieve universal freedom – freedom for all of humanity. A radical understands that human beings need to be free and loved, in order to be good human beings. Love, as a concept, is not alien to a radical. Love, as a concept, is the ultimate goal of a radical – the struggle to achieve a universal love, a total love, a human love. Radicals want love. They want love for all of humanity.

Radicals struggle for a better world. They struggle because they understand that the world can only be changed through radical struggle. An ideal radical understands both theory and practice. They understand that they need both theory and practice in order to change the world. It is the combination of theory and practice, in the form of praxis, that allows a radical to really change the world – and a real radical is all about changing the world. Theory, without practice, is impotent. Practice, without theory, is blind. A real radical combines theory and practice in order to systematically change the world – to build a better world.

The politics of radicalism change over time. At the beginning of modern times, the struggle for radicalism was simply about achieving a democratic society – based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Today the struggle for radicalism is about achieving an even more democratic society – a Socialist society. Underlying this, however, is always the consistent politics of freedom. Freedom is everything to a radical. Freedom is what drives a radical. A radical fights for the free development of each and the free development of all. The motto of a radical is very simple: freedom for each, freedom for all. A good radical, in the end, is committed to a basic truth – human freedom is everything.¹⁶

The best example of a radical, in history, is Karl Marx. Marx personifies the ideal radical. He was a revolutionary who was committed to the eternal