

# Thinkers, Activists, and Politics



# Thinkers, Activists, and Politics:

## *Critical Studies of Revolutionaries*

By

R. G. Williams

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Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

—Karl Marx



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## PREFACE

This book is a collection of my essays on various activists, revolutionaries, writers, and thinkers. It specifically brings together some of my better critical essays of some of the people who clearly, concretely, and actively, struggled for human freedom in our times. The argument of the book is very simple: the best thinkers are always those thinkers who try to change the world, to achieve a better world.

All of the essays here focus, in one way or another, on really revolutionary individuals – activists, writers, and intellectuals who have contributed to the fight for freedom since the rise of the modern world. Many of them embraced the Socialist vision of human liberation: the free development of each as the foundation for the free development of all. Yet, in different ways, all shared a commitment to human freedom.

This book is a Socialist study. It is a Socialist Humanist study, in the tradition of Democratic Socialism. It is also a study of revolutionary heroes – those who inspire us to struggle for a better world. Heroes are not perfect, but they are essential to any social movement – to any meaningful struggle for humanity.

Marx wrote in 1845: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it”. The figures in this book lived by that principle. They sought to change the world – and they did. Their ideas continue to shape our present and future.

R.G. Williams

(2025)

# CHAPTER I

## PEOPLE AND THEIR POLITICS

This essay is a study of people – and their politics. Politics is clearly a very important part of human life. Obviously, politics is powerful – it can change the world, in revolutionary ways. Obviously, politics is political – and politics is personal. Obviously, politics is a force which shapes ourselves and our society. Politics, in a very powerful way, is a force which can change the world.

Politics is the ideas, ideologies, struggles, and conflicts, between classes, which change the world. Politics, in simple terms, is the organised struggle to either change the world – or to keep it as it is. All politics, today, between the Left and the Right, between Socialism and Capitalism, between Socialism, Liberalism, Conservatism, and Fascism, is the struggle to change the world.

People, most of the time, have politics. Most of the best people, activists, thinkers, and revolutionaries, have politics. Indeed, they always have politics. They have politics because they want to change the world – hopefully to create a better world. Most people, in the world, today, have politics – or at least political views. You cannot get away from politics – even if you want to. Even the most apolitical person has some basic form of politics – because rejecting politics is, in itself, a political act. This fact means that politics is a universal, human, force – a force which exists in every human being. This fact means that politics is a deeply human force – and that we should use politics to create a better world.

I have politics. I have very deep political views. I am a Socialist. Specifically, I am a Socialist, a Democratic Socialist, and a Socialist Humanist. I am also a Marxist – in that I agree with Marx's belief in the revolutionary need for human emancipation, for a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all. I believe in this type of politics. I believe that politics, in the end, is about the struggle to build a free world – a world based on human freedom. I believe, like Marx, that politics is about achieving human emancipation.<sup>1</sup> Politics should always serve the

goal of achieving the freedom of humanity – ‘the welfare of mankind and our own perfection’.<sup>2</sup> I believe, like Orwell, that politics is about defeating Totalitarianism – and achieving Democratic Socialism.<sup>2</sup>

I believe that politics, today, is a very important force in society. You cannot understand society, or people, without understanding politics. If you understand politics, you can understand society. If you can understand society, you can understand politics. If you can understand both politics and society, and use politics for effective change, you can change humanity – you can build a better, free, humanity.

I believe that people are often defined by their politics. I believe that your politics, and your political values, say a great deal about you – about what sort of person you are. Whether you are a Socialist, a Liberal, a Conservative, or a Fascist, I believe that those political ideas say a great deal about you as a person. They say a great deal – both about yourself and what you hope for the world. We are all defined by our politics – in one way or another. I also believe that you can really understand someone by understanding their politics. A person’s politics tells you a great deal about them – about their values, their hopes, their tendencies, and their aims. If you really want to understand someone, understand their politics. Before you study someone, study their politics. If you cannot detect any political views, or opinions, in someone you are either not looking hard enough or are talking to a very boring person. Politics, of course, are political – but they are also personal.

Politics, to me, is serious. You cannot simply play around with politics. Politics is a serious business. It is a serious force, with the power to really change human lives. You cannot simply mess around with politics. You need to understand your politics, fully, and use them, reasonably, to create a better world. There is nothing worse than bad politics – except bad politics which are used irresponsibly.

Politics, to me, is also a deeply important thing – on an individual level. You need to remain true to your politics – once you decide what your politics are. Once you decide what your politics are I believe you need to stick by them – preferably to the end. Of course, we all evolve in our politics, but I do think you should never betray your basic politics – or give up on your basic politics. Betraying your politics is terrible. It is objectively a terrible thing to do – betraying your politics. If you ever betray your politics, your deepest principles, then you have probably lost something of yourself in your life. You have probably betrayed yourself –

your real self. Your politics are supposed to be a crucial part of yourself – an outline of your hopes, dreams, and values. To betray your politics is, ultimately, to betray every hope, ideal, and value, you ever had. If you betray your politics, you betray yourself. If you betray yourself then you lose something of yourself. I hope I never, ever, betray my politics, my deepest values as a Socialist. Betraying your politics, either by directly contradicting your principles, or by switching sides, is probably one of the saddest and most terrible things that a human being can do to themselves. We all, in the end, have to live with ourselves. Living with yourself is much easier if you stand by your politics – if you stand true to your politics. Betraying your politics, like betraying your friends, family, or comrades, should be impossible. You should never, ever, do it. In my view, we must never, ever, betray our politics – because betraying your politics is a betrayal of your hope. Betrayal is terrible. No one likes a traitor. In my view an honest person always remains true – both to themselves and to their politics. An honest person is true to the end – to themselves and to their politics. In my view, if you remain true to your politics then you are true to yourself. You should always be true to yourself. To your own self be true. To your own political self be true. My advice, to anyone, is – always remain true to the politics that you believe in, no matter what happens.

We all have politics. We all have political views. It is always best to be truthful, and open, about them. Hiding your politics is, at best, just cowardly. Be open about your politics – never hide your politics. We all have politics. We all have political hopes. What matters is that we use them to build a better world – a world based on a free humanity. We all have politics. Use them and change the world!

## Notes

1. K. Marx and F. Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*, (1848)
2. K. Marx, *Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession*, (1835)
3. G. Orwell, *Why I Write*, (1946)

(2022)

# CHAPTER II

## REAL INDIVIDUALISM

This essay is about individual freedom.

People are individuals. This is obvious. We are all part of human society, but we are also individual human beings. Individual human beings with individual needs, wants, desires, hopes, dreams, fears, and struggles. This makes us real. This makes us real human beings. We all want to be real individuals. We all want to be free individuals. History, politics, and humanity, in a way, has been the struggle for that freedom – for the free development of each and the free development of all.

For me, as a Socialist, individual freedom and Socialism are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other. Individualism is about the freedom of the individual. Socialism is about the freedom of each and every human being. Achieving both individual freedom and Socialism is the basis of real human freedom today. Individual freedom and Socialism are the basis of actually achieving a better society.

I believe in real individual freedom. I believe in the freedom of the individual and the freedom of individual human beings. I believe people are important – not just as people, but as real, living, individuals. I believe that the purpose of society is to build an actually free society – a society where human beings, as individuals and as part of society, are free, as individuals and as part of humanity. I also believe in collective freedom – that all of humanity needs to be free. I believe that freedom is about achieving freedom for all of humanity. I believe that freedom is impossible without having freedom for both the individual and freedom for all of society. I believe that in order to have freedom we must have both positive and negative freedom – freedom to do things and freedom from things. I believe that the best way to achieve freedom, in both a positive and negative sense, is to achieve Socialism – a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all.

I believe in Socialism. I believe that Socialism, as an idea, as a movement, and as a struggle, is about achieving freedom for both individuals and for

the collective of humanity. I believe this because I believe that a fundamental principle of Socialism is to establish individual freedom – the free development of each and the free development in all. Socialism is often seen as a very collectivist idea, movement, and ideology. Despite this, I believe Socialism, in the best sense, is about achieving individual and collective human freedom – freedom for individuals, freedom for workers, freedom for society. My own commitment to Socialism is based on my belief that Socialism is about building freedom for all of humanity – for all human beings, both as individuals and as collective members of humanity. Socialism, for me, is about individual and collective freedom – freedom for the individual, freedom for society, freedom for humanity.

Real individualism, in my view, emerges from real social freedom. You are not an individual if you simply accept the status-quo of existing society – especially when that status-quo is based on exploitation and oppression. Real individualism, in the end, comes from the ability to both interpret the world and to change it. This is why the philosophy of Socialism, with its commitment to the free development of each and the free development of all, is the real basis of real individualism – because of that commitment to the freedom of each and the freedom of all. This is a left-wing vision of freedom. This is a Socialist vision of freedom. This is why, at least to me, people like Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Tom Paine, Shelley, Orwell, and so many others of the Left, are the best real proponents of real individualism. They believed in real human individualism, in individual freedom. They believed that freedom should exist for all.

Individualism and Socialism are completely compatible. For me individual freedom is impossible without Socialism and Socialism is impossible without individual freedom. In order to be an individual, you have to be part of society. In order to have a good society you need to have freedom for individuals. Individualism and Socialism are not incompatible – they are both parts of actually achieving human freedom: freedom for each and freedom for all.

Individual freedom and Socialism are inseparable. Indeed, it is impossible to have freedom without having both individual freedom and Socialism. Individual freedom achieves freedom for individuals. Socialism achieves freedom for all of humanity. In order to have freedom we must have both individual freedom and Socialism. We must have both freedom for the individual and freedom for all of humanity.

Socialism, today, is about achieving a better society. It is about achieving a free society – both for individuals and for all of humanity. For me, Socialism has always been about the ideal society – a society based on real individual human freedom. I think achieving such a society is possible – and that we can achieve it.

(2011)



## CHAPTER III

### KARL MARX: MAN AND LEGEND

This short essay is a study of Karl Marx – as a man and as a legend. On 17 March 1883 a few people in London met to attend the funeral of Karl Marx, the German philosopher and Socialist, at Highgate Cemetery. Friedrich Engels, his friend and comrade, declared: ‘the greatest living thinker has ceased to think’.<sup>1</sup> In his short speech, Engels declared that Marx would be remembered forever: ‘his name will live throughout the ages, and so also will his work’.<sup>2</sup> Engels was correct. Marx, the man and the legend, is still with us today – in the struggle for Socialism.<sup>3</sup>

Marx was a man and a legend. He was a man – because he was a real, living, human being, who lived from 1818 to 1883. He was also a legendary man – because he was an important and revolutionary Socialist, who developed crucial ideas for the theory, practice, and struggle for Socialism. Marx was a man and a legend because he fought, every day, for a better future – for a future based on human freedom. Marx was a radical man and a radical legend. It was his radicalism, specifically his commitment to achieving Socialism and human freedom, which made him a real radical.

Karl Marx was a great man. He was a great Socialist, who spent his life fighting for freedom. He was a Communist, who believed that Communism is about achieving human freedom. He was a major thinker of world politics, of world history – who developed the ideas of Marxism: the theory and practice of working-class emancipation. He was a genuine radical, who really believed in the struggle for human freedom. Freedom was the real basis of Marx and his politics – the achievement of human freedom. This is the key idea of his politics and his thought. All of Marx’s life, as a political radical, was committed to the struggle for human freedom. For Marx, the goal of all social struggle is to achieve human freedom – freedom for each and freedom for all. Marx’s greatest contribution, to the theory and practice of Socialism, was to put human

freedom at the centre of the struggle for social progress – freedom for each and freedom for all.<sup>4</sup>

Karl Marx was a legendary man. Indeed, he is still one of the major figures of modern history. He is a figure who really did change the world – through his life, his ideas, and his struggle. He is still crucial to us, today, because of his ideas. His ideas, specifically the idea that human freedom can only be achieved by social revolution, have inspired countless individuals, parties, movements, and revolutions. His ideas have inspired every section of the Left – every Socialist, Communist, Anarchist, and Social-Democratic movement in the world. During the 19th century, and the 20th century, his ideas helped to shape the world – by inspiring events like the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the modern working-class movement. In our own times, his ideas remain crucial to the struggle for Socialism – the struggle for a world based on the free development of each and the free development of all. In the early 21st century, Marx remains a legendary figure – a key revolutionary Socialist.

Marx was a radical man. He was a Socialist. He was a Communist. Marx was a man who lived to both interpret the world and to change the world. He devoted his life, his thought, and his labour, to the struggle to both interpret the world and to change the world for Socialism. As he declared, in the 1840s: ‘the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point, however, is to change it’.

Marx was a radical legend. He was clearly one of the most important, influential, and vital radicals who ever lived. A radical legendary figure is someone who commits themselves, completely, to achieving the cause of human freedom – through a lifetime of revolutionary struggle. Marx clearly committed himself to the cause of human freedom – from the 1840s to his death in 1883. It is this commitment – to achieving universal human emancipation – which makes Marx a radical legend.<sup>5</sup>

Marx the man and Marx the legend, is often difficult to separate. Marx was not a perfect man – and he had many faults. Marx, as a legendary figure, has often been distorted by some of his admirers and by some of his opponents. Some admirers see Marx as perfect – as a perfect heroic figure. Some of his opponents see Marx as a devil – as a monster who was committed to destroying human civilisation. Both of these views are wrong – and they ignore the real facts about Marx, his ideas, and his life. Marx was not perfect – but he was not a devil either. He was simply a Socialist revolutionary who totally committed himself to the politics of

achieving human freedom. He was simply a human being – like all other human beings in history. What has to be recognised, however, is that he was probably the most humanistic man of his times – and that he was committed to human liberation and human emancipation. Marx was not a perfect man, but he was a good man. He was a humanist man. He was a man who clearly loved humanity. He was a man who was clearly committed to the struggle for human freedom. While he did have his faults his ideas were powerful – especially his idea that human beings need to struggle in order to achieve freedom. Marx, as a human being, and as a historical figure, needs to be understood better – so that we can really understand his contribution to history, politics, and society. Marx, in the end, contributed effectively and powerfully to the real struggle for Socialism. This contribution is what made him a revolutionary person – a person worth remembering.

We need to see Marx as he really was – in historical and political reality. Marx the man was clearly a great revolutionary. Marx the legendary figure was also a great revolutionary. Marx the man was not always perfect, but Marx the legendary figure has clearly helped to shape the struggle for a better world. If we are really interested in understanding Marx, and his importance to Socialist politics, we need to understand both Marx the man and Marx the legendary figure.

Karl Marx, the man, was born in 1818 and died in 1883. Since then, his ideas, and his struggle, have outlived him. He remains the most important radical, the most important revolutionary, and the most important Socialist, in world history. He has been remembered as one of the truly great thinkers of all times. His economics, his politics, his philosophy, and his Socialism, remain vital in the struggle for a better world and for a better humanity. Marx the man died in 1883 but his ideas have clearly outlived him – inspiring countless struggles for a better world. Marx the man has clearly outlived his own life – in terms of his legacy for ideas, for politics, and for struggle. Marx, the man, died in 1883, as a mostly unknown revolutionary Socialist, but his ideas have clearly outlived him.

Karl Marx, the legend, is a key historical and political figure for the struggle for Socialism. Every modern Socialist has heard of Marx. Every modern Socialist movement has been shaped by the ideas of Marx. Indeed, he remains the most important thinker for most Socialists and for most movements for Socialism. Marx's ideas and Marx's politics remain as the political basis of any serious political struggle for Socialism – particularly due to his political criticism of Capitalism, and his political struggle for

Working-Class Socialism. Since 1883, countless parties, movements, revolutions, and struggles, across the world, have looked to the ideas of Marx. Every Socialist movement, across the Left, has been shaped by the ideas of Marx. Every movement for Socialism, across the Left, owes a great deal to the ideas of Marx. Marx the man died in 1883, but Marx the legend, as an inspiration for Socialism, remains a powerful figure. Indeed, every struggle for Socialism, both now and in the future, will always need to look to the basic ideas of Marx.

Marx was a revolutionary thinker. His ideas and his politics were always framed within the politics of revolution – in the revolutionary politics of Socialism. This is why Marx is one of the key figures in the theory and politics of revolution – because he was for revolutionary Socialism. He stands in the same revolutionary tradition which defines the modern politics of revolutionary Socialism – the politics of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, and Morris. Every major revolutionary thinker, since the 1800s, has been shaped by the example of Marx. Indeed, every serious revolutionary, in modern history, has been shaped by the example of Marx.

Marx was a revolutionary. He fought for revolution – for major social transformation. His ideas, in the end, are about the struggle for revolution – in order to achieve a better world. Marx fought for revolution, during his own lifetime – from the Revolutions of 1848 to the Paris Commune of 1871. He also organised for revolution – through his commitment and struggle in the working-class revolutionary movements of his times. His ideas have also inspired revolutions – some of the great revolutions of our times. Every major Socialist revolution, both in the past and in the future, has been influenced by the example of Marx – the revolutionary example of Marx.

Marx was a Humanist. Humanism, the philosophy of human freedom, is at the centre of Marx's ideas. Marx believed in humanity. Specifically, he believed in human liberation. This was the basis of his Humanism, his Socialism, and his Communism. Marx outlined this, completely, by suggesting that Socialism is Humanism and that Humanism is Socialism. Marx will always be crucial to the real struggle of our times – the struggle for Socialism.

Marx was a political man. Marx's politics, in the form of Marx's Socialism, was always about the process of revolutionary struggle to achieve human freedom – in the form of human liberation, human

freedom, and the drive towards Socialism – a society based on the principle of the free development of each and the free development of all. He believed that the real basis of human freedom is working-class freedom – the freedom of all human beings.

Marx was a practical man. He was interested in actually changing the world. He was not interested in utopian ideas or utopian visions. He was interested in practical struggles – practical struggles to achieve a better world. Marx was always a practical political man – which is why he spent his entire adult life working as a revolutionary Socialist. Marx was not interested in speculating about society – he was only interested in actually changing it. This perspective is vital, for any revolutionary.

Marx was a writer. Indeed, he was one of the most important political writers of modern history. Works like ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844’ (1844), ‘The German Ideology’ (1845), ‘The Communist Manifesto’ (1848), and ‘Capital’ (1864), are major works for Socialist theory and thought. Indeed, modern Socialism, even today, owes much to the writing of Marx.

Marx was a great writer. ‘Capital’ (1864) remains the key book of radical economics ever written – a detailed, exact, and powerful critique of Capitalism. ‘The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844’ (1844) outline the simple fact that only Socialism can achieve human freedom – because Socialism is Humanism and Humanism is Socialism. ‘The Communist Manifesto’ (1848) remains the most influential political book of our times – a manifesto for social struggle and social revolution. Almost all of Marx’s work remains useful today – in terms of developing effective radical politics. While most writers of the 19th century are forgotten, or hardly read, people still read Marx. They still read him because his writing is clear and effective – in terms of developing the practical and humanist struggle for Socialism.

Marx developed the theory and politics of Marxism. Marxism, in basic terms, is the theory and practice of working-class emancipation. Marxism is the theory and practice of the free development of each and the free development of all. Marxism is (1.) materialist philosophy, (2.) the critique of political economy, and (3.) Socialist politics. Marxism, as a theory, is about the critique of class society – in order to struggle for a free society, for a Socialist society. Marxism, as a form of radical politics, is about achieving the emancipation of the working class – in order to achieve a better society, a Socialist society. Marxism, as a theory and as a practice,

remains crucial to radical politics today. It remains crucial because it is effectively the best form of Socialist politics – politics which can effectively change the world for the better.

Marx's ideas are revolutionary ideas.<sup>6</sup> They remain revolutionary ideas. Marx's ideas remain crucial to Socialist politics. Indeed, Marxism is the most effective form of Socialist politics for human freedom. Firstly, it outlines a brilliant critique of Capitalist society – that Capitalism is based on exploitation and oppression. Secondly, it outlines the real politics of Socialism – Socialism as the struggle for human freedom. These two ideas, as the basis of Marxism, remain the basis of any effective struggle for a better world.

Marx's ideas have changed the world. Indeed, they continue to change the world. His ideas have inspired every Socialist, Communist, and working-class movement in modern history – from the 1840s to the present day. His ideas have also inspired revolutions – the Russian Revolution, the German Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnamese Revolution, etc. Indeed, nearly every major revolution, since 1917, has been shaped by the ideas of Karl Marx. Even today, his ideas still inform the real struggle for human freedom – for democracy, for Socialism, for Communism. Today, Marx is still relevant as one of the truly important radicals – a man who fought for a better society – a society based on human freedom. He remains, ultimately, one of the truly inspiring revolutionaries of world history.

Marx left a vital legacy for the ideas of Socialism. The struggle for Socialism, since the 19th century and since the 20th century, into our century, is impossible to think about without thinking about Marx and his ideas. Marx the man, and Marx the legend, remain part of our struggle for Socialism. As long as human beings continue to struggle for a better society, then the ideas of Marx will remain relevant.

Marx lived a revolutionary and radical life. Marx was born in Trier, Germany, in 1818. His father was a lawyer. His family were Jewish, but were forced to convert to Lutheranism and Protestantism due to the policies of the Prussian state. Marx was educated at the universities of Bonn, Berlin, and Jena. He received his doctorate, in Philosophy, from the University of Jena in 1841. After his education, Marx became a radical journalist. In 1843, Marx married his childhood sweetheart, Jenny von Westphalen. In the 1830s, and 1840s, Marx became a political radical – and became a Socialist and Communist in the early 1840s. Marx was part

of a generation of radicals who emerged in the 1830s and 1840s. His politics, informed by Young Hegelianism, shifted towards the Left and towards Socialism. In 1844 he met Friedrich Engels, a fellow revolutionary Socialist, who was his life-long friend and comrade. He also became involved in the working-class movement – joining the Communist League in 1847. Marx took part in the Revolutions of 1848 – a series of revolutions that spread across Europe in 1848–1849 – but was forced to move to London, in Great Britain, after their defeat. From 1849, Marx lived in London – for the rest of his adult life. Despite the defeat of the Revolutions of 1848, Marx remained involved in radical and Socialist politics – helping to found the International Workingmen’s Association in 1864. Marx also spent decades outlining a systematic critique of Capitalism and Capitalist society – which eventually produced his greatest written work: ‘Capital’ (1864). When Marx died in London in 1883, he was relatively unknown and obscure – but his ideas have clearly changed the world since his death, and they continue to change the world. Marx began his political life as a radical, but he quickly became a Socialist and a Communist when he recognised, in the 1840s, that political freedom is impossible without social freedom and economic freedom. From the 1840s, until his death in 1883, Marx fought for a better world – for a society based on the principle of the free development of each and the free development of all.

Marx’s life shows that he was a great man. He was a great person in the sense that he devoted his life to the actual struggle for human freedom. From the moment that he became a radical, in the 1840s, he devoted himself to the cause of working-class emancipation – in order to achieve human freedom. While other figures in human history might devote themselves to power, wealth, or glory, Marx devoted himself to achieving a higher social goal – human freedom. Indeed, every aspect of Marx’s politics, after the early 1840s, shows that he was completely committed to the goal of achieving universal human freedom. His works, his writings, and his involvement in working-class politics, particularly in Germany, France, and Britain, shows that he was a man committed to the social struggle. His support for the working-class and Socialist movement shows that he was a consistent Socialist – who committed himself to the social and political struggle of working-class emancipation. His support for the North in the American Civil War, and the struggle against slavery, shows that he was committed to achieving universal freedom – for all parts of humanity. His belief in internationalism and working-class unity shows that he believed in the ability of human beings to work together, co-operatively, to build a better world. His commitment to social revolution,

across the world, shows that he was a radical who understood the importance of social struggle to achieving human freedom. He really believed in his slogan: ‘workers of the world, unite’. Marx was not a perfect man – but he was a committed man. In personal terms, he could be very insensitive, brash, and boorish, but in real human terms he was a real humanist – a real Socialist. Marx’s life shows what a life committed to human freedom can achieve. As long as human beings recognise the role and importance of revolutionaries to the achievement of human freedom, Karl Marx will be relevant. Marx the man was not perfect – but he was a good man.

Marx’s life was a committed life. When he became a Socialist, in the 1840s, he committed himself, totally, to the cause of human liberation. He also worked hard for the cause. He spent days, weeks, months, and years, working for Socialism – as a writer, researcher, and activist. Indeed, Marx often worked from eight or nine in the morning to two or three in the morning of the next day – with few breaks for food or rest. Marx was not lazy or incompetent. He was a tireless and committed radical – who really spent his life working for the cause of human emancipation. Of course, most people work hard, in life, but Marx worked hard in order to actually achieve a better world – by developing the ideas, politics, and struggles which can achieve a better world. The best product of Marx’s hard work, as a worker, was ‘Capital’ – his powerful and systematic critique of Capitalist society. In ‘Capital’, Marx outlines the reality of Capitalism as a system – a system that is based on the exploitation and oppression of the working class. Marx spent years researching, writing, rewriting, and editing ‘Capital’ – producing one of the major works of world literature. Marx’s commitment to hard work, and hard thinking, is reflected in ‘Capital’. It shows that he was a hard worker – a hard worker who committed himself totally to the process of trying to understand and analyse Capitalist society. His endless hours in the British Library also show that he was committed to producing a good, well-researched, critique of Capitalism – a critique which could effectively show the reality of Capitalism. Marx’s example shows that a radical worker can change the world – if they struggle to change the world. His example also shows that radicals can be hard and good workers – workers who commit themselves to the hard, and vital, work of changing the world. Marx’s political commitment was to the struggle – the struggle to change the world. This sort of political commitment should inspire any radical today – because changing the world is the only way to make the world a better place.



Marx's life was also a normal life. He was a radical but he was also a human being.<sup>7</sup> He was a human being who enjoyed many of the things in life that ordinary people enjoy – food, drink, culture, family, friends, reading, writing, and community. He especially enjoyed reading – and he was a major student of writers like Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Goethe. He spent his free time being a good family man – and all of the serious contemporary accounts of him seem to suggest he was a good man, a good husband, and a good father. Of course, Marx was not perfect, but his private family life does suggest that he was mostly an honest and honourable man – despite his real human faults. He clearly loved his wife and his children. He also struggled to make their lives better – despite the real poverty that he and they endured, living in London, in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s, following the failure of the Revolutions of 1848. Marx was not a lazy man. He was clearly a hard-working man. Marx was not perfect, but then no human being is perfect either – and Marx understood that. Marx was not a humourless man, or a mystical saint. He was a real human being who liked to live life. He clearly loved life – and he clearly loved humanity. It was this love of humanity, of achieving human emancipation, which drove Marx, as a radical and as a Socialist. He understood, very clearly, that human beings do not have to be perfect in order to be good – or to be free. Marx believed in building a better human society – a society of real human freedom. He did not believe in utopia, or that people need to be perfect in order to achieve a better humanity. Marx was a realist, who understood that if we want a better world, and a free humanity, we need to fight for it. Marx believed in achieving a better humanity – not a perfect humanity. We can achieve a better humanity – a free humanity. We can achieve a free humanity – by achieving Socialism. Marx's ideas can help us to achieve this.

Marx's life is interesting. It has been heavily studied. Indeed, it is a life that is fascinating to read about – both because of his ideas and because of the type of life that he lived. Marx's life was not a boring life. It was a dramatic life, full of twists and turns. His politics, and his radical influence on Socialist politics, means that he will always be of interest to biographers. There are countless biographies, books, studies, essays, and papers, on the life, politics, and ideas of Karl Marx. Some of them are good. Some of them are terrible. All of them, however, reflect the constant struggle over the ideas and legacy of Marx since his death in 1883. All of them show that we are all still interested in Marx – and his ideas. They also show that we will continue to argue about Marx – until the day when Capitalist society ceases to exist. There are thousands of biographies of Marx. Reading them all would be impossible, in one lifetime. The best

biographies of Marx are those biographies which stress his politics – his real Socialist and Humanist politics. The best biographies also tend to be those biographies that understand that Marx was a committed, radical, and humanist man. The best biographies also do not lie about Marx or misinterpret him – which has often undermined proper study of him ever since the Cold War. The best biographies of Marx are the biographies by McLellan, Liedman, Mehring, Callinicos, Löwy, and Wheen. Biographers of Marx have tended to interpret him based on their own politics. This is obvious and inevitable – but any good or effective biographer of Marx always needs to engage with Marx's own politics: e.g. the politics of human freedom, the politics of radicalism, the politics of revolution, the politics of Humanism, the politics of Socialism. If we are interested in Marx, and understanding Marx, then we really need to understand his politics – the politics of Socialism. It is only by understanding Marx's politics that we can really understand his life – as a life committed to radical and Socialist politics. Biographers of Marx need to understand the radicalism of Marx.<sup>8</sup>

Marx was not a prophet. He was not a divine being. He simply developed an effective, and reliable, analysis of Capitalist society – an analysis which can help in the struggle for a better world. In the years since his death some have tried to turn Marx into some sort of secular saint for Socialism. Marx would have denounced such attempts. Marx was not interested in saviours or heroes. He was simply interested in the real struggle of ordinary people to achieve a better world – and to help develop the ideas, strategy, tactics, and analysis required to achieve Socialism. Marx was not interested in people praising him or denouncing him. He was simply interested in people trying to achieve a better world. He was not interested in his legacy or what people thought of him. He was simply interested in doing his part in the struggle for Socialism.<sup>9</sup>

For Marx, the goal of human history is to achieve human freedom. For him this was a practical, social, and revolutionary struggle. He believed that the constant social and political struggles of human history must ultimately result in human freedom – in the achievement of a free society. He believed that this level of human freedom can only be achieved by finally achieving a stateless, classless, and democratic society – a Democratic society, a Humanist society, a Socialist society, a Communist society. Marx's theory of Historical Materialism, that history is the product of material conditions, productive forces, social relations, social struggle, class struggle, human agency, and social revolution, suggests that human beings can achieve freedom – through social revolution. Marx believed in

the potential of humanity – and the potential of human freedom. Marx was ultimately a radical optimist – he believed that human beings can be free, he believed that human beings will achieve freedom.

History is made by revolutionary classes. It is the struggle of revolutionary classes, like the working class, which really changes history. This is what Marx's theory of history shows. Despite this, individual people are important in history. Individual people can shape the direction of history – through their ideas, their struggles, and their politics. Indeed, the theory of Historical Materialism shows the important role of individuals in history – as revolutionary leaders. Marx is clearly an individual who changed history – mostly through the influence of his ideas. Marx was clearly a revolutionary leader who really shaped history – both in his own times and in the times after his death. Marx's importance to history is impossible to really calculate. He remains the greatest Socialist who ever lived – simply because of the importance of his ideas. His example is also important – to countless revolutionaries who continue to struggle for a better world. Marx is one of those key figures of history. Of course, he was just a simple human being but his influence shows just how important some individuals can be to history. Marx is one of those few individuals, in history, who really changed history. He really changed history because of his analysis, his ideas, and his struggle. Very few people really change history – but Marx clearly did. People make history, but not in circumstances that they choose – as Marx brilliantly outlined. Marx clearly helped to make history. Marx's ideas still clearly make history.<sup>10</sup>

Marx remains a major figure. He remains a revolutionary figure. Millions of people, around the world, are inspired by his revolutionary ideas – by his vision of a better human society. Hundreds of political parties are still organised around his basic political ideas – specifically the self-emancipation of the working class. He remains a major figure, today, because of his ideas. He remains a revolutionary figure – a figure who can inspire revolution.<sup>11</sup>

Marx's key idea was emancipation – the human struggle for emancipation. He saw history as a class struggle, but he also saw it as a human struggle for human freedom. He believed that human history is ultimately about the struggle to achieve human freedom – through class struggle. Marx's politics are about emancipation. His entire theory of politics was about achieving emancipation – in the form of working-class emancipation and human emancipation. It was the politics of Marx that really made him a

real radical. He was the first person, in the history of radical politics, to understand that human freedom can only be achieved by the struggle of the working class. For Marx, real radicalism is about achieving human freedom – in the form of universal human freedom, freedom for each and freedom for all. As long as human beings struggle for a better world this vision of emancipation, and self-emancipation, will always be part of radical politics. The key political struggle, today, is to fulfil Marx's vision – the achievement of human emancipation, the achievement of human freedom. Marx struggled for human freedom. This was the key political hope of his life. If we truly believe in humanity, and in the ideas of Marx, then we must all struggle for the same political hope – the hope of achieving human freedom.<sup>12</sup>

Marx changed the world. He clearly did change the world – through his ideas and through his struggles. Marx specifically changed the world through his ideas – his ideas about Socialism, revolutionary struggle, and the commitment to achieving a free humanity. Marx was a man – an ordinary man – but he was also a legend. Marx the man will always be Marx the revolutionary.

## Notes

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4. S. Liedman, The Life and Works of Karl Marx, (2015)
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## CHAPTER IV

### LENIN AND POLITICS

This short essay is a study of the politics of Lenin. Lenin's politics can be clearly defined: revolutionary politics for revolutionary Socialism. Indeed, Lenin clearly defined his politics: as the struggle for Socialism and the struggle for the freedom of the working class. The politics of Lenin are the politics of Revolutionary Socialism. Lenin spent his entire adult life, and his entire political life, trying to develop effective politics for Socialism – politics which can achieve Socialism through the revolutionary struggle for Socialism.<sup>1</sup> His entire political thought, in the form of the revolutionary party, is shaped around the theory and practice of achieving Socialism. This theory and practice of revolution achieved the great victory of the October Revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Lenin was a Socialist. Lenin was a revolutionary Socialist. Lenin was a Communist. Lenin's political ideas can be easily summarised by those three basic ideas – Socialism, revolutionary Socialism, and Communism. Lenin believed in Socialism – a society based on the free development of each and the free development of all.<sup>3</sup> Lenin believed in working-class revolution as the basis of Socialism.<sup>4</sup> Lenin believed in working-class organisation as the basis of working-class revolution.<sup>5</sup> Lenin's form of working-class organisation was the revolutionary party.<sup>6</sup> Lenin believed that a revolutionary party should be organised on the basis of democratic centralism: 'freedom of discussion, unity of action'.<sup>7</sup> It is on this basis that the working class can achieve both its political struggle and its social liberation – by achieving Socialism.<sup>8</sup> He believed that this process, in the end, would create Communism – a truly free human society.

Lenin was specifically a political thinker. Lenin was a political revolutionary. Politics is what drove Lenin – and his ideas. Lenin believed in the importance of politics – to achieve social change, to achieve Socialism. Lenin's political theory, in the 1880s, 1890s, 1900s, 1910s, and early 1920s, can be summed up as follows: the need for revolutionary politics to achieve Socialism, the need for a revolutionary party to achieve Socialism, the need for the self-organisation of the working class to

achieve Socialism, the need for democratic revolution, the need for Socialist revolution, and the need to oppose Capitalism and Imperialism in all their forms. The political thought of Lenin, as a development of the political thought of Marx, is one of the most important forms of politics in human history, as it shaped the majority of the struggles for Socialism in the 20th century and it still forms the revolutionary basis of the struggle for Socialism – even in our own times. The politics of Lenin are, very simply, the revolutionary politics of the Socialist Revolution. When Lenin led the October Revolution, in 1917, he proved, firmly, that the working class can make its own revolution – for its own revolutionary purposes. The victory of the October Revolution, and of the Bolshevik Party, as a political event, produced a historical event in world politics and world history. Lenin proved, through revolutionary politics, that the revolutionary struggle of the working class can achieve Socialism. Lenin's achievement, in politics and political thought, is remarkable. Indeed, Lenin managed to achieve the key task of Socialist politics – the task of both revolutionary theory and revolutionary politics for achieving Socialism. The struggle for Socialism still owes a great deal to Lenin and his politics.

Lenin helped to develop modern Socialist politics. Indeed, he developed his own form of Socialist politics – in the form of Leninism. Leninism, as a theory of both interpreting the world and changing the world, is also a theory of understanding Capitalism and Imperialism. The ultimate purpose of Leninism, as a form of Marxism, is to organise the theory and politics required for Socialism and for Socialist Revolution. Leninism is the politics of achieving the Socialist Revolution. Leninism, in political terms, is the theory of the revolutionary party, to achieve Socialism. All of the ideas of Lenin and Leninism, in terms of politics, can be thought of as the ideas, theory, and practice, of building a working-class party, in order to achieve a working-class revolution. In this sense Leninism is a natural political development of Marxism – the revolutionary theory of working-class struggle – organised for the specific political struggle for Socialist revolution. If Marxism, in political terms, is the revolutionary theory and practice of Socialism, then Leninism, in political terms, is the revolutionary theory and practice of the working-class party and the working-class revolution for Socialism. Indeed Leninism, in these terms, is simply a continuation of Marx's own basic revolutionary politics – except with more emphasis on revolutionary organisation and revolutionary strategy. Georg Lukács, the Marxist philosopher, defined Leninism as revolutionary theory, revolutionary practice, revolutionary strategy, and revolutionary politics, for Socialism and for Socialist Revolution. He defined Leninism as the revolutionary praxis of Socialism.<sup>9</sup> Lukács saw