

RECOVERING MARXISM OF KARL MARX

BY
RANDHIR SINGH

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INDIAN ACADEMY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
AND
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MARXIST THEORY AND PRACTICE



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OF KARL MARX

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We are thankful to Prof. Randhir Singh for permitting us to publish this material as it is. The monograph is likely to be completed and the final version published in 1999. Its translation in other Indian languages too will soon be available. A series of publications on **Theory And Practice of Marx-Engels** will be published by the Indian Academy of Social Sciences in association with Indian Institute of Marxist Theory And Practice. All the publications will be in Indian Languages as well. This publication is the first in our series of proposed publication.

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(N.P. Chaubey)
General Secretary
Indian Academy of Social Sciences

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Recovering Marxism of Karl Marx

I

The collapse in the Soviet Union is not just the collapse of a system; the debacle has been interpreted as in effect the liquidation of a collage of ideas and praxis inspired by those ideas. The retreat from socialism we have noticed is only a part of this larger debacle which has involved the loss of any and every theory, including Marxism, which could provide a mobilizing vision for a social order other than capitalism, leaving behind a vacuum where all sorts of facile syllogism thrive and which now resounds with the cliched-wisdom and commonplaces of Right-wing ideologies. It is a theoretical defeat which, expressed more explicitly and vocally among the intellectual and academic Left in the West, has found its resonance in every other part of the world. The quick and final unravelling of the first and now recognisably 'false' start on the road to socialism has been indeed so debilitating as to result in what can only be described as 'a devastation of the mind' on the Left, the magnitude of which is still awesomely difficult to assess.

While the opponents have reached back to question Marxism, and with it any kind of radical or revolutionary politics for human emancipation, it is not difficult to find socialists busy questioning the authenticity of the October Revolution and its aspirations. It is not merely that 'those of us who believed that the October Revolution was the gate to the future history have been shown to be wrong', as Eric Hobsbawm has put it, or that the era 'in which world history was about the October Revolution' has definitively ended, the October Revolution itself is pronounced as 'premature'. In an amazing denial of historical facts, the Revolution and its sequel is seen not as a process which degenerated in stages but as 'a regression *ab origine*, or a pile of rubble'. The view is common that the origins of the failure of 'actually existing socialism' lay precisely in a premature attempt to break away from the model of capitalist civilisation, from the world market; or, therefore, a return to the canons of capitalist social and economic system now taking place is only a necessary and legitimate historical process - a necessity asserting itself in history. Arguments abound with such vulgar Hegelianism that seeks to dress up the actual outcome in the grab of historical necessity.

In the recoil from general notions of human emancipation, particularly socialism, or Marxism which inspired it, all large schemes of social reform or renewal, however necessary, or cautious and qualified, have come to attract suspicion, hostility and denunciation. This was always an intrinsic part of conservative or liberal-conservative thought, it has also now become part of the thinking of a substantial part of the intellectual Left, loudly proclaimed by people who once were committed to progressive politics or even Marxism. The very notion of socialism as a comprehensive reorganisation of the social order has come under fire. Any such 'meta-saga' as Jean-Francois Lyotard - one-time Marxist radical, now a high priest of the much fancied 'post-modernism' - has contemptuously called it, is a dangerous illusion. And this is being touted

everywhere when the most lethal of the 'meta-sagas', *the 'meta-saga'* of our times, capitalism, is very much on, now more comprehensive globally than ever before! 'Deideologisation' accompanying the current triumph of capitalism has served to make capitalism virtually invisible. Now it is only one world, the world-market and 'a new world order'; yes, 'globalisation' and with it 'the end of geography', including 'the territorialised nation-state of proven inadequacy', only the 'global village' and revitalised micro-histories. With the collapse of politics understood in the sense of a collectivist project, the accent now has to be on partial, localised, fragmented, specific goals, on small-scale movements, and against universal, dangerously illusionary, 'totalising', perspectives!

A 'new realism' is abroad which rejects the very notion of a comprehensive reorganisation of society on socialist lines as an unrealistic and even a dangerous utopia – and many on the Left are happy proclaiming their loss of faith. The very terms capitalism, socialism, classless society are suspect, anti-diluvian concepts which only dinosaurs, as it were, use these days – 'paleolithic sectarians', Hobsbawm has called them. 'Socialism has become stale', echoes Zillah Eisenstein. If you must, speak now in the vocabulary of 'democracy'. And many are indeed doing so. There is a swelling literature on citizenship, 'rule-of-law' and 'law-abiding state', multi-party politics, democratic and constitutional reforms, the virtues of civil society and so on, where socialism is replaced with social citizenship and the enhancement of 'social rights' within capitalism is viewed as the highest (feasible) emancipatory aspiration and, of course, the superiority of the market is taken as axiomatic. The seemingly 'sensible and intelligent' retreat from socialism leads to an almost unthinking, fashion-driven rush in the direction of non-planning, or minimally planning private property based market society. Those not willing to thus travel the whole distance dignify their destination with that rather ambiguous term, 'market socialism'. Much of what now passes for socialist thought with the 'new realists' is indistinguishable from run-of-the-mill liberalism.

The 'new realists', most of them at least, are knowledgeable enough to recognise that the 'socialism' which has just suffered demise had little affinity with the real thing, with socialism of Karl Marx. But they know now that the latter just won't work and one must take a practical view of things. We are also told that capitalism that Marx wrote about and condemned is simply not there, not any more. We have moved far beyond it, and for the better, into post-capitalism. In any case, call it what you like, the reality of this dispensation, a society inescapably based on private property and the market, has to be accepted as permanent. The only thing practical is to try for its more humane management. It is indeed symptomatic of the shift in the whole spectrum of debate on the Left that loyalty to the Keynesian welfare state has come to be seen as an increasingly revolutionary position, and many on the farther Left have staked out this ground as their own. Socialism, if you must still use the term, must be defined in term of a series of remedies to specific problems within the confines of capitalism – though one is always free to hold on to a vague hope of a more equitable society.

It has been for long commonplace in social thinking that appeal to 'realism' is often a cover for abandonment of principles. This is certainly the case with contemporary 'new realism', the new faith on the Left. Far from

being an accurate reading of the new situation and its possibilities, or even remotely adequate response to the theoretical needs of the present moment, in its abandonment of socialist principles, 'new realism' represents acceptance of a defeat, the Left intellectuals' capitulation to the ideological and political offensive of capitalism.

There is one aspect of this intellectual capitulation on the Left which needs to be specifically noticed. As Gramsci had pointed out, the essence of ruling class hegemony is to ensure willing acceptance of capitalism's domination in society. And traditionally it has been the obligation of the intellectuals to offer a critique of capitalism, to help people see through the existing social order and to sustain their hope for a future worthy of humankind — an obligation, reasonably well discharged on the Left, till recently. Today, along with a renewed idealisation of capitalism and hosanna cries to its market, with so many, not only in Russia and East Europe but everywhere, in the West and the East, looking to capitalism for paradigms of economic and political success, capitalist hegemony in society has been sought to be further secured with the argument that 'there is no alternative' and that the alternatives tried or proposed are far worse or simply quixotic or utopian. The instilling of such acceptance and resignation in society on behalf of capitalism is indeed a great triumph for capitalism. And it is precisely at this moment, when a critique of capitalism was most needed, so many on the left appear to have abdicated the traditional role of the intellectual as a critic of capitalism. Ellen Meiksins Wood, a most perceptive analyst of the contemporary ideological scene in the capitalist world, writes:

The critique of capitalism is out of fashion- and here there is a curious convergence, a kind of unholy alliance, between capitalist triumphalism and socialist pessimism. The triumph of the Right is mirrored on the Left by a sharp contraction of socialist aspirations. Left intellectuals, if they are not actually embracing capitalism as the best of all possible worlds, have little hope for anything more than a bit more space within the interstices of capitalism; and they look forward, at best, to only the most local and particular resistances. And there is another curious effect of all this. Capitalism is becoming so universal, so much taken for granted, that it is becoming invisible

Now clearly we have plenty to be pessimistic about. Recent and current events have given us plenty of cause. But there is something curious about the way many of us are reacting to all this. If capitalism has indeed triumphed, you might think that what we need now more than ever is a *critique* of capitalism. Why is this the right moment to embrace modes of thought which seem to deny the very possibility not only of surpassing capitalism but even of critically understanding it?

I really do think we are in an unprecedented situation now, something we have not seen in the whole history of capitalism. What we are experiencing now is not just a deficit of *action*, or the absence of the necessary instrumentalities and organisation of struggle (though those are certainly thin on the ground). It is not

only that we do not know how to *act* against capitalism but that we are forgetting even how to *think* against it.

That intellectuals have so largely sold out their critical responsibilities is one of the great moral disasters of our time; which, conversely also helps us define the courage of those who have stood firmly by their commitment as intellectuals.

The retreat from socialism has inevitably meant a retreat from Marxism. In fact, in its entire history, no specific development has more single-handedly opened the floodgates of attack on Marxism, its analytic categories and political project, than the collapse of the degenerate and deformed regimes in the Soviet Union and East Europe which claimed to have successfully built socialism and to be on the road to communism. This world historic event, whose substantive origins lay in a series of developments in the post-Lenin Soviet Union, coupled with the stagnation, retreat or even defeats of the international revolutionary movement in recent years, has negatively conditioned, in its process and combination, so much of what is happening around and within Marxist theory today. 'Actually existing socialism' was born of revolutions primarily led by Marxists, had proclaimed Marxism as its official ideology, and in its own way represented the first major and seemingly successful revolutionary wave against capitalism. It should not be difficult to understand, therefore, that its collapse is seen as defeat of Marxism itself by its opponents. In their anti-communist perspective which refuses to make any distinction at all between theory and practice, Marxism is proclaimed to be finally dead and best forgotten. Marxism bashing is currently more popular in the academies of the capitalist world than ever before, now that, as the mainstream media tell us, it has been bashed in the streets of Moscow or Prague. And Marxism-bashers include not only the predicable conservatives but also trendy intellectuals of all sorts who are busy finding methodological and epistemological reasons to discredit and finally dispose of the entire Marxist enterprise of critical social theory.

Marxism has, of course, been regularly denounced and declared 'dead' or 'failed' over the last hundred years, not only by its opponents but often also by adherents gone penitent. Periodic pronouncements of this sort have been the historic destiny of the doctrine of Karl Marx. In recent times, during the Cold War era, a whole generation of former Marxists denounced the 'God that failed'; many others, including Sidney Hook had already declared the movement more or less dead by the 1940s. The 1950s saw the intellectuals in France proclaiming the end of history and with it also the obsolescence of Marxism. Across the Atlantic, in the United States, the fifties and sixties witnessed the emergence of heady discourses on the 'end of ideology', 'post-industrial society', etc., which made their own declarations about 'the end' of Marxism. In the post-1960s, as the failure of 1968 produced a renewed conservative assault on Marxism, it also led many disillusioned adherents to turn on Marxism itself and typically, we had a Jean-Francois Lyotard declaring that the era of totalising theories of history and grand narratives of emancipation was over. The chequered history of the socialist movement during this period, its successes far outweighed by retreats and failures — the 'dissipation' of European reformism in both its social democratic and

Eurocommunist variants, the failure of the new Left in the historic upheaval of 1968, the decline of revolutionary struggles and regimes in the Third World, the growing crisis of 'actually existing socialism' and the general 'exhaustion' of the global communist movement — indeed provided a certain credibility to such funereal pronouncements on Marxism, especially in a context of the unprecedented success of capitalism in its post-War boom. But Marxism was seen to have not only survived but also retained its intellectual and moral authority on the Left, and even among many critics. However, the events of 1989 and 1991 are now widely believed to have delivered a definitive death blow to Marxism. It is not only that the great world-historic project of struggle and transformation identified with the name of Karl Marx has ended, with it has crashed too an entire world view which inspired and sustained it. As the enemies pronounce Marxism to be finally dead and done with, even friends seem compelled to agree. As Aranson has argued: 'Marxism is over, and we are on our own'.

If the attack from without has become more virulent than ever before, regularly proclaims the failure, disintegration and final demise of Marxism, transforming it virtually into a term of ridicule and opprobrium, within the costs of Stalinist legacy are being exacted in ways that are as complex as they are often unanticipated in Marxist theory. The repudiation of 'official Marxism', as it came to be described, has opened cracks in doors that have widened to explicit assaults on even basic principles of Marxist theory. There is a state of deep ideological confusion, disarray, and perplexity. Even those who are not yet ready to give away the whole Marxist heritage, and plunge into the current chaos of academic and political obscurantism, are trying to retreat in good order. With others it has become almost a rout.

An interesting case here are the Left intellectuals who, still wanting to be socialists of some kind or the other, in turning away from classical Marxism, have sought self-serving refuge in what can only be described as pre-Marxian socialism, very much akin to what Marx at the end of the *Communist Manifesto* castigated as 'true socialism'. In a manner reminiscent of the Frankfurt School of Marxists of 1930s, those theorists whose search for a humanistic socialism in the face of Stalinism led backward to Hegel and Kant, or others who similarly turned to the writings of the young Marx, they are resuscitating versions of utopianism, which Marx always frowned upon, often presenting it as 'post-Marxism' or 'post-modern socialism'. Far too many on the Left are today busy, in the name of rehabilitating the 'idea' of socialism, or completing and perfecting its vision, putting into it every conceivable value they can think of or they think the Soviet system in its dark days lacked — often paining the darkness thick for their visionary light to shine the brighter!

This modern variant of 'true socialism' has its socialist aspirations but it explicitly abandons any historical grounding for them in favour of a moral appeal on behalf of socialism. It indeed prides itself on a rejection of what it describes as Marxist 'economism' or 'class reductionism', and in doing so virtually excises class or class struggle from its socialist project. Instead it would construct the socialist movement by moral and political means which are treated as essentially autonomous from any social-material basis or, more specifically, economic-class conditions. The moral element is certainly the driving force behind any socialist project, but with the new 'true socialism', the

morally grounded appeal for socialism, in effect absolves the socialists of any need to seek or formulate the new socio-material or economic-class conditions under which capitalist rule can and has to be challenged. Socialism stands reduced to a 'vision' as it was before Karl Marx.

As distinct from this regression to pre-Marxian 'true socialism', the dominant tendency on the Left, however, seeks to 'reconstruct' or 'modernize' Marxism, to 'go beyond' Marx in order to improve and update his supposedly antiquated methods and theories – a tendency that easily merges into the 'theoreticist deluge' of academic, analytical or exegetical, exercises that have characterized Marxist studies in recent years and are collectively spoken of as 'post-Marxism' (The tag post-Marxist, it has been suggested, has a nicer ring to ears than the alternative 'ex-Marxist', it evokes the idea of forward movement, of 'an upto-the-minute thinker', rather than, as does the latter, of a change of colours if not of renegacy itself). Earlier 'making sense of Marx', or more recently 'reconstructing Marxism' in the face of what is seen as 'a crisis.... even the end of Marxism', such politically safe exercises have indeed generated valuable insights along the way but, as a whole, meant only an infinite regression in theory rather than produced a new synthesis of understanding, a theoretically more adequate Marxism, 'a reconstructed Marxism... far sounder than any of its ancestors', as one such exercise has claimed for itself. The regression has in fact involved a rejection of the Marxist tradition altogether, even its basic principled positions; and in a backward-looking combination or rehash of old theories and ideologies, it has adapted Marxism to the ruling class ideas, not only to liberalism, individualism, or positivism but even to the market, its idols, rituals and its dogmas. There is 'an aspect of black humour' about contemporary exercises at 'modernising' or 'reconstructing' Marxism, writes Suchting:

Marxism is reconstructed in something like the way in which those monks approached their work of 'reconstruction' by penning, as the *Communist Manifesto* says, 'silly lives of Catholic Saints over the manuscripts on which the classical works of ancient heathendom had been written'!

Many of the intellectuals involved in these exercises in 'post'- or 'neo'-Marxism as it is called, were once Marxist scholars and even politically engaged people. Obviously, scholars at heart, their Marxism or political commitment was only skin deep. As has been well pointed out in their demoralized or fashionable shift rightward, away from the classical to one or the other form of hyphenated Marxism, they have simply lost their frame of reference and in tune with the now dominant intellectual fashions, not hesitated to adopt ideas or analyses totally alien or even antagonistic to Marxism and peddle the most stupid platitudes of post-modernity. Marxists still, they have gone around proclaiming new paradigms capriciously or declaring ideas obsolete because they were written in the last century, or because they seem to go against the trend of the moment. In trying to make up for 'the failure of orthodox Marxism', to replace its outmoded concepts or theories so many have only dredged up a melange of conceptual or theoretical banalities from all sorts of bourgeois orthodoxies of the present and the past: individualism (methodological, economic or political), theories of freedom of the market and economic equilibrium, consumer sovereignty, rational choice or preferences, distributive justice or equality, formal democracy, rule of law, freedom of

expression, political pluralism, and so on. A 'realist' retreat from Marxism, when it is not a reversion to pre-Marxian socialism, has often been a reversion to neo-liberal orthodoxies in economics and politics. Discarding the world-historic aims of Marxism, gutting its holistic perspective and the emphasis on the structural basis of radical change, socialism itself is put in quotation marks and shrunk down to merely a humane economics, a programme of social-democratic econometrics to give capitalism a human face. 'Post-' or 'new-' Marxism in turning away from Marxist revolutionary politics has only created a metaphysics of post-politics. Hyphenated Marxism in its most important expression indeed turns out to be 'a half-way house between the radical past and a final reconciliation with orthodox neo-classical economics, mainstream pluralist politics and micro sociology'.

The ideological retreat on the Left has been, as hinted above, both facilitated and conditioned by the overall philosophical context of 'post-modernism' as the cultural logic of late capitalism, which beyond the crisis of socialism or Marxism, reflects a phase of the more basic, epochal crisis of our times.

If the Right has proclaimed 'the end of history' or the final triumph of capitalism, many on the Left, unsettled by the movement's weakness or disarray, have also come to concede that an epoch has indeed ended, that we are living in a 'post-modern' age, that the 'Enlightenment project' is dead, that all the old varities and ideologies have lost their relevance, that old principles of rationality or ethical judgement no longer apply and so on. In trying to be 'with it', quite a few have indeed queued up to renounce any lingering attachment to such old notion as truth, reason, critique, ideology or false consciousness. These are all said to be mistaken, rendered obsolete by the passage to a post-modern outlook that acknowledges the collapse of any hopes once vested in Marxism or any other similarly delusive 'meta-narrative' creeds. As grand narratives, totalising knowledge and even conceptions of causality are rejected for 'post-modern' fragmentation, difference, contingency and 'the politics of identity', the very notion of capitalism as a systemic unity, of its structural logic, becomes impossible to entertain. The 'post-modern' thought simply cannot accommodate the idea of capitalism, let alone subject the capitalist system to critique. The only option that survives the 'post-modern' nihilism is acceptance of what is and, therefore, also a submission to it. And what, of course, is capitalism—capitalism, the universal reality and the market an inevitable natural law. To opt for any thing else, for socialism, is to opt for a delusion. History is indeed over.

Surprised and somewhat scared by the turn of events a Derrida may, rather late in the day for him, nod feebly in the direction of Marx — 'upon rereading the *Manifesto* and a few other great works of Marx, I said to myself that I knew of few texts in the philosophical tradition, perhaps none, whose lesson seemed more urgent *today*'—and even recall Benjamin's reference to the 'weak messianic power' we need to preserve and sustain during dark ages. Others of that ilk too may so shift and turn. But with its obscurantist celebration of all kinds of intellectually fashionable scepticism, agnosticism and cynicism, post-modernism is incapable of summoning any kind of power to understand and act in the dark age that a capitalism living beyond its historical time portends. 'Post-modernism' is indeed a philosophy of status quo-serving political

impotence today wherein even the theoretical possibility of meaningful generalisation is rejected in favour of petty empiricism, and the painstaking search for truth about an objectively existing social reality has been abandoned for a comfortable subjectivism, wherein pursuit of knowledge has given way to academic word games and the faddish followers of Foucault and Derrida talk subtle abstractions about language, knowledge and power but are silent about the grim concreteness of people's powerlessness or about how to empower them to stand up and resist, wherein power itself is seen bounded not so much by the structures of historically determined political economy or class relations and struggles but by discursive exercises, wherein along with a denial of the intelligibility of the world, absolute relativism in matters of knowledge or ethics has emerged as a new orthodoxy, wherein social reality itself is dissolved into a discourse in which exploitation is only a set of words or a state of mind and imperialism merely an unpleasant ideological construct. Such is the philosophical or intellectual freight accompanying human descent into the so-called 'post-modern world', which is yet as ancient a world as capitalism ever was.

'Post' is the buzz-word these days. Scholarship abounds with writings that are 'post-this and post-that'. To be post-something is in fact the current fashion, especially for those who are ex-something. Thus we are post-modern, post-enlightenment, post-scientific, post-industrial, post-structuralist, even post-liberal and post-western, or if we must be, post-Marxist, indeed post-everything — but 'post-capitalist' notwithstanding, it is capitalism forever!

Yes, there have been massive retreats and desertions on the Left. But in the midst of it all, at the other end of the Left spectrum, there yet remain the 'heretics' who have refused to retreat or surrender, who still remain committed to socialism and to the Marxism of Karl Marx, who continue to believe in the necessity of revolutionary politics, of social revolution and the possibility of achieving an egalitarian, co-operative and democratic (ultimately classless) society which, making a planned, rational use of available resources ensures for all its members immediately a more decent, equitable and humane social existence than it ever lies in the power of capitalism to achieve, and ultimately an all-sided, genuinely rich human development for all as visualised by Karl Marx. Firm as they are in their socialist commitment, they are also fully aware of the enormity of what has happened. They know that life and struggle cannot go on just as before; but they also know that it has to go on. The number of such men and women, though small, is not inconsiderable. And their number is bound to grow as people in the East and the West, in the First World of advanced capitalism as much as in its peripheries in the Third World and the vanished Second World as well, catch up with the ugly, rapacious reality of the currently triumphant capitalism. In fact they have already begun to do so and are increasingly moving into action against it.

As the Soviet Union passes into history, a heavy price is being exacted for the dependence, and often the identification of the socialist cause with the grossly deformed Soviet experiment in socialism. There is nothing surprising in the Soviet collapse turning into a major defeat for the socialist idea. And insofar as no idea can for long hold out against reality, this defeat means a

difficult time for Marxist theory, all the more difficult because Marxist theory, while it has been eminently successful, especially when compared to bourgeois social science, in analysing the large-scale historical structures and processes of capitalism, even though it did not mean anticipating particular futures, has been by and large incapable of providing similar analysis or understanding when this future took the shape of post-revolutionary societies in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. For many Marxists, the failure here included the use of Marxism to defend or justify the ugliness, the cruelty and barbarities and worse that came to disfigure what was built there as socialism. It is no use, therefore, to assert once again — as has been customarily done in times of crisis in the past, the ‘invincibility’ of ‘the science of Marxism’ (or the science of Marxism-Leninism’ plus, at times, ‘Mao Tse Tung Thought’ too). If Marxism, with or without these hyphenations was indeed *that* kind of science, then surely socialism would not have been in *this* kind of mess today. Such ideological rhetoric, however comforting when in distress, only betokens a dogmatism which treats Marxism as ‘hermetically sealed fortress to be defended against the enemies’. Far from being ‘a guide to action’, as it was intended to be, Marxism becomes theoretically sterile, helpless against new ideas and challenges and incapable of that combination of principle and flexibility which is necessary for any socialist advance, now or at any other time. But in rejecting dogmatism we must not lapse into ‘realism’ or ‘pragmatism’ that abandons principles in the name of flexibility. Socialism *has* suffered a defeat, what has happened *was* unexpected. But the experience of defeat must not be generalised into the impossibility of the struggle, or the confrontation with the unexpected that has happened into an abandonment of historical materialism which alone can help us understand and cope with it. The defeat does not have to become a rout, nor disappointment lead to a panicky depression. There is no reason at all for Marxists to either don sack cloth and ashes, or surrendering to the pull of conventional thinking or current fashions prune or abandon Marxism and jump on to bandwagons labelled ‘neo’- or ‘post’-, etc. That is not the way out of the current crisis but buying into it and its logic of disintegration. For Marxism as a ‘critique’ or the pre-eminent theory of human emancipation in our times, is not exhausted with the exhaustion of ‘actually existing socialism’. History is certainly at a specific crossroads, but it has neither ended as proclaimed from the pulpits of the ideological Right, nor is it afflicted with a post-modernist unintelligibility and, therefore, to be jettisoned as the currently fashioned theoretical texts are making out. Classical Marxism still has sufficient resources to provide theoretical and political guidance through the contemporary world of late capitalism. In fact, the relevance of Marxism, its philosophical premises, analytical method and ethical commitment are most certainly going to increase over time as the unhindered logic of the currently triumphant global capitalism reveals itself, which may not be very long. Though it is necessary to add that in many matters we have indeed to begin again, and the process of recovery of socialism in historical terms will be long and bitter.

The task is certainly not a retreat into the idealism of setting forth blueprints for a future socialism, for, if not perfect, a better socialism than what ‘actually existing socialism’ was. Whatever marginal usefulness such exercises

may have, socialist renewal will not be substantially forwarded by constructing abstracts models of socialist society, attractive as such models may be in their detailed features. To focus on such exercises, especially at this time, is really to mock what is sound and viable in Marxist social science. Social systems do not come into being because someone has a good idea, by the automatic operations of principles. Nor do they collapse because of lack of them. Either way, the crucial dimensions of material basis and human agency are decisive.

The real task, therefore, lies elsewhere. As the struggle for socialism goes on, or is resumed, in the historically specific conditions of different countries or regions of the world, the task in its general formulation remains as Marx stated it at the very beginning of his vocation as a communist:

It is not our task to build up the future in advance and to settle all problems for all time; our task is uncompromising critical evaluation of everything that exists, uncompromising in the sense that our criticism will not shrink either from its own conclusions or from conflict with the powers that be.

This indeed is the challenge confronting Marxists today—an 'uncompromising critical evaluation of *everything that exists*' and this, in the present context means above all, the failed effort that was Soviet socialism and the seeming triumph of capitalism today. As a Marxist evaluation it must seek to take us behind the immediate appearances to the reality of things, the epochal historical processes of our time.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, disastrous as it has been for socialism, also provides an opportunity for renewal of socialism. The identification of the socialist cause with the deformed Soviet experiment, helpful in some ways, had over the years, for reasons already noticed, also become an obstacle to the effective prosecution of this cause. To the extent that the Left has been, consciously or otherwise, positively and at times even negatively, parasitic on 'actually existing socialism'— here benefiting the most, Communists have also been the worst sufferers — the events of 1989-91 represent a moment of liberation, an occasion not to abandon but to recover and renew the authentic Marxist tradition. The socialists or the Communists no more need to carry the burden of a deformed and degenerated socialism; they are no longer answerable for its ugliness and cruelties. The burden of a Marxist explanation of what has happened is still theirs, but this in its own way can also serve as a vantage point to consider afresh the problems of the struggle for socialism, including the construction of any new socialism. In this strictly Marxist sense, all Socialists including Communists are indeed, once again, 'on their own'.

The road ahead is indeed an uncharted territory, there are no easy solutions or ready-made answers, not any more. But the new situation also leaves us all, socialists and communists, free after a long time, for a better, bolder practice of Marxism, for a confident, truly innovative, nonsectarian Left politics in the tradition of revolutionary Marxism — in other words, free 'to think and act as Marx would have done in our place'. As Engels had insisted 'it was only in that sense that the word Marxist had any *raison d'etre*'. In doing so we may yet draw strength from what the same, Engels once wrote. It is the end of the letter which he wrote to his comrade Sorge, the day after Marx died:

"Local lights and lesser minds, if not the humbugs, will now have a free hand. The final victory is certain, but circuitous paths.

temporary and local errors — things which even now are so unavoidable — will become more common than ever. Well, we must see it through. What else are we here for? And we are not near losing courage yet.

II

Yes, not yet. For even as the first worldwide wave of popular movements seeking an escape from capitalism is disintegrating, the causes that gave rise to it not only remain but are more powerfully effective and urgent today than ever before. Not only will history continue, the 'age of revolution,' too is not over.

The collapse of 'Soviet Socialism' needs to be understood as one historically specific outcome of Marxism, implicating only a particular political practice in the name of Marxism. It must not be understood on any abstract or universal terms, as settling the question of capitalism or socialism for all times, or signaling some final demise of Marxism itself.

In recent years such ahistorical argumentation has been a regular feature of articles and books in the popular press and academic circles, where it has been fashionable to equate the collapse of the communist regimes not only with the collapse of socialism as such but of Marxism as a social theory as well. This has only helped to accelerate a growing sense of self-doubt and confusion on the part of many radical activists and intellectuals, including socialists and communists about not only the future of socialism but, more important for my immediate argument, about the viability and future utility of Marxism. Even those who (with Hobsbawm) concede Marxism a future as a social theory--'that Marx would live on as a major thinker.. could hardly be doubted' -- deny it any future as a political project. It is important, therefore, to recognise that while there is unquestionably a linkage between Marxism and capitalism, Communism of the erstwhile Soviet-type regimes, it was a *historical* linkage, the two are not interchangeable. Marxism as a social theory and political practice that seeks to understand and change the world is not exhausted with the exhaustion of 'actually existing socialism' of the Soviet Union. Marxism retains its validity and viability as a tradition of social theory within which it is possible not only to do social science--that is, identify real causal mechanisms and understand their consequences - but also do it as an emancipatory project for our times, which remains a socialist project. The collapse in the Soviet Union is a defeat for but not of Marxism. Even as we seek to understand it as an outcome of Marxism or a certain Marxist political practice, we must do so in Marxist terms and recognise its historical specificity, which leaves open the possibility of other, better and more successful outcomes of Marxism or, more specifically, of Marxism as a political project that seeks to build a socialist society.

Marxism as such is not my concern in these notes. But given the overall nature of the issues involved and the fact that the current crisis has made Marxism all the more a controversial topic where its status as social theory, and even place on the Left, is being questioned, and far too many are in a hurry to reject it as obsolete for reasons which are in the main unjustified, a digression on the subject will not be out of place -- no detailed exploration of what Marxism is or is not, but some general observations and a few substantive propositions which may help clarify issues and sustain the contention that, the damage done by the Soviet collapse notwithstanding, Marxism retains its

viability and utility as a vital tradition of social theory and revolutionary praxis.

Speaking of the conflict between 'reason' and men's 'interest' and of men 'setting themselves against reason as oft as reason is against them', the English philosopher Hobbs once wrote: 'For I doubt not, but if it had been a thing contrary to any man's right of dominion, or to the interest of men that have dominion, *that the three angles of a triangle, should be equal to two angles of a square*, that, doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of geometry, suppressed, as far as he whom it concerned was able'. History of Marxism is well illustrative of this remarkably insightful observation of Hobbes. Marxism, obviously, is 'a thing contrary to the interest of men that have dominion' in our society, it arose as a challenge to all the established authorities — economic and political, intellectual, ideological or academic. Therefore, hostility and prejudice against Marxism, its misrepresentation or caricature, a conscious and continuous effort to either ignore Marxism or distort and denigrate it, should not be difficult to comprehend. Successive generations of bourgeois social scientists and ideologues have felt the compelling need to 'refute' Marx's ideas yet again, and to make periodic announcements of its death and final demise over the last hundred years and more. As a result, what Maurice Dobb, describing Marx as 'one of the least understood of social thinkers', once said of his method of historical interpretation is indeed true of Marxism as a whole: 'it is usually much easier to state in brief what it is not than to expound its positive claims'. And the situation has been only confounded by the 'faithful' who, from the other side, have often approached Marxism almost as a matter of religious faith. Given the intellectual and moral authority that Marxism as a social theory yet acquired, it has had to pay the penalty for its "success" too — namely its co-optation by alien elements. Here it has been not so much a question of the rapidly spreading, confused and confusing, use of Marxian language, categories and concepts in bourgeois social and political theory. Really significant is the fact that so much of what has gone by the name of Marxism in recent years has little or nothing to do with Marxism as Marx himself understood or practised it. The current crisis has only reinforced all this, the overt hostility and prejudice, the caricature and misrepresentation, ill-informed oversimplification and generally facile disputation in its treatment that Marxism has always faced. The latest here is the post-modernist 'critique'. Marxism is the 'meta-narrative' that post-modernists most like to scoff at. Marxism is treated at its most skeletal and abstract level ignoring its materialist and dialectical underpinnings; long-dead or settled themes (such as economic determinism or class reductionism, essentialism, functionalism or universalism, etc.) are flogged into some semblance of life to impose on Marxism impossible rigidities, a positivist closure or completeness, which makes it eminently amenable to refutation, indeed final destruction, analytically and otherwise.

It is important to note that questioning or denial of Marxism has been all too often nihilistic in character, born of an implicit, utterly unscientific, 'all or nothing' attitude, an attitude, it must be added, that has been well-sustained, unfortunately, by the claims that the 'faithful' have tended to make for their 'science of Marxism'. Marxism is called upon to provide answers to all questions which a supposedly complete system of thought must provide. And since Marxism does not or cannot, it stands condemned. The focus is not on

the positive achievements of Marxism but its limitations, its 'silences' or 'empty spaces', which are indeed there as they are bound to be and which the classical tradition of Marxism always recognised. Even the slightest qualification to a basic proposition — and these have to be made in social scientific theory to secure better validity — is interpreted as being self-destructive of Marxism. Indeed, the critics have demanded of Marxism or sought to impose on its theory, standards which no other social theory has yet been able to attain or can possibly attain. For example, even a knowledgeable critic like Barry Hindess has recently demanded that Marxism must specify 'the precise mechanisms' of the relation between base and superstructure! Such 'precision', needless to say, is not demanded of any other theory in the domain of social and historical analysis where in fact relativism of all sorts is readily conceded. Such precision is in fact impossible in social theory and likely to remain so in future. For as Goethe put it in his own way: "Grey is theory, my friend, but green is the everlasting tree of life" — an aphorism that was quite a favourite with Lenin, the Marxist. Change and inter-connectedness of social being what they are, our concepts can never fully hold or grasp the concrete, it always spills over the designated territories; a good enough reason, among others, to reject all claims to absolute truth and the possibility of ever finding or revealing it. But this does not imply lapsing into absolute relativism, which has literally enveloped the social sciences today, a relativism which, incidentally, refuses to relativise itself. As Adorno has argued, even if a concept is lacking in the sort of 'precision' that is demanded, to be concrete, as expression of truth, it yet needs to establish rational identity with its object. Hence his insistence that the dividing line separating Marxism from the currently fashionable relativising sociology of knowledge is the former's commitment to the 'idea of objective truth'. Postulating *growth* of our knowledge of objectively existing reality, without either attaching finality to our knowledge at any stage or lapsing into vulgar relativism, Lenin had written: 'The limits of approximation of our knowledge to the objective, absolute truth are historically conditional, but the existence of such truth is *unconditional* and the fact that we are approaching nearer to it is also unconditional' — though we shall never reach it absolutely. As Engels put it: 'an adequate exhaustive statement... the formulation in thought of an exact picture of the world system in which we live, is impossible for us and will always remain impossible'.

This is how we have truth as scientific approximation; not 'the absolute truth', or 'the whole truth', but the truth that is ours which, never finally certain or complete and always open to revision, yet reveals, however partially, genuine aspects of an objectively existing world and thus, however, relative is nonetheless objective truth, not saying everything about the whole, yet enables us to say something truthful about it as a whole.

In understanding Marxism, it helps to remember that Marx was not a professional philosopher, a system-builder, offering us, in the tradition of Plato or Hobbes or Hegel, a more or less complete system of thought. Nor was Marxism ever intended to be a 'positive science', making statements about past and present facts, or prediction about the shape or timings of future events. Not a 'philosopher' or a 'social scientist', Marx was by vocation a revolutionary, 'before all else a revolutionist' as Engels described him. The major thrust behind his systematic theoretical work (pre-eminently represented by *Capital*)

was born of his urge to understand the capitalist social order, the system he wanted to overthrow, and most of his other writings was done as part of his revolutionary, that is, Marxist practice of politics. In so far as his work claims to be scientific, it was never science for science's sake or for peers or policy-makers. It was his commitment to the liberation of working classes that drove Marx to gather together the theoretical and factual knowledge that he could muster at the time into a scientific understanding of history in general and capitalist society in particular, and put it at the service of the emancipatory struggles of his time, which remain our struggles today

Again, in a most important sense, Marx's theoretical work is 'an unfinished project'. Engels' *Anti-Duhring*, that masterpiece of popular exposition and clarification, written with Marx's collaboration and endorsement, does offer a somewhat systematic account of Marxism, but the fact remains that so much of what Marx expressly wished to write under his own name to ensure a clearer and fuller understanding of his ideas — on philosophy (Hegel), or political theory (the State), or, desperately towards the end, at least 'two or three printer's sheets' on method (Dialectics), and much else besides — remained simply unwritten. Part of the explanation lies in Marx's life and work as a revolutionary — intense practical activity and involvement with men, politics and movements the world over, besides long years of poverty, privation and ill health, 'the humiliations, torments and terrors, (the) *petites miseres* (small wretchednesses)', as Marx himself wrote, of the daily struggle for sheer physical survival, and always the demands and still more the hazards of a revolutionary's life... Possibly, the high exacting standards Marx set himself for any serious theoretical work also acted as an inhibiting factor, Engels has told us how 'Marx thought his best things were still not good enough for the workers, how he regarded it as a crime to offer the workers anything but the very best'.

Certainly, an important reason was the inescapably necessary, but near-exclusive concern of the mature Marx with his work on 'Economics' as he called it, which yet remained unfinished — thus, for example, the second and third volumes of *Capital* were later put together by Engels, *Theories of Surplus Value* by Kautsky still later, and *Grundrisse* in different editions has become available outside the archives only in our times. It needs to be noted that concerned with all of capitalism, the capitalist society as a whole. Marx lived long enough to view it only from the vantage point of capitalist economics (and that too incompletely), and not its politics, ethics, ideology, culture, etc. as well, which would have made for a fuller understanding of the capitalist social formation. (Incidentally, concentration of Marx's mature efforts on the capitalist economy, the outstanding quality of this work and its preponderance in his published writings, together with some of its strong skeletal propositions and their, mostly historically conditioned, erroneous interpretations are among the factors which facilitated the widely prevalent economic interpretation of Marxism.) More specifically, Marx's treatment of philosophy, politics, ethics, literature or culture, in fact the realm of the non-economic in general, remained largely untheorised by him. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are any number of 'silences' and 'empty spaces', inadequacies and ambiguities in his work, far too many loose threads, the argument often yielding large questions rather than providing neat answers... This is, however, as it should be in any scientific enterprise and does not in any way impair Marxism as a body of thought claiming to be scientific.

Within the corpus of Marx's 'unfinished project' we also need to notice and resolve a problem arising out of the inherent variety and quality of his writing. While we do have an authentic, even if somewhat partial, expression of the views of Marx, as of Engels, in works which were put out under the writer's own control, duly corrected and revised for publication — all of which even so are not comparable to each other and certainly not to a writing like *Capital* — there are other works, the early as well as the latter ones, which lack such authenticity and which have come down to us scattered and translated over a long period of time. And these include writings of all sorts: numerous articles and other journalistic, even 'hack' pieces as Marx called them, which he hated having to write; addresses, proclamations, speeches and statements for particular occasions, situations, organisation or audiences; unpublished or unpublizable manuscripts in finished, unfinished or fragmentary form; extensive correspondence with diverse addressees, obviously not intended for the eyes of others; private notes and workbooks, often in a personal 'shorthand' and meant only for the writer's own subsequent use (some of which he may himself find difficult to decipher later on), etc. etc. Hence the problem, namely, determining the *specific nature* and *theoretical status* of each such writing of Marx and Engels. A good example here is Marx's 1853 articles on India published in *New York Tribune*, which were for long treated by the Indian Communists, like the rest of Marxism then available to them under the British rule, almost as sacred texts, as authentic a statement of Marxist theory as anything else written by Marx, including *Capital*. Written in a period of hunger and deprivation, and deep family distress, on payment of desperately needed £1 per article, these were part of what, for nearly ten years, Marx penned away as weekly dispatches covering the widest field of international politics, on European affairs, on the Far East, on India, on the Crimean War, on the American Civil War etc; Marx himself said this 'continual newspaper muck annoys me. It takes a long time, disperses my efforts and in the final analysis is nothing'. Of course, we would still do well to remember that this is 'muck' written by a Karl Marx. But for himself Marx had insisted that 'purely scientific works are something completely different'.

The point is that all of Marx's writings cannot be treated on par in terms of their theoretical importance or significance. There is always the need for utmost caution in determining their precise nature and theoretical status in each case for purposes of understanding and assessing Marxism — a caution generally observed only in the breach by the critics who have preferred to take every liberty with the texts of Marx, and often disregarded even by many of the professed followers of Marx himself. 'If people could only read,' Marx used to say, we may well add they also need to know 'how not to quote Marx'!

Again, precisely because Marx's work has come to us the way it has, that is not as a body of thought systematised by him, we have yet another quite understandable problem. Of course there is continuous growth and development in the thinking of Marx. But obviously he was not some sort of supra-historical genius who would be always fully consistent in what he said or wrote; and what needs to be recognised is that, as discussions of the last few decades have made abundantly clear, there are different and indeed sometimes inconsistent strands in his writings, in those belonging to different periods or even to the same period. Even the same writing may have propositions

carrying different, conflicting implications, some of which certainly facilitated the development of grave deformations of his theory later on. One of the gravest of them, for example, could appeal to many statements in the thought of Marx, particularly in popular or propagandist or polemical writings, which either articulated economistic views or can be reasonably interpreted in an economistic manner, the most famous being Marx's frequently quoted formulation of the doctrine of historical materialism in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*. Such statements came to be emphasised and exaggerated by his followers in the half century after his death, as part of the justificatory ideology and political theory of the reformist working class movement which grew up in the industrialised West in the period of emerging monopoly capitalism. Such emphasis simply excluded other more representative and more important tendencies in his thought. Economism was certainly not the dominant thing in Marx, ever. On the contrary, his theory as well as life long practice were for the most part informed by the ideas so succinctly set forth in the *Theses on Feuerbach* which are thoroughly anti-economistic and speak up for 'revolutionising practice', for human beings changing their circumstances. If anything, as a revolutionary doctrine, Marxism accords primacy not to economics but politics: politics is the cutting edge of the social revolution it argues for. Very early Marx saw the weakness of Feuerbach's preoccupation with philosophy in that 'he refers too little to politics'. For Marx himself philosophy had to be realised through politics. This conviction remained central to Marx's life-long practice as a revolutionary. His emphasis on 'economy' does not refer to any 'economic factor' so-called, but to the economic structural basis of society which can be transformed only through revolutionary politics.

Given its dialectical orientation, a 'factorisation' of social life, any kind of 'factors theory' to understand it, in fact 'one-sidedness' of any kind is alien to Marxism. It explicitly eschewed what Engels described and rejected as the 'metaphysical mode of thought' which is 'one-sided, limited, abstract', studies things 'in isolation, detached from the whole vast interconnection of things' and thus, 'cannot see the woods for the trees'. For Marx, as with Hegel, 'the truth is the whole'. But in one important sense the issue of 'one-sidedness' goes beyond the question of dialectical or 'metaphysical' orientation in social theory or of assigning importance to different aspect of social reality or practice. As V.G.Kiernan has suggested, 'the most formidable intellect cannot work at full stretch on human problems except passionately and all original and intense thought must be one-sided; the eye that sees every aspect of the question sees none of them vividly'. 'Passionate' is in deed the word to characterise Marx's theoretical engagements; and it is probably this very passion which infuses his writings with their continuing relevance, just as it also accounts for Marx's ideas and aspirations for humanity at moments out-running the historical evidence.

The economistic tendency within it is suggestive of another important consideration in understanding Marxism of Karl Marx, namely, its intellectual as well as historical context. The former involves bearing in mind what he was variously arguing with, for, or against — notably Hegelian philosophy, classical political economy and contemporary socialism. Thus, for example, if Marx and Engels sometimes put the sort of emphasis they did on 'the economic side' of things, or 'the economic base', tending to set the intellectual or ideological 'superstructure' too far apart from it, it should be remembered

that they were polemicising not only against the dogmas of conventional historiography but also the not insignificant threat of philosophical idealism. Accepting part of the blame for 'more stress (being laid) on the economic side than is due to it', Engles himself wrote 'we had to emphasise the main principle in opposition to our adversaries who denied it' which, he added, gave 'our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstanding and distortions' Engles specifically disavowed the tendency to economism in Marxism, even though, on occasions, he still succumbed to it.

The historical context of Marx's theoretical work was the nineteenth century and his writing in what he called 'only a little corner of the world — Europe'. This does impart his work a certain Euro-centricity, though some of it certainly has its historical justification, for that is where the epochal transition from feudalism to capitalism was most manifest. Yet Europe was only 'a little corner' of the world for him. In his now well-known letter to the editorial board of the Russian periodical, *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*, in response to a critic, 'honouring me too much' as he said, Marx specifically disowned any claims of having provided a 'master key' or 'universal passport' of 'a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical'. Rejecting the very notion of such a theory, he insisted that *Capital* contained 'my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western-Europe', and it must not be metamorphosed into 'an historic-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself.'. And we now know, better than before, that his earlier interest and work apart, the later Marx was primarily busy exploring, in relation to Russia and its backwardness, problems which are today our problems in the Third World. No doubt Marxism is an offspring of Western-centred thought but what needs to be recognised is that it had, especially as Marx himself was shaping it in his later years, the potential to transcend its European origins and to become a truly universal world outlook — as arguably it indeed became in the twentieth century.

Let me conclude with the basic point of my argument so far on how one needs to go about understanding Marxism. Rich, multiple, and tirelessly creative as Marx's work is, it has its 'silences' and 'empty spaces', and — like all living reality — its contradictory aspects. But to focus on these 'silences' or 'empty spaces', or to abstract any one of its different or contradictory aspects at the expense of ignoring either its context or its place in his thought as a whole is to distort and misunderstand his Marxism. As Gramsci once suggested, what is important is not 'single casual affirmations and isolated aphorisms' but 'the Leitmotiv', 'the rhythm of the thought as it develops'; the need is to look for those 'permanent' or stable, mutually consistent elements that go to constitute the 'essential coherence' of Marx's thought. Describing Marxism as 'a new conception of the world' as also the 'philosophy of praxis', Gramsci wrote that its essential coherence is to be sought 'not in each individual writing or series of writings but in the whole development of the multiform intellectual work in which the element of the conception are implicit'.

Marx was, of course, very much — as much as anybody else — a 'child of his time' (to borrow an expression from Hegel). This not only involves the implications of not looking for answers in his work which either do not exist or which are not at any rate to be found there, it also involves recognising that Marx too, like anybody else, carried his share of 'the mud of his times'.

including, for example, a certain gender blindness and ecological short-sightedness. He very much belonged to his age, even as he was, here as elsewhere, in his own magnificent manner, moving beyond it. Immediately important is to notice the fact that it was an age excessively confident of itself, drunk with the achievements of modern science. Marx was not immune to its intellectual or cultural ethos, its language or idiom. It had its impact on his work. And one important negative consequence was that Marx's thought did not always transcend the bourgeois-positivist model of the social science of his time, based on an arbitrary and unqualified extension to the social and historical sphere of the epistemological paradigm of the natural sciences, with its laws, its determinism, its purely objective predictions, linear development, and so on, all expressed in the strong, confident, even dogmatic language of the second half of the nineteenth century. This tendency, however, minor, indeed expressed itself in Marx's social scientific work and was, during certain phases of subsequent historical development, pushed to its logical conclusion by a certain kind of Marxism, which besides a certain Eurocentrism, came to be characterised by an entirely unjustified evolutionism, by scientific, economic and deterministic interpretation of Marx's theoretical and political writings. Plekhanov and Kautsky are good examples here. 'Economism' in its scientific expression emerged as the most grievous deformation within Marxism.

Such indeed was the Marxism which came to be dominant in the Second International, where the pursuit of Marxism as 'science' led to a disastrous loss of revolutionary perspective, its replacement by a complacent concern with 'the historical necessity' at work in the socio-economic processes; 'irresistible natural necessity' having made socialism 'something inevitable' (Kautsky), this Marxism simply turned its back on the other necessity, which is yet a free choice, namely, a revolutionary struggle for socialism. In our own times, we have had efforts such as Althusser's for example, to 'rescue' Marxism in rigorous structural terms, highlighting the scientific credentials of Marxism as against its revolutionary as well as humanist interpretation. The need for epistemological correctness and rigour in matters of Marxist theory and practice is obvious. But to privilege Marxism's scientific potential in such structural, economic and deterministic terms has only reinforced an earlier tendency and given rise to a most misleading, dogmatic, scientific Marxism-with its slogans about 'invincibility' of the 'science of Marxism', heard from time to time, and somewhat more loudly these days among desperate, die-hard 'official' as well as 'ultra-left' Marxist circles. By claiming too much for Marxism, without any serious consideration of what really makes it a scientific doctrine, such 'friends' or 'defenders' of Marxism not only give its 'enemies' an easy and welcome opportunity to attack and denigrate Marxism, but also deny themselves access to the immense social scientific potential Marxism really has, and thus fail to confront the reality around them with reason in a truly Marxist manner. To repeat what I have said earlier, if Marxism was indeed *that* kind of science, surely socialism would not have been in *this* kind of mess today. A tribute to the deserved but in some ways dangerously ambiguous prestige that Marxism has come to acquire in our times, among friends and foes alike, such scientism together with the claims that have been made in its name, is absolutely alien to Marxism of Karl Marx.

It is not my concern here to discuss the nature of Marxism as social science or for that matter, the nature of social science itself as a scientific

enterprise which would need to include a consideration of what is valid and not so valid in the conventional critiques of positivism and how Marxism is scientific without being positivist. (In the name of rejecting positivism what is often rejected is any kind of scientific understanding of society.) I will also concede that dogmatism, a deterministic necessitarianism, has a certain usefulness in sustaining faith when the movement is weak, a persecuted minority, or is faced with defeat. Speaking of what he described as 'the fatalistic conceptions of the philosophy of praxis', that is, Marxism, Gramsci wrote:

When you don't have the initiative in the struggle and the struggle itself comes eventually to be identified with a series of defeats, mechanical determinism becomes a tremendous force of moral resistance, of cohesion and of patient and obstinate perseverance. 'I have been defeated for the moment, but the tide of history is working for me in the long term'. Real will takes on the garments of an act of faith in a certain rationality of history and in a primitive and empirical form of impassioned finalism which appears in the role of a substitute for the Predestination or Providence of confessional religions.

But whatever its usefulness for sustaining faith in difficult times, or partial justification in certain periods of history, such dogmatism, evolutionist or determinist interpretation of Marxism, or 'revolutionary fatalism', as Gramsci called it, surely can never be a long term support for sustenance and growth of the movement. On the contrary, it has, and can have, only dangerously negative consequences for the movement, because, apart from its inherent passivity such dogmatism not only means a refusal to study the ever-changing concrete situations, or obscuring of live issues, choices or alternatives before the movement, it has also involved all sorts of problematic claims concerning 'necessities' of history, exclusive possession of 'truth', much too precise predictions and provisions of 'the correct party line', and the infallibility of the leadership on the ground that their decisions reflected the objective working of natural laws, provided by the 'science' of Marxism ('laws of history', or those most dubious 'laws of socialism'), which enabled Foucault even to argue, no matter how mistakenly, that Gulag, as he puts it, is not the consequence of an unhappy mistake but the effect of the 'truest theory in the political order'. It is with good reason that Gramsci, the Marxist revolutionary, had argued for the need to 'pronounce a funeral eulogy' upon such scientific-deterministic Marxism, and its usefulness for a certain period in the history of the movement notwithstanding, urged us 'to bury it with all due honours'.

Alien as these were to his Marxism, Marx had found the doctrines of his scientific, evolutionist disciples in Russia, Plekhanov and others, 'boring' and had expressly dissociated himself from these Marxists. If Lenin's break with their evolutionist-determinist politics was in the authentic tradition of Marxism of Karl Marx and made for the success of the October Revolution under Bolshevik leadership, the scientific economism of the other parties of the Second International only resulted in the failure of the post-First World War revolutions in the rest of Europe, with disastrous consequences for the future of socialism, not only in Europe but elsewhere too; this failure was a vital factor in the growing deformation and ultimate demise of socialism in the Soviet Union.

It is worth noticing here that an important proximate, as well as ultimate, possibly the most decisive factor behind the demise of Soviet socialism was the scientific-economic deformation of the post-Lenin Marxism in the Soviet Union which, while allowing for a certain kind of even spectacular economic progress, left it essentially incapacitated for coping with the entirely unanticipated situation resulting from the survival of the post-First World War European revolution only in a single, backward and beleaguered country, Russia. I will return to this issue in some detail later. Immediately I would only like to draw attention to the Stalinist canonisation of Marxism, its reduction, as Roger Garaudy put it, to 'a dogmatic pseudo-scientific positivism dressed up as dialectic'-with its scholastic codification of the three principles of materialism, the four laws of dialectic and the five stages of historical materialism (that is, development), etc. etc., creating 'the procrustean bed on which science and creativity were mutilated'.

One aspect of this new 'orthodoxy' which also became 'official' Marxism for the world communist movement with the now obvious denouements, deserves to be particularly mentioned. Scientism of this orthodoxy, in tandem with the persistent 'economism' within Marxism, which now acquired a new life by the needs or demands generated by the economic backwardness of Russia, found expression in a rigidly structuralist, entirely undialectical, implementation of Marx's notion of base and superstructure, that refused to consider the superstructural dynamics, contenting itself with a vague theory of a determining economic base and a derivative superstructural realm, and ending up almost literally as 'a theory of productive forces'. This could not but lead to grave deficiencies in Marxist theory and practice in the Soviet Union, apart from the damage this theoretical deformation caused in the allied communist movements elsewhere. 'A bad and dangerous model', E.P.Thompson called it, 'since Stalin used it not as an image of man changing in society but as a mechanical model, operating semi-automatically and independently of conscious agency'. (Against this mechanistic interpretation and use of Karl Marx's metaphor, Thompson, while in no way denying the place of 'objective determinations' in historical process, argued for restoration of the authentic Marxist project as one of freeing humanity 'from victimhood to blind economic causation, and extending immeasurably the region of choice and conscious agency').

Stalinist canonisation of Marxism, with its monopolistic claims for itself, made possible an easy transition to Marxism being treated, not as the critical social theory it is, but as a religion, something to be invoked on high and holy occasions, indeed a legitimising ideology for the established social order, and thus utterly incapable of understanding or changing the world which in the Soviet Union meant, above all, effecting a genuine transition to socialism.

To question scientism in Marxism, the scientific emasculation or mangling of Marxism, by both its supporters and detractors, is not to deny the scientific credentials of Marxism but to assert them by focussing on how precisely it claims to be scientific, what indeed it has to offer as a critical science of society, with careful attention to certain long standing misuses of the word 'science'. Marxism is, and needs to be, scientific in its philosophical foundations, and commitment to criticism and continuing verification and development of its main principles, postulates and conclusions. It is a living and creative theory that continuously interacts with the reality of the world around it and with the rest of contemporary thought, and grows with the growth of scientific and historical knowledge.

It is important to recognise that Marxism of Karl Marx is a remarkably open body of thought, open in the best *scientific* sense of the word. Of course, in humankind's centuries old effort to understand society and to change it for the better on the basis of this understanding, Marxism is possibly the most ambitious exercise, so far, ambitious not only in the extraordinary sweep and power of its explanatory theory, its truth, but also in its actual historical achievement. At the same time, Marxism is very modest in its claims and extraordinarily open in its orientation, contrary to the conventional belief, the familiar caricature of Marxism as a rigid, closed system already in possession of 'the truth', a set of sacred scripture as it were — a caricature compounded of its opponents' distortions and misinterpretations and nurtured, it must be conceded, by certain trends within Marxism itself that we have already noticed. '*De Omnibus Dubitandum*' (Doubt Everything) was Marx's favourite methodological principle and Engels wrote: '(our) dialectical philosophy dissolves all conceptions of final absolute truth, of a final absolute state of humanity corresponding to it. For it nothing is final, absolute, sacred'.

Aware of the intrinsically irreducible historicity of their own work and of programmes getting 'antiquated', Marx and Engels, in claiming truth (some truth, that is) for themselves, always postulated a continuous growth of human knowledge and understanding. In a statement remarkable for their age, the Darwinian age drunk on its achievements of science, or 'reason' as they also called it, and breaking sharply with the received philosophical tradition, from Plato to Hegel — which, in Marx's words, again and again sought 'to settle all problems for all time' and regularly demanded "Here is the truth! Here you must kneel!" — the founders of Marxism proclaimed: 'we are but little beyond the beginning of human history, and the generations which will put *us* right are likely to be far more numerous than those whose knowledge we — often enough with a considerable degree of contempt — are in a position to correct... the stage of knowledge which we have now reached is as little final as all that have preceded it'. It is this self-critical, 'correction'-demanding spirit of Marxism that was underlined by Rosa Luxemburg, when, referring to the second and third volumes of *Capital*, she wrote: 'they offer more than any final truth could: an urge to thought, to criticism and self-criticism, and this is the essence of the lessons which Marx gave the working class'. And it is precisely this critical spirit underlying Marxism which gives its essential meaning to Engels' adjuration to followers to 'not pick quotations from Marx or from him as if from sacred texts, but think as Marx would have thought in their place'. He had insisted that 'it was only that sense that the word *Marxist* had any *raison d'être*'... This scientific resilience, this openness to 'correction', is really the strength of Marxism and not its weakness, except to religious minds. Behind it lies an explicit assumption about the growth of human knowledge, the endless human quest to acquire a better, more true, understanding of the world. To question the signature of Marx in the course of this quest, to seek to 'put *him* right' if need be, is not to deny Marx but to enter into the freedom of his Marxism.

Marxism was open in its origins: it arose, as is well known, acknowledging its debts to English political economy, German philosophy and French socialism. It is, and needs to remain, open to new ideas, to new data and experience, competing insights and bodies of learning, to newer fields of enquiry. Marxism must continue to learn from other intellectual traditions, confront them not merely for the sake of critique and dismissal but drawing out elements to enrich itself, just as it does so through corrections, rectifications and criticisms inspired by its own experience and social practice. To be able to grow and develop as a living and creative theory Marxism has to recognise that it 'cannot generate all its intellectual capital out of its own resources', as V.G. Kiernan has put it; it must be receptive to what may possibly be secured from competing theories. Equally, if not more, Marxism needs to be self-conscious and self-critical about its own inadequacies and responsive to new challenges

and demands. It is only such an open and honest, self-critical and creative Marxism that can remain current and relevant, and survive to play its vital role in the ongoing struggles and the struggles that lie ahead, as people persist with their quest for a just and humane, egalitarian social order to replace capitalism.

There is an aspect to new challenges and demands which is important enough to be specifically noticed. It is that Marxism today needs to respond to problems of the present-day world which were not recognisably the problems in Marx's time, especially those raised by the 'new social movements' as they are called, the struggles around such issues as feminism, ecology, democracy and democratic rights, rights of national, religious and ethnic minorities, race and caste oppressions, oppression of Dalits and tribal communities, and so on. Not that these issues of struggles are alien to Marxism or that Marx and Engels were unfamiliar with or uninfluenced by them, or had nothing to say about them, at least most of them. On the contrary even as it is, these issues or struggles carry the imprint of Marxist thought on them, many of those involved have belonged to Marxist parties or are familiar with Marxism, and many more are turning to it as they learn from their experience and recognise the need to articulate their struggle with class struggle. Even so these issues and struggles have acquired an importance all their own in our time and call for a specifically new and positive response from Marxism. This is what Marxist openness of theory and practice immediately demands.

Having argued on behalf of 'openness' in Marxism, a word in defense of orthodoxy, properly understood as a commitment to basic principles, will perhaps not be out of place, especially in view of certain recent developments within or around Marxism, or at 'its frontiers' as the 'going beyond' fraternity would like to claim.

'Openness' is integral to Marxism, and its value is almost impossible to overrate today in view of the long and persistent tradition of a certain other practice of Marxism, which has been 'officially' or otherwise, dogmatic, sectarian or scientific even to the point of reducing Marxism to a political catechism, the ossified 'commonsense' of the average Party cadre, or an ideology serving only to legitimise the established Communist Parties or the social order of erstwhile communist regimes. It is necessary to argue for 'openness' in the context of all this and so much else that has disfigured and stultified Marxism in our times, resulting in repeated failures to respond effectively to the changing historical situations and to particular national conditions. But then 'openness' is not a value in itself, a self-evident or self-validating good. And at a time when anything and everything has claimed the fashionable mantle of Marxism, or Marxism of some hyphenated kind or the other, and in the name of 'openness' even a surrender or falsification of basic Marxist positions has been passing for Marxism, a certain orthodoxy, a commitment to 'Marxism of Karl Marx', I believe, is not only in order, it is necessary, if one would take the issues of socialist theory and practice seriously. In other words, the 'open' character of Marxism notwithstanding, there are basic, principled Marxist positions which cannot be abandoned without ceasing to be a Marxist.

Not a closed or finally definitive theory, certainly not one forever sealed and delivered at the death of Marx, or that of Lenin or Mao or anyone else for that matter, Marxism is yet not so open that anything goes — a room you can enter by one door and leave by another, at will, and remain a Marxist all the while. This has been quite a phenomenon in recent years, with such Marxists either unaware or refusing to see that in 'further developing' Marxism, they have been really exiting from it. That this ex-Marxism has generally preferred the tag post-Marxism (which has a nicer ring to the ears) cannot hide the truth that in fact Marxism itself has been abandoned. If the critics, saving themselves the trouble of engagement with particular issues, of debating the empirical validity of this or that Marxist concept, which would after all require a developed knowledge of not vulgar but authentic Marxist traditions, are

happily busy pulling the ontological or epistemological carpet out from under Marxist or any other radical thinking as such, so many on the Left, knowledgeable and serious scholars otherwise, too have been engaged in similar or parallel exercises of their own, thus adding their own 'Marxist' endorsement to the familiar proclamation of the 'obsolescence' of Marxism. In ridding themselves of the sin of 'orthodoxy' and revising earlier 'Marxism' to make Marxism suitable for our post-modern times, they have been simply revising Marxism out of existence and doing so as Marxists, or as they prefer to describe themselves as 'post'- or 'neo'- Marxists. We have already seen how this 'revision' or 'updating' of Marxism has often meant only a regression into social democratic non-Marxism or, further down, into the long-discredited bourgeois orthodoxies of yester years. That they have chosen to describe all this as 'going beyond' Marxism, only reminds us of what Sartre had once said. Stating that 'Marxism is the ultimate possible horizon of our age' he had added, 'and attempts to go beyond Marx frequently end up *falling* short of him.'

Before I state and affirm a few of the basic positions in Marxism which, for the present at least, cannot be surrendered or revised without ceasing to be Marxist, there is another aspect of the recent developments within Marxism that deserves to be taken note of.

While 'official' Marxism, religiously dogmatic in theory and unashamedly revisionist in practice reigned supreme in the politics on the left, often serving only as a legitimising ideology in the 'socialist world' and the communist movement, the post-Second World War period saw Marxism acquire a new lease of life in the academies of the West. As the centre of Marxist scholarship came to be displaced from Germany and South-European countries to the United States and England, mid-seventies onward there was an unprecedented growth, a virtual deluge of Marxism, numberless philosophical and exegetical works, politically-desiccated culture studies, and a variety of Marxisms — 'Analytical'... 'Neo-classical', 'Game Theoretic', 'Rational Choice', etc. etc. This certainly filled up a few 'empty spaces', lighted up some dark corners, clarified many unresolved issues and made for greater rigour in Marxist theoretical debates. But whatever the gains, it was a deluge of academic or 'theoreticist' Marxism which was in the main a shift away from the traditional or core concerns of classical Marxism as a critical social theory and a revolutionary doctrine. Marxism became an academic discipline, a subject for study in the universities. Even outside the universities, it came to acquire similar academic, fragmentist and scholastic features. The significant fact is that, whatever its strength or weakness, unlike 'official' Marxism which it scoffed at and rejected, this Marxism had no ties at all with Left political movements at home nor any links with liberation struggles or other emancipatory movements stirring in the Third World. Some sort of 'intellectual Marxism' that Trotsky once spoke of, 'a Marxism which ends only in thinking and not acting', this Marxism has been essentially impotent politically.

This is how Douglas Dowd saw the situation in the early eighties: noticing that 'the years since the Second World War have unquestionably produced more people in the United States who see themselves as Marxists, more Marxist periodicals and books, more university and other classes taught by Marxists... than at any time in US history', he wrote:

But in the same years, and despite growing and widespread cynicism, skepticism, despair, and anger of ordinary working people concerning various aspects of the society (though seldom 'the system'), the upsurge of Marxism has just unquestionably coincided with — not, one trusts, caused — a noticeable decline in the overall political effectiveness of the Left in the United States, and an associated dimming of prospects here for even a mildly improving, let alone a democratic socialist society. The Marxists, mostly out of,

or still connected with, universities, tend to function like a suburban swimming pool: self-contained and self-purifying.

More recently John Saville has written:

There are more Marxist in Britain today than there have ever been; there are more socialist books on the shelves than at any previous period; and there are serious journals of the Left. The gap, however, between socialist theory and socialist practice continues to widen, and while we are not yet in the American situation, where an annual meeting of 3000 socialist scholars can meet in New York with almost no impact on practical politics, we do seem to be moving, albeit slowly, in the same direction.

And we have the cryptic comment of a sympathetic observer, Hugh Stretton, which has a relevance beyond its bare statement:

I do not believe the workers of the world can expect much benefit from the feuds which entangle some, contemporary Marxists in the concerns of Althusser, Habermas, and other obscure but rigid elaborators of Marx.

With the Soviet collapse the situation is obviously not the same, it is changing, though not necessarily for the better. But this paradoxical phenomenon of Marxist scholarship flourishing in countries where there seems to be less class consciousness and less of an organised Left movement, of Marxism becoming a theory without movement, does continue to have a certain relevance, even if of a negative sort, for the present and future of Marxism. It is not my concern here to explore this phenomenon in any detail. A reaction away from 'official Marxism' and the communist movement guided or misguided by it, could be one possible cause. May be 'functional rationality' that comes to govern organised academic disciplines has something to do with it — intellectual fashions emerge and are driven by peer group considerations and a competitive logic which even when it involves shifts within, even displacement and succession, yet keeps scholarship away from substantive concerns. There could also be the more important impact of the failure of the Left at home, the disastrous experience of Marxist-led regimes in the Third World and the continuing, eventually terminal, crisis of the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and East Europe. The absence of an effective political organisation capable of coordinating the whole range of political oppositional struggle against capitalism, including that at a plausible theoretical level, was certainly a factor in the situation. All this and more that can be said in this connection explains but does not justify. In a somewhat justificatory explanation we have been told: in reactionary times Marxism has become the province of intellectuals operating without any popular base in society and has lost its bearings. But the fact remains that this Marxism has offered little or nothing by way of guidance or sustenance to people struggling against these reactionary times as Marxism has indeed done, and not lost its bearings, in other such times. Perhaps there has been safety too in staying away from politics and political struggle. Scholars are not known to be immune to such or similar considerations.

Whatever the explanation or justification for it, this Marxism, a theory without a movement, is a significant phenomenon within Marxism. It has been quite influential in its own way, finding adherents even among the academic and intellectual circles in the far-off lands of the Third World. Its real importance perhaps lies in providing, understandably enough, a breeding ground for post-Marxism, when it was not itself already post-Marxist. What is more those who came to Marxism via this route, in the West or the East, have generally made an easy and natural transition to post-modernism — and carried its political impotence with them. (Incidentally, how you come to Marxism is an important question — via this academic Marxism or 'official'

Marxism once sanctioned by Moscow, via Lenin or Mao, or, more recently, Rosa Luxemburg or Gramsci, or for that matter via Stalin or Trotsky and the Fourth International. They have all contributed to Marxism, some more and better than others. But it is still best to come to Marxism via Marx and Engels.)

Marx sure would have difficulty in recognising a Marxism that is all theory and no movement just as he would have in recognising that other scripture-quoting 'official' Marxism with its scientific 'Brahmanical' concern for 'ideological purity'. Much is made of the scholarship involved in this Marxism and there is no denying it either. But a revolutionary, Marx was a scholar too, a 'man of science' as Engels put it. And typical of this 'man of science' is his response to the news of the great run his theories were then having in Czarist Russia. On December 14, 1882, Karl Marx, old, sick and dying, thus wrote to his daughter Laura Lafargue:

Nowhere is my success more delightful to me: it gives me the satisfaction that I damage a power which, besides England, is the true bulwark of the old society.

Yes, *damage* is the word. One wonders how much of recent Marxist scholarship can claim this quality for itself? A distinguished Marxist himself, G.E.M. de Ste Croix once wrote of 'the disastrous developments of Marx's thought by many of his followers'. We have noticed some of these in the preceding pages. Of his disciples in another age — the French Marxists of the late 1870s — Marx had said; 'All I know is that I am no "Marxist".' He would have felt much the same about quite a few 'Marxists' of our own, more recent times. As the German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger says in his moving short poem *Karl Heinrich Marx*:

*I see you betrayed
by your disciples
only your enemies
remained what they were.*

A concern for theory has been central to the authentic Marxist tradition. As a scientific as well as a revolutionary doctrine, it visualises the relationship between theory and practice as a dialogue, a dialectical relationship in which theory guides practice but is modified and enriched by the experience offered by practice. That is how it grows in truth and this truth matters. Theory cannot act as a guide to practice — subject to modifications imposed on it by practice — unless it offers a true account of the nature of the social world. Marxism emerged and saw itself, and still sees itself, not as anything complete, perfect or final, but as the most adequate, pre-eminently true and fertile theory for the emancipatory practices of our time.

Marxism's concern for theory has to be noted and emphasised not only for its intrinsic importance but also because, along with proclamations of 'obsolescence' or 'death' of Marxism, it has been claimed that 'there is no such thing as Marxism', and in support is mentioned Marx's revelation of his own non-Marxism. This is Marx's often cited statement which we have just noticed: 'All I know is that I am no "Marxist".' The citing seems to have accelerated in recent years; it is doing the rounds today in seminars and conferences, learned articles and books, and espoused by an increasing number of Marxists gone 'open-minded' in order to gain respectability and acceptance among their bourgeois peers. This rather pointed quip is one of the most misunderstood and misleading of the quotes from Karl Marx. In betraying its utter ignorance of

Marx and Marxism, the misrepresentation here only lends substance to Marx's complaint: 'Yes, if people could only read!' Aware of the power of 'thought' — 'As soon as the lightning of thought has struck deep into the virgin soil of the people, they will emancipate themselves and become men'; or again, 'Theory becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses' — Marx was extremely sensitive to matters of theory, his own and that of his opponents, and waged a lifelong struggle in defence of his own ideas not only against his opponents, but also un-understanding followers. This quote is precisely an expression of this sensitivity and thus means the very opposite of what it is made out to be by hostile critics or 'open-minded' and ignorant friends. Marx's expression is really a comment on the 'so-called "Marxism" in France', 'an altogether peculiar product, according to Engels. Marx felt compelled to tell his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, face to face that he and other French Marxists of the late seventies had not understood his theory and politics. A comment on the incapacity of would-be disciples to understand his ideas, what the quote really means is this: if what you people are putting out is Marxism, then I am no Marxist! Commenting on parallel misunderstandings or misinterpretations of Marxism, Engels had once written of 'how not to translate Marx'. Here we have a good example of 'how not to quote Marx'.

In drawing attention to Marx's sensitivity in matters of theory, I am only stating the fact that there *is* such a thing as Marxism, that we can legitimately speak of an authentic Marxist tradition. It has its 'empty spaces' and 'silences', its share of anomalies and unresolved problems, and contradictions too. But all this notwithstanding it has its basic propositions which hold together as an eminently self-consistent body of thought and which cannot be abandoned without ceasing to be Marxist. No doubt Marxism has suffered several serious, though by no means fatal, political defeats, but none of its basic positions have been refuted, let alone replaced by those offered by any more powerful alternative or successor. Marxism continues to be not only a viable, indeed a robust, social scientific research programme, but its core insights remain indispensable to any serious emancipatory project for our times which, insofar as it has to be an opposition to and a negation of capitalism, can only be socialist in its proximate direction and ultimate outcome. Rosa Luxemburg's claim, however, strong or monopolistic it may sound these days, is till substantially true: 'no socialism... outside of Marxist socialism'. At the very least, no emancipatory struggle in this capitalist era can ignore or bypass Marxism and yet hope for success.

Critiques of Marxism, of course, continue, suitably sophisticated to be in tune with the times, that is, with the fashionable post-Marxist or post-modernist trappings. There is the occasional insightful writing, but most often only a rehashing of the old, much-too-tired themes: Marxism is scientistic and monadic (and, therefore, also authoritarian), it is determinist and teleological and class reductionist, its objectivism is a denial of the role of the subjective, and so on. If, oblivious of the dialectics of men and circumstances, of freedom and necessity in Marx, that Marx so well expressed in his early *Theses on Feuerbach*, Karl Popper once condemned Marxism as the most dangerous 'Historicism' (which denies the importance of 'human will, consciousness and intelligence', regards ideas and ideals as largely impotent or irrelevant, and reduces man to 'a pawn', 'a somewhat insignificant instrument in the general development of mankind') and about the same time, Michael Oakeshott

denounced Marxism for exactly the opposite reasons, as a most dangerous 'Rationalism' (which gives high importance to man, his reason and freedom of action, to the role of ideas and ideals as human beings go about making their own history), armies of strawpersons continue to be set up and duly annihilated as Marxism, by positing new or resurrecting old rigid oppositions between men and circumstances, between freedom and necessity, between objectivism and subjectivity, between strict inevitabilism and indeterminacy, between monadic, linear causality and non-causality, between single agency and unstructured multiplicity, between scientism and rejection of science, and so on — all of which is entirely alien to the materialist dialectics of Marx and which Marxism rejects. Characteristic of the current criticism, post-Marxist or post-modernist, is its near-exclusive preference for a supposedly 'philosophical' attack on Marxism. More than questioning substantive Marxist propositions and analytic concerns, or denying particular historical materialist postulates, such as the systemically capitalist nature of the modern industrial order, which is hardly to be denied, the critics have sought to undermine, if not wholly reject, the philosophical basis of Marxism as an explanatory enterprise. In the currently fashionable post-modernist philosophical disputes, conducted in its own incomprehensible or obfuscating jargon, to accuse any theory of working with such concepts as 'reductionism', 'essentialism', 'functionalism' or 'universalism' is deemed sufficient to dismiss it entirely. And the 'modernist' theory that most prominently stands accused of committing these four 'methodological sins' is Marxism. The critics' analyses which question and reject these concepts have consistently refused to face the fact that these concepts, properly used, are literally integral to any useful form of intellectual activity. Indeed without some version of these 'four sins of modernist thinking', as they have been called, the very notion of explanation in social theory cannot be sustained. Used not in a crude or, vulgar but properly nuanced and sophisticated manner, they are simply inescapable in any searching explanatory endeavour. Of course, insofar as certain practitioners of Marxism have been guilty of their crude or vulgar use, such Marxism is deserving of criticism. But it seems that even the best of critics, including many sympathetic ones, have generally preferred to go in search of only vulgar Marxism, or what Sartre once called 'lazy Marxism', in order to secure credibility for their attack, rather than confront the authentic Marxist tradition, which I have chosen to describe, somewhat symbolically, as Marxism of Karl Marx. In which case they may have well hit upon what really needs to be done, and is also worth doing, namely, going to Marx not to find what is not there or is flawed, dated or gone vulgar, but to discover what his Marxism nevertheless offers as a critical social theory. And it still has a great deal to offer, far more than any other tradition of thought in our times. Again, it is this which accounts for its strength and continuing relevance.

Criticism is welcome, always, even of the mistaken kind. A reminder of the deformations, of what has gone vulgar, compels us to look within for the tendencies which too have contributed, and seek rectification. But surely this does not mean replacing 'lazy Marxism' with a still more lazy 'post-Marxism' or post-modernism. The real task lies elsewhere. It is to recover the classical tradition of Marxism, its basic positions or components as they emerge from the vital and mature works of Marx (as of Engels) and his lifelong practice, and the works and practice of followers who remained 'fidel' to him.

These positions ranging from a most general view of the world and man's place in it, of human life and destiny, to particular principles or doctrines, concerning philosophy, science, economics, politics and ethics, culture, art and literature, and so on, are not an eclectic affair. They are interrelated and cohere together in a way that gives Marxism its distinctive identity as a body of scientific thought which retains its validity and relevance today. Open and undogmatic methodologically, skeptical in the true scientific sense, this Marxism yet cannot accommodate anything and everything, certainly not the various forms of currently fashionable hyphenated Marxisms. Its basic positions, as already stated, cannot be abandoned without ceasing to be Marxist. They can only be abandoned if the growth of our knowledge so decrees. As stated earlier Marxism as such is not my concern in these notes. It would suffice for my purpose here to offer, even at the risk of being charged with dogmatism or oversimplification, a bare statement of some, only some, of its basic positions as I understand them.

Marxism, with its twin premises of materialism and dialectics as formulated and interpreted by the founders — to be distinguished from 'official' Marxism's 'dialectical materialism', 'that dreadful term', as Althusser was once compelled to call it, which surely put generations of young and old Soviet citizens off Marxism and bored or frightened as many away from it else where — provides the basis for any viable scientific world view today. Its materialism accepts the reality of the world 'just as it exists without any foreign admixture', as Engels put it, or as Einstein saw it: a law-governed 'world of things existing as real objects'. This is a world existing independently of our knowledge and the objectivity of ideological or socio-cultural constructions in no way contradicts the materialist postulate concerning the chronological and ontological primacy of being over consciousness. For dialectics, viewed in its most general form, this world is a complex, multi-level, evolving world of contexts, connections, contradictions and processes, a 'whole vast interconnection of things' that is constantly changing, 'coming into being and passing away', evolving through contradictions and conflicts, the interaction and interpenetration of various, often contradictory, components. It is a world whose dynamic of self-development accommodates not only quantitative changes, but qualitative leaps as well, transformations and counter transformations in which realities are at the same time preserved and transcended in ways that seem to defy logic, unless one's logic is dialectical. Integral to a dialectical materialist world view is the belief that this world is knowable, that is, can be rendered intelligible within a unified framework of principles, that 'the truth is the whole', and 'all science would be superfluous if the appearance, the form, and the nature of things were wholly identical', that while the search for truth is unending, and 'absolute truth' is out, there is genuine growth of our knowledge (as of morality too), in the course of human history.

Philosophy as our most general way of looking at and making sense of the world is of utmost importance for how we live, think and act in the world. And literally everyone has his philosophy. There is none so poor as not to have philosophy of his own and none so rich either as to be able to do without one. As A.E. Taylor has pointed out 'we have no choice whether we shall have a philosophy or not, but only the choice whether we shall form our theories consciously and in accord with some intelligible principle or unconsciously

and at random'. In other words, the only real choice is to have a philosophy as rational and scientific as we possibly can make it, that is, as much in correspondence with the nature of things in general as our current stage of knowledge allows and this is precisely what Marxism as a philosophy offers. It is indeed *the* philosophy for our times; at the very least, Marxism has to be central to any sane way of looking at and acting in the world today. As a corollary of its revolutionary politics, Marxism accepts the obligation to, as Mao said, 'liberate philosophy from the confines of the philosophers' lecture rooms and text books and turn it into a sharp weapon in the hands of the masses'.

We may here notice the way Paul Baran has put the argument. Speaking of Marxism as 'an intellectual attitude, or a way of thought, a philosophical position', he has described its 'fundamental principle' as 'continuous, systematic, and comprehensive confrontation of reality with reason.' Not that this principle originated with Marx and Engels. It has been central to all progressive thought in history and there already existed a great philosophical tradition which centred on the critique of reality in the light of reason and whose aim and purpose was to seek out and establish the pre-requisites or conditions for the growth and development of human beings; 'yet it was left for Marx and Engels to take a decisive step forward in this centuries-old effort at confronting reality with reason. They translated the notions of both reality and reason from the metaphysical abstractions and idealistic assertions — the forms in which they appear in most pre-Marxian thought — into living, concrete categories of real continuously moving, continually changing human existence.' That is, they put them on a basis at once materialist and dialectical. As such Marxism by no means implies a dogmatic finding as to what defines reason or what constitutes reality at any given time. For it, the task of any fruitful intellectual endeavor is as Baran puts it,

to define and continuously redefine the meaning of reason, to assess and continuously reassess the structure of reality — confronting systematically the one with the other, pointing out the short comings of the concrete, specific reality in terms of equally concrete, equally specific standards of reason. Remaining realistic because it derives its frame of reference from the study and observation of the attained stage of historical development, and retaining the courage to be utopian because it sets its sights on the not yet realised but already visible potentialities of the future, such intellectual effort performs an overridingly important function: it serves as a guide post to the next steps in mankind's forward movement.

This is precisely the task that Marx carried out for his times which are our times too: that is, he confronted the reality of capitalism with reason to provide us a guide-post to the next step, which is socialism in humankind's forward movement. Marx's *Capital* is an exemplary exercise in the use of the dialectical materialist method where, moving from appearance to reality, from form to substance, from immediate external relations to deeper lying inner interconnections, he explores 'the hidden structure' or 'the inner physiology' of capitalism to explain — and explanation, not description, however impressive, is the essence of a scientific theory — how capitalism emerges and functions as a system (a systemic whole) and what possibilities, both positive and negative it holds for the future of humankind. Marx's is an explanation that still holds.

This brief reference to Marx's achievement in *Capital* should make it clear that Marxism believes in the universality of science. Science illuminates the natural world. However differently and relatively less adequately, but using fundamentally similar methods, science can do the same for the social world. In historical materialism, which can well be regarded as its hard core as a science, Marxism has provided so far the most adequate intellectual tools for such a social scientific enterprise, for illuminating the structure and dynamics of social formations, the movement of society in its historical development. Speaking of Marx's achievement here, V.G. Kiernan has pointed out: 'Much as Columbus and those who came after him convinced men once for all that the earth was round, Marx brought recognition of an order and priority of relationships among all human concerns.' Or, as Raymond Williams has put it: 'It is true that there are forms of material production which always and everywhere precede all other forms (in society)... The enormous theoretical shift introduced by classical Marxism — in saying these are the primary productive activities — was of the most fundamental importance.' With historical materialism Marx indeed opened up the continent of social sciences, as Althusser stated it years ago. As Sweezy and Magdoff have recently stressed: 'Historical materialism as first formulated in the *German Ideology* and later extended and developed in the *Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital* is the firm foundation on which all that is best in social sciences has been and continues to be based'.

Historical materialism remains central to any viable science of society. Marx and Engels advanced the general proposition that 'the mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part.' Making a more specific reference to social relation of production as the economic 'base' which 'determines' the super structure of a social formation, Marx thus located the source of its structural dynamics which also makes for the centrality of class struggle in historical processes: 'It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers... which holds the innermost secret, the hidden foundations of the entire social structure'...

It should be clear, therefore, that Marx's view of the place and role of 'economy' in society is no recognition of the so-called 'economic factor', often vulgarly read into historical materialism. This recognition as economic interpretation of social life and history, is as old as Plato and is a commonplace of bourgeois social science today. Marx's is an entirely different, differently precise and specific argument. Viewed in a Marxist, that is, historical materialist perspective, a society or social formation is not merely an aggregate or random togetherness of parts, factors, levels or instances. It is a complex and differentiated social whole or 'totality', a historically specific structured interdependence of parts, which is loaded by predominance in the long run of one part within it, the economy ('the mode of production', with its 'social relations of production', or the *economic- structural base*) and whose existence is characterised by *contradictions* (principal or structural, and other equally specific secondary ones within and between various parts) that account for its dynamics, its concrete *overdetermined* historical development — the whole shaping and expressing itself through the parts, and the parts, even as they represent and bear the signature of the whole, constituting, in their inter-

relatedness, the specific unity that makes it a whole, *the* whole and no other, that is, a particular society or social formation.

The *determination* involved, in so far as we must use this term, is neither simple or straightforward nor unique, and nor is it to be understood in any economic or class reductionist manner, it is something far more complex and problematic, realised on an economic base but through any number of interactions and mediations, horizontal, vertical and across each other, and allowing for other, base-corresponding, possibilities — unless, of course, what is involved is a revolutionary, that is structural transformation of the economic base itself. The important point is that the parts, aspects or instances, generally referred to as ‘superstructure’, along with their contradictions, are not some immediate or epiphenomenal manifestation of the economic base. On the contrary, they may, and often do have, each one of them, an autonomous, irreducible, historically specific existence of their own. But this is an existence of dialectical, determined and determining, relationships to each other and to the social whole. And the dynamics of this existence, the working out of their contradictions is, in an asymmetry of reciprocal influence, most decisively conditioned by the basic economic contradictions, the structural logic of the economic base. It needs to be added that it is only within the necessities and constraints of the given objective, economic-structural situation, within this ‘determination by the economic in the *first* instance’, that whatever happens, every complex historical effect or outcome is *ultimately* determined by the activity of men in pursuit of their aims or purposes.

Hence also the primacy of politics, not economics, in Marxism. It is not merely that historical materialism accommodates or incorporates the subjective side of things, which, after all, is also a part of real life, produced like everything else that matters to us. As a philosophy of praxis, Marxism puts subjectivity, willed human action that is politics, at the centre of social practice for our times (At least that is how Marx himself, unlike so many Marxists in recent years, understood and practised Marxism throughout his life). Given a Marxist understanding of society as a structured whole, and the crucial place or role of ‘economy’ in it, any fundamental change in society involves as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition a changing of its economic structural base. And this is possible only through politics of revolution. That is why Marx spoke up for revolution as ‘the highest form of class struggle’. This is how politics, as revolutionary politics, comes to acquire primacy in Marxism. But this primacy does not in any way contradict the other, better known, Marxist proposition about ‘the base determining the superstructure’, it only calls for its better understanding. The obvious implication of our argument is that in the absence of politics changing ‘the economic base’ of society, the logic of this base shall assert itself and, in howsoever different ways, ‘determine’ superstructure, reducing politics itself to something superstructural in its essential character and outcome. Such is the dialectics of economy and politics, of science and revolution, in the social theory of Karl Marx.

Marxism certainly, though in its own specific manner, emphasises the special role of ‘the economy’ in society — and without this emphasis Marxism would be theoretically indistinguishable from conventional or any other

'sociology' — but this does not make Marxism either 'determinist' in politics, or 'reductionist' in its explanation. For Marxism, 'men make their own history', and in so far as they cannot make it except under given circumstances or objective conditions, structurally constituted or determined by the prevalent mode of production, revolutionary politics, gives them the freedom to transcend or transform them. As for 'reductionism', one must recognise the difference between explanation that is reductionist *and* explanation. It is integral to the very act of explanation that some things are picked out as important, given prominence over others, in terms of their effects or influence. Otherwise there is no explanation, only aggregates of things, disparate elements, or descriptive fragments — and this surely does not take one very far. In fact, a notion of explaining the events of one domain in terms of those seen to be important enough from another domain is basic to what we mean by an 'explanation'. Marxists pick out economy, economic or class structures, or classes, for prominence or importance for the simple reason that they consider them to have, with their exceptionally powerful effects in society, the necessary explanatory potential for the purposes they, have in view. Again, to see some things as important is not to see them as the *only* ones. The real issue here is not the possibility of explanation or Marxism's reductionism which is now a very tired theme and only betokens political prejudice or philosophical illiteracy, but the empirical validity and achievement of this scientific, that is, explanatory hypothesis of Marxism, relative to what bourgeois social theory has to offer in explaining the world around us and the worlds past. In any unbiased assessment the latter can well be envious of the Marxist record.

This record certainly allows us to affirm that historical materialism as a theory about the dominant, not the only or exclusive, lines of social and historical causation has been deservedly validated as the most fruitful in the field, that the metaphor of base and superstructure, as metaphor and not a rigidly structuralist, mechanistically interpreted, formula, is a theoretically viable one, that the concept of 'economic structure' has a well justified explanatory pre-eminence in scientific understanding of social phenomena, that causal determination of social and cultural life by economic structures, without excluding interaction, is a valid general proposition, that class and economic structures do have powerful effects, both shaping and constraining, on ideas, ideologies and culture, on institutions like the state, on political and other practices in society, that class is not just another 'identity', it is a structural constituent of a social formation and therefore class questions are central to revolutionary politics and to any pro-people social transformation or reconstruction of society, that objective or structural class positions are indeed the primary, not sole or exclusive, historical determinants of social and political identities and alignments, institutions, ideologies and politics and that, as Ralph Miliband has put it: 'when all is said and done, Marxism as class analysis handled with due care, remains an instrument of unsurpassed value in the interpretation of social and political life, and in the explanation of phenomena which, in other hands, remain unexplained or misunderstood.'

The concept of class, ambiguities endemic to such concepts notwithstanding, remains central not only to explaining historical processes, but to the possibilities of human emancipation. At issue is the fact of class struggle as the motive force of history. If a grasp of the dynamics of class struggle, is essential to understanding politics, it is even more so for pursuit of revolutionary politics. And this does not mean any kind of class-reductionist politics. Classical Marxism, even as it laid a historically specific emphasis on the role of the working class, yet visualised the proletarian movement (as, for example, in *Communist Manifesto*) as the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.' This obviously implies drawing together a whole range of other classes against the bourgeoisie, which indeed was a key concern of Marx whenever he touched on the role of peasantry or petty bourgeoisie in the revolutionary processes of his time. Understood and defined not in narrow economic or reductionist but generous and pluralist terms, class struggle or struggles if you like, are still going to be at the centre of any genuinely emancipatory, that is, socialist project of the present or the future. Philosophical presuppositions of Marxism such as materialism and dialectics are important as is its explanatory enterprise of historical materialism, but the insistence upon the viability and relevance of Marxism in practical terms, means insisting upon the centrality of class struggle. Class struggle is indeed the conceptual linchpin in as much as it is here that Marxists and socialists have to fight for the truth they believe in.

It can be legitimately argued that Marx overestimated the revolutionary potential of the working class. Whatever the reasons, the European proletariat can be said to have failed on the whole to live upto his expectations — though an European revolution did occur and the the Russian proletariat under Bolshevik leadership certainly vindicated Marx. Also, important changes have occurred in the conditions, composition and structure of the working class since Marx's days. Economic globalisation and technological change has not only increased the political power of capital, it has also weakened the working class everywhere, not the least in the mother countries of capitalism. There is also the historical experience of the failed or successful revolutions and revolutionary struggles of the twentieth century, as also of the more recent 'new social movements'. All this and more make it abundantly clear that the agency for a socialist transformation has to be specifically multiple and more inclusive, according to the situation in different countries. But apart from the fact that this view is not entirely alien to Marx, as even a cursory look at his political writings would reveal, it does not in any way exclude the vital role of the working class in the struggle against global capitalism and, the past failures notwithstanding, it may still have a decisive role to play in the emancipatory struggles of the advanced capitalist countries. The working class everywhere continues to have an objective interest in socialism. I may add that, in line with Marx's view of the working class, it is rational to speak of the objective

interests of a class or classes, that the victims of capitalism anywhere have an objective interest in socialism, and that among its victims, the structurally significant class or classes have more radical or revolutionary potential than others and, therefore, a possibly privileged role in struggling for and effecting a socialist transformation. This also means that in so far as it is the contradictions of capitalism (and allied exploitative structures) which generate the conditions and forces for socialist politics, the need is to analyse these contradictions and locate the main or worst victims of the extant exploitation, the class or classes with the strongest possible interest in a socialist transformation, who, having gained the requisite revolutionary consciousness — 'won the theoretical awareness of their loss', as Marx put it — shall be the driving social forces of socialist or socialism-oriented struggles. It is indeed the task of the socialist movement to bring in and foster revolutionary consciousness among these classes as also to develop appropriate programmes, politics and organisation to help them pursue their struggles more effectively and purposefully. If the point is to actively change the world, not merely interpret it, then Marxism is, above all, about using class analysis to understand the ongoing socio-economic and political processes and pursuing *class struggle* for realisation of *historically possible emancipatory goals*, which goals in their immediate or ultimate definition today can only be socialism as Karl Marx visualised it.

At the core of Marxism, best illustrative of its scientific character and continuing relevance, lies Marx's critical analysis of capitalism, its structures and contradictions and the laws of its movement, which, as he foresaw, almost inexorably lead to its worldwide extension, a global domination of capital, even as its structural logic simultaneously manifests itself, in each society and across societies, globally, in the tendency towards accumulation of wealth and affluence at one end and poverty and misery at the other. Marx's empirical analysis of capitalism is suffused with a profoundly perceptive ethical critique of capitalism, drawing attention to the inherent inhumanity of its origins, existence and worldwide expansion, its manifold, historically specific alienations, and the ultimate 'barbarism' that its market-based regime of private property and profit-making portends. Against the pitiable, fragmentary and alienated existence which is the lot of human beings under capitalism where all the truly human senses are, swamped by a historically transient substitute sense, the sense of property and 'the more you have, the less you are', Marx pointed to the historically possible ideal of a 'truly rich human life', of human beings appropriating the world with all their glorious human senses, 'the realm of freedom ...beyond the sphere of actual material production (where) begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself.'

Marx certainly underestimated capitalism's potential for growth and development, but his framework for understanding the capitalist system remains as illuminating as ever, his empirical and ethical critique of capitalism still holds, as does his argument that, an inherently irrational

system, capitalism yet prepares the necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for a transition to a more rational social order, a socialist, ultimately communist, society. Whatever may have happened to socialism in the former Soviet Union, Marx's argument for socialism, seen essentially as a negation or transcendence of capitalism, has lost more of its legitimacy or force, and the abolition of capitalist production relations remains the strategic goal, a necessary but not sufficient act within the project of emancipatory social transformation, defining as it were the fundamental moment, the decisive point of revolutionary rupture in the epochal process of transformation from capitalism to socialism.

The current 'triumph of capitalism' is often cited as the reason for Marxism having become 'dead' or 'obsolete'. The critics seem to be in an unseemly hurry. Marxism, given its signal achievement in this area, can well be defined as the science of capitalism none of whose fundamental theses have been refuted so far. Therefore, it has been suggested that it is simply incoherent to celebrate the "death of Marxism" in the same breath with which one announces the definitive triumph of capitalism and the market. The latter would rather seem to augur a secure future for the former, leaving aside the matter of how 'definitive' its triumph could possibly be. To put the argument differently, and a bit more sharply, capitalism has 'triumphed' to become universal, more so than ever before; but it is universal not only in the global sense but also in the sense that its systemic logic — the logic of accumulation, profit-maximisation, competition, commodification — has become universalised, intensifying the polarisation of wealth and poverty within and across countries and penetrating, as never before, every aspect, the very heart and soul of social life, and nature itself, with devastating consequences everywhere. And no one, then or now, has seen and explained this systemic logic of capitalism, its capacity to 'totalise' itself in society, better than Karl Marx, even as he also posed the issue: 'socialism or barbarism'. It is this which makes Marx and his Marxism more and not less relevant to our times. In other words, so long as capitalism, triumphant or otherwise, lasts, Marxism can neither die nor go obsolete, nor socialism, as a negation of capitalism, disappear from the agenda of human history. Towards the end of eighties, even as the communist regimes collapsed in Eastern Europe, the *New Yorker*, 'an up-market magazine for sybarites of world over', celebrated the occasion with an article entitled 'Triumph of Capitalism', whose argument reverberated worldwide, setting off a new round of hosannas to capitalism and pronouncements of 'the death of Marxism'. Now less than a decade later, in a bout of futurology, bringing together a series of articles around the theme 'what's next?', the same *New Yorker* has gone looking for the 'next most influential thinker', and the article, written by one who is no Marxist, now or ever before, is entitled 'the Return of Karl Marx'! It concludes: 'His (Marx's) books will be worth reading as long as capitalism endures'. Yes, Marxism is back and Marx is going to be with us so long as we live in a capitalist society.

So much for the more basic Marxist positions. I have already touched on some of these earlier and may return to others later in my argument. Here, in

conclusion, I would only add that with its scientific world view, its powerful dialectical-analytic method, the depth and sweep of its explanatory theory, historical materialism, the continuing validity of its analysis of capitalism, the exceptionally rich humanism of its ethical commitment, and the unqualified sanction it provides for the struggle of the exploited and oppressed everywhere, for revolutionary politics in behalf of socialism, there is enough to be said for Marxism to justify Sartre's aphoristic summing up. He had spoken of Marxism as the *necessary* philosophy of our time.

A contrasting reference to the mainstream, that is 'bourgeois' social science will help clarify the nature and achievement of Marxism as social science. A somewhat detailed comment on the subject will be found in my *Reason, Revolution and Political Theory*. Here I will only offer a few necessarily brief and fragmentary observations. The claim is not that Marx's social theory fully accounts for all social phenomena, or that it has answers to all our problems, or that there is any finality to the answers this theory itself provides. There are no such claims, promises or pretensions in Marx. On the contrary, as we have already noticed, Marxism has its 'silences' and 'empty spaces', its contradictions and any number of unresolved tensions: for example, between determinism and contingency, structure and agency, individuality and sociality, spontaneity and organization, and so on, which tensions, I may add, are an intrinsic part of ever-changing real life. On its own Marxism often yields large questions rather than provide neat answers. Its own strength rather lies in highlighting questions or problems as no other social theory does and in suggesting better ways of understanding and resolving them, in theory as well as in practice. The claim is that Marxism offered and remains a superior mode of analysis of our social world, better than anything that bourgeois social theory has to offer. It is not merely that 'Marx's combination of insight and method permanently altered the manner in which reality would thereafter be perceived', as Heilbroner once put it, it is that none has provided, so far, a better method of understanding this reality, the reality of society and historical processes. It is in this sense that Marx opened up the continent of social sciences, as Althusser stated it years ago. But there is also more specific and substantive claim. It is that guided by his dialectical method, Marx's own exploration of this continent (which he saw as a never-ending enterprise) has gained for us knowledge of the structure and dynamics of the contemporaneously dominant social formation, capitalism, better than anything that bourgeois social theory can claim for itself. In fact, whatever be its other achievements, here bourgeois social science has signally failed to deliver. And for reasons which make for a direct contrast with Marxist social science.

In his masterly survey, *Science in History*, J.D. Bernal has pointed out that it is 'a very dangerous thing to look too closely into the workings of one's own society'. For this may well bring out its arbitrary, irrational and unjustifiable features. This 'dangerous thing' is what Marxist social science has always attempted and the dangers involved are precisely what has pushed bourgeois social science persistently in the direction of *apologetics*. If truth indeed be the concern of social science, then in the kind societies we have, class divided and oppressive, unequal, unjust and more or less iniquitous, social science cannot

but be, essentially, a subversive exercise, dangerous for those who have 'dominion' in society, as Hobbes put it long ago. Hence Bernal's argument that 'the backwardness and emptiness of the social sciences are due to the overriding reason that in all class societies they are inevitably corrupt'. The corrupt or apologetic character of bourgeois social science as a whole has been facilitated or reinforced, and justified as well, by its philosophical orientations or 'Methodology', which has been in the main a modernised version of 'the metaphysical mode of thought' which Engels had found wanting as 'one-sided, limited, abstract' because it studies things 'in their isolation, detached from the whole vast interconnection of thing; and, therefore, not in their motion, but in their repose; not in their life, but in their death.' He had added: 'in considering individual things it loses sight of their connections; in contemplating their existence it forgets their coming into being and passing away; in looking at them at rest it leaves their motion out of account;... it cannot see the woods for the trees.' Modeling itself *uncritically* on modern natural science, rather as it appeared to be in its period of 'adolescence', as it came up in opposition to 'rationalism' of late medieval scholasticism, and throwing out philosophy in the name of, rejecting metaphysics, the practice of mainstream social science has been all along characterised by 'the fetishism of Empiricism' and the accompanying fetishism of fact-value dichotomy or 'ethical neutrality'. Focussing on 'facts' in opposition to traditional social theorising, its distrust of generalisation or theory failed to understand that science, in its maturity, is not factual statements but *explanatory* theory, a knotting together of the empirical and the rational. An universally admitted 'hyperfactualism' followed where 'the immediately observable, measurable fact' was soon 'the Moloch', as Paul Baran called it, 'which is always seeking to devour analytic thought in contemporary social science'; 'a social science of the narrow focus, the trivial detail, the abstracted almighty unimportant fact', is how C. Wright Mills described it. It spoke with Robert Dahl, an eminent practitioner himself, of 'the rapid development of the social sciences, with their rigour and empiricism', and even boasted of 'the intellectual revolution brought about by the development of logico-experimental reasoning', yet it has been admittedly 'concerned often with a meticulous observation of the trivial'. As Rogow reported it: 'the data stand mountain high, with fresh increments arriving quarterly (when the Journals appear) alongside molehills of generalisation and theory'. This essentially quantitative output, certainly has its 'molehills', its undoubtedly valuable 'little truths' about contemporary society, but no 'big truth', that is the truth about the whole that is the capitalist system, no explanation, that could take one behind 'appearances' to the 'nature of things', be it capitalism itself or the nature of things under capitalism. This reality has indeed often taken this social science 'by surprise' as, for example, eminent mainstream scholars, Easton, McWilliams, Schaar, Lowi, among others openly admitted for Political Science. Thanks to its 'metaphysical' mode of thought or 'abstracted empiricism', this social science invariably missed the wood for the trees. As regards the question of values this philosophical illiteracy of this social science found expression in its failure to recognise that which truth in natural sciences is by and large politically neutral, in social science of a class-divided society it is not only partisan but can be political dynamite, that an explanation of facts invariably has a value-slope, even if the values remain

unacknowledged, and that the very use of language, given its value-loaded nature, forbids any kind of ethical neutrality.

Recognition of its inadequacies and the accompanying loss of relevance, even when dressed up as yet another 'revolution in social science', has not made for any significantly new or radical departures in practice. Insofar as a reaction away from 'hyperfactualism' has meant a turn to theory, it is not scientific theory that *explains* through concepts which are concepts of the world, 'explaining the world by itself', as Engels had phrased it. The proliferating 'concepts' and 'conceptual frameworks' simply stand apart from the real world. 'Towards a theory of.....' that academic research is flush with is a promise that only beguiles for there are no genuine arrivals. In Oran Young's words, 'a theology of concepts' has come up, confronting as it were 'the world of facts'. 'Fetishism of the concept' replaces or supplements the 'fetishism of Empiricism', each in its own way insuring that we do not learn much about man and society, the social world we inhabit. Even the welcome shift from facts to their interconnections has engendered a 'systems theory', which, as used in social analysis, has been generally a formal or classificatory exercise with little or no explanatory value. As for 'ethical neutrality' the only real advance here, amidst a fashionable agnosticism about values, seems to be the admission that this 'neutrality' hid and still hides, from others and often from themselves as well, the social scientists' unstated commitment to the values dominant in their, that is bourgeois, society.

As knowledge became the domain of academics, the academic disciplines got organized into separate social sciences (where students study power in political science, social class in sociology, the market in economics and so on). This has had an ultimate consequence, which needs to be noticed. An essentially artificial separation — that performed a conservative detotalising ideological function in opposition to Marxism's radical 'totalising' concern with society as a whole — it has ultimately degenerated into an ever-growing, and often mindless, specialisation, where fewer and fewer people are now hearing more and more about less and less, and all the time woods continue to be missed for the trees. Contrasting this empiricistic orientation of contemporary social science with the holistic and deep-penetrating thrust of Marxism, which seeks to go behind 'the appearance' to 'the nature of things'. David McLalhan has written: 'the huge development of the social sciences in the century since Marx's death has often brought with it results that are thin in two respects: first in the vertical sense of being produced inside a narrow specialization by scholars who know more and more about less and less, and secondly in the horizontal sense that they spring from a preoccupation with the surface phenomena of society so easily available for observation and quantification'. This thinness, the failure to 'interconnect' and to reach down and question the basic assumptions of the system as a whole, obviously makes for conservatism in social science, facilitating, as not a few scholars have posited out, its easy degeneration into 'scientific applauding of official policies and defaults' (C Wright Mills), 'footnoted rationalisation and huckstering of these policies' (Neal Houghton) or plain 'capitulation to the status quo' (Christian Bay), etc. etc.

The institutionalisation of different disciplines in the academy has also had the natural consequence of strengthening the apologetic or status-quoist bias of

social science studies. The institutional success, and success within the institution, become the major concerns, which increasingly ties them down to 'policy research' for the ruling establishments, that is, finding means to their ends without any questioning of those ends. The social scientist becomes a 'specialist' or an 'expert' who, taking the existing order of 'facts' for granted and existing order of 'values' as somehow beyond rational inquiry, questions or deals with the prevailing state of affairs solely within the limited, unrelated area of his immediate preoccupation. No longer an intellectual but only an intellect worker, as Paul Baran put it, he turns 'a technician', 'typically the faithful servant, the agent, the functionary, and the spokesman for the capitalist system', whose preoccupation is with 'the job in hand', with 'the rationalisation, mastery, and manipulation of whatever branch of reality he is immediately concerned with' and not with 'the meaning of his work, its significance, its place within the entire framework of social reality'. 'His "natural" motto is to mind his own business, and ... to be as efficient and as successful at it as possible'; 'he is not concerned with the relation of the segment of human endeavour within which he happens to operate to other segments and to the totality of the historical process'. 'The concern with the whole' which as 'holism' is in any case unscientific, is not his concern and thus 'he *eo ipso* accepts the existing structure of the whole as a datum and subscribes to the prevailing criteria of rationality, to the dominant values, and to the socially enforced yardsticks of efficiency, achievement and success'. 'Taking an agnostic view of the ends themselves, he makes a fetish of 'ethical neutrality,' of his abdication *qua* social scientist, expert or scholar of all 'value-judgements', an abdication which 'amounts in practice to the endorsement of the *status quo*, to lending a helping hand to those who are seeking to obstruct any change of the existing order of things in favour of a better one.'

Another aspect of contemporary social science to which I would like to draw attention here is the way its professed 'substantive rationality' as Mannheim called it, has been virtually swamped by a 'functional rationality', facilitated by the fact of academic disciplines growing into professions, organised structures of teaching and research to make a living. Scholarship is increasingly addressed not to problems and publics but to peers and to prestige and preferment in the increasingly bureaucratized academic professions, where the professional or peer group compulsion to stay noticed and the 'publish or perish' syndrome leads to a constant search for novelty, formal and empty ingenuity, laboured exercises in originality, all sorts of irrelevant pedantry and repetitive and shoddy writing. 'Invisible colleges' and 'repute systems' have come up to set standards and certify the quality of work done. Theories are valued not for their content in terms of truth or knowledge or any kind of larger social usefulness but, as Hugh Stretton has said, 'for themselves, for their qualities of novelty or intricacy or elegance or mathematical interest', or even as tests of loyalty including 'cliquish academic loyalties'; they indeed become 'consumption goods' for the use of producers themselves, serving the social purposes of the disciplines and people who generate them rather than the social purposes of the society at large. A primary concern with the substantive problems of society, with truth, together with the recognition that 'the truth is the whole', as Hegel put it, and, therefore, social science most importantly needs to be concerned with the dynamics and evolution of the social order itself, an effort to *interconnect* things, to relate whatever specific area one is

working in to other aspects of human existence, an ability and willingness to go behind 'appearance' to 'reality' and see that 'the seemingly autonomous disparate and disjointed morsels of social existence under capitalism – literature, art, politics, the economic order, science, the cultural and psychic condition of people – can all be understood (and influenced) only if they are clearly visualised as parts of the comprehensive totality of the historical process', an awareness of the larger ends and purposes of society and implications of one's own work in relation to them -- in short, the 'substantive rationality' which, necessarily in association with a certain degree of courage, ought to govern and characterise a genuine social science or any worthwhile teaching and research, has simply lost out in the way bourgeois social science has come up and grown to its so-called maturity in this century. It is significant that the overall irrelevance of this social science has been a major topic of discussion in recent years, even among its proponents and practitioners.

At its best this social science can certainly be said to have 'served society', which, however, is not the same as 'serving truth'. Morgenthau's sharp comment here has a relevance that goes beyond the discipline he is referring to: 'it is the measure of the degree to which political science in America meets the needs of society rather than its moral commitment to the truth that it is not only eminently respectable and popular, but — what is worse — that it is also widely regarded with indifference'. At its worst, social scientists have been co-opted into 'the establishment' as, for example, David Apter has confirmed for America, and Joseph La Palombaras has wondered how they can rebut the charge that 'western social science is not much more than thinly veiled bourgeois ideology'. Not unoften this social science has sought to hide its poverty and mediocrity behind esoteric sophistication and elaborate vocabularies of weird and unintelligible jargon — 'socspeak' Malcolm Cowley called it — which has led Stanislaw Andreski to even write of 'social sciences as sorcery'. Not an unapt description, considering the overall obscurantist ideological role of much of bourgeois social science in our society. One does not have to deny the substantial achievements of bourgeois social science in certain areas to, at the same time, substantially agree with Bernal that 'much social science is merely the putting of the current practice of the trades and professions into learned language', or is science 'only by courtesy or for examination purposes'. Chomsky indeed well summed up the situation when, recognizing the overwhelmingly apologetic character of modern social science, once described its practitioners as 'a secular priesthood'!

A last word before I leave the subject of Marxism as social science. Marxism did not arise as a social science for peers or policy makers, it is social theory at the service of the exploited and the oppressed who are yet wanting to struggle for a better life. A struggling people will not get very far without some substantial knowledge of the structures they need to overthrow for their emancipation and a sense of direction in their struggle. This is what Marx sought to provide. For a better grasp of his theory we have tried to relate Marx to his times and to some of the subsequent history of Marxism. But for its effective practice, we also need to relate Marx's theory or received Marxism to our times. This makes it a legitimate object of reflection and criticism, all the more so because of the political defeat, it has suffered. The failure of the socialist enterprise in the Soviet Union has certainly precipitated an intellectual crisis for Marxism. But it is only religious dogmatism, which is impervious to

reality that sees in an intellectual crisis nothing but threats to its own certainties. Marxism does not have to do that. Any way, Marxism never had any 'certainties' of that sort. For it the crisis is also an opportunity, to reflect on itself and to rectify. New challenges have to be met — a failure here will only result in ossification and ultimate atrophy of Marxism. Rectifications are indeed called for. But this does not mean analytical regressions or obfuscations of hyphenated Marxism, or 'making sense of Marx' that puts a question mark on Marxism itself, or 'reconstruction' of Marxism that reconstructs it out, or simply lapsing into social democratic theory and practices. The task is, if I may again put it that way, a 'recovery' of Marxism of Karl Marx, a garnering of the resources of its classical tradition for facing the new situation and the tasks that lie ahead. In other words, in coping with the current crisis we don't have to in any way abandon the basic framework of Marx's theory. This framework remains the overall horizon of our activity, our orientation, not for any dogmatic reasons but for the simple fact that it remains the right orientation, that its basic thrust embraces the whole epoch of transition from capitalism to socialism. And if, and in so far as we indeed go 'beyond Marx' in our enterprise, we go with him and not against him or away from him.

* * *

Marxism is science, it is also about revolution. I have spoken of the dialectics of science and revolution in Marxism. This dialectics is not a matter only of theory guiding revolutionary practice, it also involves a commitment to revolution which Marx once described as "the conversion of all hearts and the raising of all hands in behalf of the honour of the free man", together with a recognition of moral consciousness as a vital agency of revolutionary change. A matter of head, revolution with Marx is a matter of heart also. Underlying Marx's theoretical work throughout was a proud and passionate ethical commitment, the motivating force of the moral choice he had made early in his life to stand up for 'humanity'. His was a vision or dream, a dream born of reality but dream nevertheless, 'Traum' Marx called it, that looked beyond capitalism to a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all', where all are fulfilled by equality and freedom and a truly rich human life. Communist utopianism? May be, but a legitimate utopianism based as it was on Marx's recognition of 'free conscious activity' as 'man's species character' and his awareness of the range of possibilities inhering in human nature which we cannot even imagine today, not only because of the way capitalism has blighted our essential humanity and distorted our vision but even more because we are, according to Marx, still living in our 'pre-history'. Marx saw communism as the beginning of the 'history' of a liberated humankind. Human liberation was the vision Marx pursued throughout his life and he saw capitalism barring the road to it when its own productive achievements had at last made its realization possible. This is how Marx, 'the man of science', was also a revolutionary and an advocate of class struggle.

That scholars in recent years have sought to divest Marx of this 'Traum', his 'image of the future', revolutionary commitment and advocacy of class struggle, and reduce him to another abstract savant or run-of-the-mill humanist philosopher, or turn his revolutionary doctrine into a modern metaphysics, is

generally known. But the real damage here has come from within, above all from scientism and economic deformations in the post-1880 Marxism as a whole, whose one consequence has been, as expressed by E.P. Thompson, 'the subordination of the imaginative utopian faculties within the Marxist tradition: its lack of a moral self-consciousness or even a vocabulary of desire, its inability to project any images of the future, or even its tendency to fall back in lieu of these upon the utilitarian's earthly paradise — the maximization of economic growth'. There is the need, therefore, to recover the utopian vision, moral consciousness and ethical commitments of classical Marxism. One cannot but reiterate what Thompson concluded in his vindication of utopianism of William Morris, which was also the utopianism of Karl Marx : 'What Marxism might do, for a change, is to sit on its own head a little in the interests of socialism's heart'. In this 'heart' lies the secret of Marx's life-long hostility to capitalism and his equally life-long pursuit of revolution. It is important that Marxism's claims as social science are not so recognized as to evade, obscure or push out of sight the fact that Marxism is also about revolutionary transformation of the present-day capitalist society.

Marx was by vocation, a revolutionary as Engels emphasized in his famous grave-side speech on the death of Marx. Philosopher, economist, historian, and so much else, Marx was indeed 'the man of science', said Engels. He had, however, immediately added: 'But this was not even half the man... For Marx was before all else a revolutionist... Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity, and a success such as few could rival'. Marx recognized for himself and for others the liberating quality of practical activity, the purifying power of revolutionary action in transforming the very nature of those involved in it. Teodor Shanin is very right in insisting that revolutionary ethics was as central as his historiography to Marx's political judgement and to practice flowing from it. It is this ethics, a fighting commitment to the cause of social revolution, and the moral passion that went with it, which gives its special quality to Marxism of Karl Marx, and enables us to make sense of his life — a life full of the trials and hazards of the life of a revolutionary, its political defeats, factional struggles and repeatedly dashed hopes as well as years of personal poverty and privations, 'the humiliations, torments and terrors', the '*petite miseres* (petty wretchedness)' as Marx himself put it, of the struggle for sheer physical survival which did grave damage to his wife's health and his own and were a contributory cause of the death of a daughter and two sons, years when he had no money to pay rent or buy medicine or even coffin for a dead child, when his daughters were out of school because their winter shoes were with the pawn-broker, when for days the family fed on bread and potatoes and at times even these were not available... And all this while Marx refused those other easily available 'soft options'. This life is simply inexplicable in terms of conventional scholarship, of 'science' or 'reason' or any 'theory of historical development', of some 'pure logic'. It had an altogether different logic to it, one which underlay all of Marx's theoretical work and his life-long struggle, the logic of a revolutionary commitment, of the clear-eyed choice Marx had made in the fight between the people and those who oppress and exploit them. And he had chosen to stand by the people.

In an essay Marx wrote for his school-leaving examination in 1835. 'A Young Man's Reflections on the Choice of a Career', he stated that working 'only for himself' one can 'become a famous scholar, a great sage, an excellent imaginative writer (*Dichter*) but never a perfected, truly great man'. Instead, Marx himself opted for a life 'that is most consonant with our dignity, one that is based on ideas whose truth we are wholly convinced, one that offers us largest scope in working for humanity'. This option which soon matured into a clearly defined revolutionary commitment, stayed with Marx throughout his life. Early in his youth, asserting that 'man is the highest being for man' he spoke up for 'the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, despised and rejected being'; later, about the time he finished writing *Capital*, to complete which he had sacrificed, as he said his 'health, happiness, and family', Marx wrote to a friend: 'I laugh at the so-called "practical" men with their wisdom. If one chose to be an ox, one could turn one's back on the sufferings of mankind and look after one's own skin'; towards the end, as we shall see, he stood up with the revolutionaries of the Peoples Will in Russia, against his own evolutionist disciples there.

It needs to be clearly understood that this moral option or choice, this revolutionary commitment, which was indeed the only absolute principle that governed the life and work of Karl Marx (and which his dialectics allowed), was not a matter of any scientific or historical analysis, knowledge of 'laws' or 'stages' or any other 'inevitable' of history, or 'predictions' about the future, etc. On the contrary, it entailed a seemingly 'romantic' but necessary boldness in pursuit of revolutionary possibilities. That is how, for example, even as Marx foresaw (in *Communist Manifesto*) the coming 'bourgeois revolution' in Germany, he also saw it as 'the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution'. And when this 'bourgeois revolution' indeed occurred, he proclaimed it 'our interest and our task' to seek 'to make the revolution permanent... until the proletariat has conquered state power'. Marx failed in Germany, but seventy years later, exactly as Marx had wanted, Lenin succeeded in Russia, though I must add, to fail again, through unworthy successors, another seventy years later. Such success or failure in struggle, in the epochal process of transition to socialism, however, is not my concern at the moment. The issue here is the commitment and conduct of Marx as a revolutionary, which for Marx also entailed contempt for the philistines who, as he wrote to an old friend, 'consider people like you and me as immature fools who all this time have not been cured of their revolutionary fantasies'. Told of a contemporary having 'mellowed with age', his response was a disdainful 'oh, has he?' 'To fight' was his 'idea of happiness' as he confessed to his daughter Laura, and to the very end Marx's sympathies always lay with fighters and revolutionaries whatever be the 'small print' of their creeds, as Shanin has put it. Marx had only scorn for the 'know all' types, the doctrinaire theorists including Marxists, his own followers, when on scientific or theoretical grounds they questioned, criticized, rebuked, or abandoned revolutionary struggle.

We know that Marx had tried to persuade the workers of Paris, for good reasons, not to venture on a revolution. But once they did so he hailed them for 'storming heavens' and stood up magnificently in defense of the Paris Communards against their enemies and calumniators. Again, even as he persistently warned against utopianism and Blanquism in the movement, he

was scornfully dismissive of socialists within his own party in Germany who 'keep themselves within the limits of the logically presumable and of the permissible by the police'. Yet again, when the issue was joined between on the one hand the revolutionaries of the Peoples Will — the indigenous revolutionary organization of his times in Russia, remembered for its insurrectionary politics and heroic defiance of the Czarist state — who postulated an immediate Russian revolution and the possibility of 'revolutionary leaps' which may ensure Russia 'bypassing the stage' of capitalism on its way to a just society, and on the other Marx's own 'disciples' in Russia—Plekhanov and others — whose strictly evolutionist Marxism saw history as constituted by necessary stages and postulated the necessity of a capitalist stage in Russia's advance to socialism, and, therefore, criticised the populist revolutionaries in the name of Marxism and scientific socialism. Marx came down loud and clear on the side of the revolutionaries of the Peoples Will. He found these revolutionaries, on trial for life, not only right in the essentials of their stand but 'simple, objective, heroic'. Theirs was, Marx wrote, 'not tyrannicide as "theory" and "panacea" but a lesson to Europe in a "specifically" Russian historically inevitable mode of action; against which any moralizing from a safe distance was offensive'. Marx always spoke admiringly of human qualities of these revolutionaries and to the end he and Engels consistently referred to them as 'our friends'. In contrast Marx spoke of the 'boring doctrines' of his evolutionist disciples and referred to them derisively as 'Russian capitalism admirers' (Incidentally, later on, Lenin too seems to have shared Marx's deviation on the Russian question. During and after 1905-07 revolution, he was accused of leaning towards populism, that is the Russian revolutionaries, by some of this associates and adversaries).

Marx never countenanced scientific, evolutionist, or economic determinist deformations of Marxism. On occasions a legitimate Marxist recognition of the 'historically progressive' character of certain phenomena (men/women, movements, economic developments, etc.) has been deemed excuse enough to speak up for them and to eulogize and extend support to them in a manner as to go soft on the exploiting classes, even to the point of rallying behind them in the name of Marxism. Marx would have none of such political opportunism. It was on this issue that he, along with Engels, broke publicly with the Lassalleans in Germany and later, as we have seen, spoke with unconcealed scorn of 'Russian capitalism admirers'. Marx was always allergic to and contemptuous of such doctrinaire or, shall we say, 'scientific' Marxism'. If Marx sought to discover the necessity underlying contemporary socio-historical process, it was to establish the objective context or terrain of his political struggle and define its revolutionary thrust; and when he recognized the historical progressiveness of certain roles or developments, it was as *fait accompli*, without approval but with all their advantages and drawbacks, so as to make the best possible use of the new starting points or opportunities provided by them for the prosecution of his own political purpose, his uncompromising struggle aimed at overthrowing the system of exploitation and oppression that is capitalism — 'progressive', 'self-reliant' or any other. In this sense, Marx's practice of science was always subject to the logic of his political position, of the choice he had already made in the fight between the people and those who oppress and exploit them. And, as we have already said, he had chosen to stand by the people. This choice, a revolutionary

political position, was for Marx not a matter of scientific analysis – economic, social or historical; it was, as it has always been for revolutionaries, simply taking of sides in the on-going class war.

In a brief but brilliant exploration of the life and work of late Marx, drawing our attention to this particular aspect of Marx as a revolutionary and, more specifically, to his expressions of solidarity with the Russian revolutionaries, Teodor Shanin has written:

‘It has been the way of many sophisticates of marxology to scoff at such utterances of Marx or to interpret them patronisingly as ‘determined rather by... emotional motives’ (an antonym, no doubt, of analytical, scientific or sound). To understand political action, especially the struggle for a socialist transformation of humanity, as an exercise in logic or as a programme of factory building only, is utterly to misconstrue it, as Marx knew well. Also, he shared with the Russian revolutionaries the belief in the purifying power of revolutionary action in transforming the very nature of those involved in it – the ‘educating of the educators’. The Russian revolutionary populists’ concern with moral issues found ready response in him. Moral emotions apart (and they were there and unashamedly expressed), revolutionary ethics were often as central as historiography to Marx’s political judgement. So was Marx’s distaste of those to whom the punchline of Marxist analysis was the adoration or elaboration of irresistible laws of history, used as the license to do nothing’.

Soviet collapse has caused, however temporarily, a retreat from Marxism. Another consequence has been a resurgence of old and new alternative theories. All sorts of essentially rightwing ideologies have come to flourish. Old orthodoxies have been resurrected and ancient prejudices and superstitions argued for in modern and supposedly scientific ways. ‘Culture’ and ‘civilization’ and their so-called ‘clashes’ are invoked to explain history rather than be explained by it and in an exercise of racial pseudo-science, not only is the reality of imperialism obscured but its crimes are justified as the product of cultural ‘incompatibility’. ‘Identity politics’ and ‘communitarianism’ are the new catchwords and obscuring the reality of iniquitous class structures within — and around the identities or communities and the ‘mud of the times’ invariably carried by them, they are so theorized as to persuade the victims of capitalism and imperialism to accept and stay happy with their ‘difference’ in place of equality and liberation that Marxist theory and practice seek. And so on. Of these supposed alternatives, there is one that I would like to take a quick notice of — the rather ‘infashion’ post-modernism which is particularly influential in the Left intellectual circles in the West and has acquired adherents world wide. Loud in proclaiming the ‘end’ or ‘obsolescence’ of Marxism, it has even claimed to be a replacement of and advance over Marxism, (or ‘traditional Marxism’ as its ex-Marxist adherents would have it), and thus, to be the most advanced radical social theory of these our post-modernist times. Critics from the other end have seen post-modernism as, in some ways, the most dangerous of the forces currently threatening the survival

of the socialist project in as much as it threatens the project from within, given its origins, the nature of its criticism, and the significant ex-Marxist presence in it. Post-modernism's rhetoric of rupture and discontinuity renders wrong everything you thought you ever knew and the accompanying fragmentation of time, space and historical experience is supposed to liberate us from the mistaken modernist notions of reason, knowledge, history, morals or progress, and, above all, the dead hand of 'meta-narratives'. The best or rather the worst, typical representative of this mistaken 'modernity', they say is, Marxism and its socialist project. As it is, traditionally trained, conditioned or persuaded to underreach themselves, as they have been in class-divided societies, people always had a hard time seeing beyond their most immediately visible oppressors; post-modernist thinking, with its distrust of so-called 'grand narratives', simply reinforces such myopia. That is how, for post-modernism, capitalism *is* and socialism *can never be*....

A point of interest here is that quite a few of the original or leading post-modernists, who have thus argued against Marxism or socialism, were once themselves Marxists or near-Marxists and believed in what they were willing to call socialism. This draws our attention to a certain psychological aspect to this postmodernist episode in the intellectual biography of the western Left intelligentsia. Post modernism has certainly a great deal to do with capitalism; scholars like Jameson and Harvey have seen it as a cultural expression of late capitalism and Hawkes — old fashioned enough to be still a believer in concepts like false consciousness — has even defined and dismissed post-modernism as 'nothing more than the ideology of consumer capitalism'. But surely there is more than a grain of truth in the view, which taking cognizance of its noticeably significant French origins, has seen post-modernism as a passing, or somewhat more lasting, fad of French intellectuals (typically the survivors of the 'sixties generation' and their students) who, having lost their revolutionary faith, have taken refuge in a nihilistic skepticism rather than come to amicable terms with the bourgeois world in which they live and whose benefits they enjoy. Or perhaps, they have found it *psychologically* the most comforting way of coming to terms with this world and succumbing to it. But fad or whatever else originally, post-modernism is a significant mode of thought today. Much of ex-Marxism, often via post-Marxism, has found its way into post-modernism, and similarly disillusioned or otherwise complacent intellectuals everywhere, in the West as much as in the third world, have flocked to it as the very latest in social theory. For the time being at least, post-modernism is so ubiquitous and influential as to be the intellectual fashion *par excellence*. That post-modernism has spread so fast and far is a matter for social historian to explore. But the power of fashion apart, surely it has something to do with its animus against Marxism (however, ambiguous it may be at times) and even more its unambiguous surrender to what is, that is capitalism and its current triumphalism — a surrender made all the more attractive or comforting by the seemingly avantguard sophistication of post-modernism. It only needs to be added that the success, such as it is, of the post-modernist theory is largely parasitical 'because it rests on its proponents' claims concerning the obsolescence of Marxism, and it is this which enables the post-modernists to position themselves as the most advanced radical social theorists!

The language is abstruse and esoteric, almost incomprehensible, the 'discourse' inaccessible except to the initiates. Rhetoric of 'discontinuity', notwithstanding, there is continuity of assumption with the jargonised modernist thought that to be readable or comprehensible is to be superficial, to be not theoretical, certainly not theoretically profound. It is supposed to be a theory but there is no agreement among the proponents, let alone the critics, what precisely 'post-modernism' is. Its practitioners are, in fact, inclined to be rather disdainful of any such systemising or self-consistency seeking enterprise. Our difficulty in comprehending and assessing post-modernism critically is compounded by the fact that it has emerged generally, and as an influence on the Left, in almost inseparable association with a variety of other intellectual and political trends, including 'post-Marxism' and 'post-structuralism'. But the basic thrust of post-modernism is sufficiently clear for us to take a quick look at it before we take another quick look at the themes secreted in its interstices, which themes, even as we reject post-modernism, must be the concern of any serious socialist today.

As the name itself suggests, the basic thrust of post-modernism is a 'rupture' or 'discontinuity' with the project of modernity which is seen to have its origins in the Enlightenment, though it came to fruition in the nineteenth century. 'The so-called Enlightenment project is supposed to represent rationalism, technocentrism, the standardization of knowledge and production, a belief in linear progress and universal, absolute truths'. Post-modernism is supposed to be a reaction to, and the rejection of the project of modernity, its science or knowledge, its rationalism, universalism and humanism, and so on. The post-modernist interpretation of Enlightenment or so-called 'project of modernity' is not my concern here. There is undoubtedly a lot to be criticized in Enlightenment theories of history and progress, its view of science or technology, knowledge or truth, or reason itself whose excesses indeed spawned 'some petrified and tyrannical versions' as Feyerabend has described them. Its optimism or general hopefulness, however justified then or even now, could be charged with certain lack of sensitivity to the complexity or *dialectics* of human situation and processes of social change. And so on. But more to the point is the fact that not only is all this only a small part of the story but that it soon came to be criticized from within, long before the arrival of post-modernism. Marx himself, for example, was profoundly aware of the limits or deficiencies of the theoretical baggage carried from Enlightenment. In other words, Enlightenment or 'modernity' so-called had within them a strong critical tradition which, over the years, questioned almost all the 'evils' now being ascribed to them by post-modernism. Aberrations, even serious aberrations were there; but on the whole and at its best it was a tradition of positive, rational scepticism, a scientific scepticism if I may so call it, that helped us gain better knowledge of reality around us and improve our modes of getting things chosen and done. Post-modernism is, in its own way, rooted in this sceptical tradition within 'modernity'. But what has now happened is that in its 'new turn' (as one of its leading lights, Laclau, had called it), scepticism has been pursued, dogmatically, to its ultimate nihilistic conclusions. Marxism seeks to find a perspective and purpose for human life by an inquiry into the foundations of human thought and action. Post modernism, reminiscent of a philosophical aberration or two earlier, makes no such inquiry and says it cannot be made in a manner that at the end of it all the post-modernist view of

life looks very much like what Shakespeare put in the mouth of Macbeth: 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'.

Post-modernism sees the world or social reality, when it is at all willing to *see* it, as essentially fragmented and indeterminate, a realm of the contingent, the ephemeral and the discontinuous where only thing possible is delight in the chaos of life as if it were some kind of game. The social is not to be conceived either in terms of possessing unproblematically 'real' empirical characteristics, or in terms of constituting a structured totality. The very notion of structure or structural connections is denied. There is no such thing as a social whole or structured processes accessible to human knowledge and, therefore, to purposive human action, only a bricolage of difference, identity and social multiplicities, so diverse and flexible that it can be rearranged as you like by discursive construction. A dominant theme has been the denial of capitalism as a 'structured' and 'totalising' whole with its own systemic unity and 'laws of motion'. The constitutive relations of capitalism are at best only one personal 'identity' among many others, no longer in any way privileged by their historic centrality. Capitalism, therefore, is simply unamenable to any 'causal analysis'. Structures and causes are all replaced by fragments and contingencies. There is an uncritical eclecticism that celebrates particularity and multiplicity for its own sake. What exists are only disconnected, anarchic and inexplicable *differences* or particularities. There are only so many different kinds of power, oppression, identity, etc, and, of course, as many or more 'discourses' about them.

Causality, and, therefore, the very possibility of causal analysis is rejected. There can be no social science as it has been traditionally conceived — and in extreme cases perhaps, no science at all. What is deemed possible and advocated is a 'deconstructed', restless, indeterminacy of analysis. There is historicity of knowledge, but no historical knowledge or any objective truth. Marxism is ruled out and so is any other attempt at systematic explanation of social or historical conditions. Not only have we to give up any idea of intelligible historical processes or causality but along with it, evidently, any idea of 'making history'. One distinctive feature of the post modernist 'new turn' is its rather loud rejection of 'totalising' thought in all its forms, the so-called 'metanarratives'. And significantly enough, privileged for attack here are the universalistic, emancipatory 'meta-narratives', 'the projects for a general human emancipation', which are typically represented by Marxism and its project of socialism. It is argued that any broad movements for social change, general emancipatory struggles for equality and liberation, inevitably lead to new forms of repression and oppression. What is possible and permissible are only particular struggles, on particular issues or against particular oppressions, only a fragmented politics of 'difference', and 'identity'.

The post-modernist 'deconstructed' indeterminacy of analysis is carried into the realm of morals with similar nihilistic or near nihilistic consequences. We cannot be sure of any rational values. We simply cannot or do not have any general moral principles, let alone ones that should be universally defended as between human beings, communities and traditions. There is an unequivocal denial of the possibility or the desirability of universal values, ambitions or aspirations. The irreducible historicity of values (as of knowledge), interpreted

in terms of a theoretically most flawed relativism is so emphasized by post-modernists that, their protests notwithstanding, the end result is, and on their argument can only be, an undeniable moral nihilism, where there is only multiplicity of values (as of 'truths') and no rational way of choosing or deciding between them.

Postmodernism may be disdainful of confronting fundamental issues or evasive about its philosophical premises, but it has come to sport what can only be described as idealism, its own specifically new form of idealism, the idealism of discourse', and at one more remove, of 'language' that 'discourse' cannot do without and is, therefore, reducible to. An idealism of the subjective kind, it has an obvious flavour of solipsism about it.

As the argument proceeds, social reality, seen as fragmented and indeterminate, is soon dissolved into 'discourse'. Since there are no historical conditions or connections, limits or possibilities, only arbitrary juxtapositions, conjunctures and contingencies, only discrete and isolated fragments or differences, if anything holds it all together, gives it meaning or coherence, it is only the logic of 'discourse'. What is involved here is not merely a detaching of thought or ideology from any social basis, its autonomisation, but its self-sufficient independence, and as a consequence, social reality, society itself, is now constituted by thought or 'discourse. Reality is only a field of discursivity, nothing objective, only discursively constructed idea about it. Indeed, language is all.

A long time back, in *The German ideology*, Marx and Engels had written: 'Language is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they were bound to make language into an independent realm'. Philosophers have been at it, or preparing the ground for it, before, during and after Marx's own time. Plato's 'theory of ideas', as an exercise in 'reification of concepts' was a significant beginning, and Hegel's massive act of reification was thus noticed by Marx: 'To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of "The Idea", he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external phenomenal form of "the Idea".' Of the more recent 'Age of Analysis', Barrows Durham has written: 'Whereas philosophers had once speculated boldly about the universe as a whole, they now preferred the safer latitudes of language. They began as seers, and they dwindled into grammarians.' Further cutting itself free from the material world, philosophy has had its devotees who so focussed on language as to question the validity of social concepts and treat social problems as if these were only a matter of language and syntax, as if struggle against fascism, for example, involved no more than a definition of terms. It has been a long journey for such idealism in Western philosophy. But it can be said that the destination or denouement, has been now reached with post-modernism — a slide down the road from reality to discourse, to language. The language is not merely an independent realm but an all-pervasive force, so omnipresent and dominant as to overwhelm and exhaust all that was supposed to be an objectively existing social reality. Language is all we can know about the world and we have access to no other reality, none whatsoever except language or discourse. Once again matter has disappeared, this time giving way to the immateriality of communication, where everything

is discourse and discourse is everything. Our very being, our identities or 'subjectivities' are constituted through discourse or language. Our 'language' or 'discourse', or 'text' — the jargon varies but not the message — defines and limits what we are, what we see or know, what we can imagine or do. It is all a matter of the way in which we are positioned by words in relation to other words. Oppression and exploitation, things like rape or deaths in police lock-ups and fake encounters are really a matter of the way in which they are defined, rather 'constituted', linguistically — this is the only reality they have, or can ever hope to have. So goes this new idealism... That this idealism serves the established order or the powers that be is obvious. But it is equally a self-serving philosophy for the intellectual whom it privileges against fellow human beings. He is the one who discourses, or can discourse in the best deconstructionist — solipsistic manner.

Post-modernism is very much *a l'a mode* of the moment, *the* fashion in the academy and elite intellectual circles elsewhere. And the power of fashion is great. But to say this is not to be dismissive about it. For fashion, in philosophy or social theory at least is never something merely frivolous or fortuitous. It is always a true and revealing thing. And post-modernism is truly revelatory of the disillusionment caused by the collapse of the socialist project in our time, the seeming failure of the long term promise of Enlightenment, and the consequent succumbing of the intellectual to the established order. But equally, indeed even more, it is a response to something real, the real situation as it has come to be in contemporary capitalism. For Jameson, for instance, as already noticed, post-modernity corresponds to 'late capitalism,' a new multinational 'informational' and 'consumerist' phase of capitalism. Others too have argued along same or similar lines. But this argument is not what I would like to pursue here. Important for my immediate purpose is the fact that post-modernism has, in its own way, raised questions that we need to consider and incorporate into any analysis of what is wrong with the world today, if we would find really adequate or effective answers to its problems. In other words, secreted in the interstices of the basic thrust of postmodernism are themes which, reflecting as they do the real conditions under contemporary capitalism, are, therefore, also the themes with which people on the socialist left must come to terms. Here I can do no better than turn to Ellen Meiksins Wood. This is how she lists the more important of these themes especially as they have found expression on the 'postmodern' left:

a focus on language, culture and 'discourse' ... to the exclusion of the left's traditional 'economic' concerns and the old preoccupations of political economy; a rejection of 'totalizing' knowledge and of 'universalistic' values (including Western conceptions of 'rationality', general ideas of equality, whether liberal or socialist, and the Marxist conception of general human emancipation), in favour of an emphasis on 'difference', on varied particular identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, on various particular and separate oppressions and struggles; an insistence on the fluid and fragmented nature of the human self (the decentered subject), which makes our identities so variable, uncertain, and fragile that it is hard to see how we can develop the kind of consciousness that might form the basis of solidarity and collective action founded on a common

social 'identity' (such as class), a common experience, and common interests – a celebration of the 'marginal'; and a repudiation of 'grand narratives', such as Western ideas of progress, including Marxist theories of history'...

Postmodernists have tended to lump these themes together in a dismissal of Marxism, rather what they allege Marxism to be. But as Wood has insisted, Marxists do not need to deny the importance of at least quite a few of these themes:

'For instance, the history of the twentieth century could hardly inspire confidence in traditional notions of progress, and those of us who profess to believe in some kind of 'progressive' politics have to come to terms with all that has happened to undermine Enlightenment optimism. And who would want to deny the importance of 'identities' other than class, of struggles against sexual and racial oppression, or the complexities of human experience in such a mobile and changeable world, with such fragile and shifting solidarities? At the same time, who can be oblivious to the resurgence of 'identities' like nationalism as powerful, and often destructive, historical forces? Don't we have to come to terms with the restructuring of capitalism now more global and more 'segmented' than ever before? For that matter, who is unaware of the structural changes that have transformed the nature of the working class itself? And what serious socialist has ever been unconscious of the racial or sexual divisions within the working class? Who would want to subscribe to the kind of ideological and cultural imperialism that suppresses the multiplicity of human values and cultures? And how can we possibly deny the importance of language and cultural politics in a world so dominated by symbols, images, and 'mass communication', not to mention the 'information superhighway'? Who would deny these things in a world of global capitalism so dependent on the manipulation of symbols and images in a culture of advertisement, where the 'media' mediate our own most personal experiences, sometimes to the point where what we see on television seems more real than our own lives, and where the terms of political debate are set — and narrowly constricted — by the dictates of capital in the most direct way, as knowledge and communication are increasingly in the hands of corporate giants?'

But, most importantly, Wood immediately adds :

we don't have to accept postmodernist assumptions in order to see all these things. On the contrary, these developments cry out for a materialist explanation. For that matter, there have been few cultural phenomena in human history whose material foundations are more glaringly obvious than those of postmodernism itself. There is, in fact, no better confirmation of historical materialism than the connection between postmodernist culture and a segmented, consumerist, and mobile global capitalism. Nor does a materialist approach mean that we

have to devalue or denigrate the cultural dimensions of human experience. A materialist understanding is, instead, an essential step in liberating culture from the stranglehold of commodification.

'If postmodernism does tell us something, in a distorted way, about the conditions of contemporary capitalism, the real trick is to figure out exactly what those conditions are, *why* they are, and where we go from there. The trick, in other words, is to suggest historical explanations for those conditions instead of just submitting to them and indulging in ideological adaptations. The trick is to identify the real problems to which the current intellectual fashions offer false – or no – solutions, and in so doing to challenge the limits they impose on action and resistance. The trick, therefore, is to respond to the conditions of the world today not as cheerful (or even miserable) robots, but as critics.'

And no theory provides better weapons for the needed critique and better solutions to the real problems involved than Marxism.

Postmodernism, with its denial of objectivity and causality and overall explanatory agnosticism, its embrace of an indeterministic concept of complexity, and ultra-relativism in matters of culture, truth and morals, its overriding historical cynicism and fear-laden contempt for modernist 'meta narratives', all of which really adds up to a rejection of everything that purports to offer anything resembling *answers*, can obviously provide no answers to the problems that the modern, or shall we say post-modern world, confronts. Its claim to be a radical rupture with the past only betrays its lack of historical sensitivity which makes it sublimely oblivious of everything that has been said so many times in the past and condemns it to conscious or unconscious repetition of old themes. Even the epistemological scepticism, the assault on universal truths and values, which is so crucial a part of this current intellectual fashion, has a history as old as philosophy — post-modernism has only so pursued it as to reach altogether nihilistic conclusions'. That wherein science or morals are a social or historical product is turned into an argument that all theories or moral principles, thus conditioned, are equally invalid, and the categories involved valid only as objects of discourse. Concepts indispensable to any worth while social theory, 'universalism', 'essentialism', 'functionalism' and what they misdescribe as 'reductionism' — of course, like all such concepts needing to be used with care and sophistication — are attacked and rejected as 'the four methodological sins' of modernism, Marxism being the worst sinner, the uniqueness of Marxism being used to deny the possibility of general theories about anything. Particularity is celebrated without realizing that it is self-defeating because any account at the level of the given particular can be undercut by some more particularistic analysis. We can never actually know when any particular is particular enough, and in any case the smallest significant particulars you can think of — groups, selves, experiences, thoughts, words, events, actions — are themselves inevitably *abstractions* from countless further particulars: In fact, without a more general, universal theory it is impossible to tell when to stop or make sense of particularities. And

these 'universalising' theories, all the time moving from the particular to the general, have embodied immense imagination and scientific capacities and helped us reach ever closer to the nature or truth of things. 'Essentialism' is considered a major methodological sin when it is simply indispensable to any realist thinking about complex entities and processes. Without some coherent notion of what is central, that is *essential* to a thing which makes it, as a specific unity of parts and particulars, *the* thing and no other, and without which it would be literally unrecognisable as that type of thing, making it impossible even to speak of any particular thing (for example, an 'identity' that post-modernists are otherwise so loud about), or postulate any thing explanatory about its being, behaviour or functioning. "Functionalism" is questioned when, posing a certain kind of 'why' questions of its subject matter, 'making sense' of how things came to be what they are, explaining the emergence, persistence or rationale of the more concrete practices, institutional arrangements or ideological phenomena in terms of, for example, the way in which they comply with the needs or logic of interests of classes in society, functional explanation has its intellectual validity and value and remains, not an all-purpose *affaire* but a legitimate *part* of any adequate, reasonably comprehensive, causal explanation of things. As 'reductionism' what is rejected is the act integral to any explanation where some things are priked out as important and giving prominence over others in terms of the effects or influence — otherwise there is no explanation, only 'disparate fragments' or 'aggregates' and their *descriptive* statement. What is entailed here, as I have already argued earlier, is a failure to distinguish between explanation that is reductionist and explanation. These vital concepts are so interpreted or misinterpreted by post-modernists as to cover and reject not just simplistic or lazy explanations but any kind of serious causal analysis or general explanatory enterprise.

That this epistemological scepticism stops short of nihilism in practice only means that, at this level at least, it is impossible to wish away social reality and some knowledge to cope with it, however fragmented a view one takes of both; the fragments are yet the sites where human beings live and act. The 'fragmented knowledge', of post-modernism has thus produced some keen insights well suited for narrowly defined specific types of tasks, even when any 'big picture' or 'meta-narrative' is ruled out. This is welcome and to be acknowledged, but there is an interesting aspect to it, which also cries out to be noticed. Its 'rhetoric of ruptures' notwithstanding, post-modernism here is too much like the modernist (mainstream or bourgeois) social science, governed as it has been by quantitative empiricism and mindless specialization, where its narrow focus and piecemeal approach, and a distrust of generalized explanatory theory, have led it to study only relatively unrelated, particular parts, areas or problems of contemporary social and political life, and thus helped it avoid 'big issues' concerning the basic character of society as a whole and the general direction of its movement, and thereby also evade the issue of large scale social change. Neither modernist social scientists, nor post-modernists however would be willing to accept that in turning away from 'grand theory' in one case and 'metanarrative' in the other they have both come to deal with 'small potatoes' only, and avoid the 'big issues'. The former assume away the big issues, whereas the post modernists claim that big issues

do not exist or that they are impossible to understand. If modernist social science *adjusts* itself to existing social reality, that is the established bourgeois social order, in one way, post-modernism does it in another, its own postmodernist way.

This adjustment has been facilitated in both cases by their respective stances on the question of values. Bourgeois social science's treatment of values as somehow beyond rational inquiry or validation (and the accompanying fetishization of 'value freedom' or 'ethical neutrality') is paralleled by post-modernism's ultra-relativism in matters moral or cultural. It should not be difficult to see that in both cases, notwithstanding their occasional expression of dissatisfaction or disillusionment with the current state of affairs, this in effect amounts to an endorsement of and submission to the currently dominant moral and cultural values of bourgeois society. The two, incidentally, also share in obscuring this adjustment and submission to bourgeois social order by their linguistic practices. Critical of unnecessary obscurity and jargon of modernist discourse, post-modernism has created a parallel obscurity of hermeneutics, deconstruction and textual nihilism. Once again triviality of content is often in sharp contrast to complexity of form, obscurity of presentation a substitute or compensation for the lack of substance. A critic has even spoken of 'the more obscure, relativistic cant put out by post-modernism', and, as a recent example, referred us to Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International!*

The cognitive relativism of post-modernism, given its nihilistic orientation and the view it takes of the historicity of all knowledge where questions of origin are confused with those of truth or validity, is wary of and rejects any assessment of social reality that claims to be based on truth going beyond what is currently accepted as 'good in the way of belief' — which, it should be obvious, is established by media, business interests, governments, by the powers that be in our society. In denying any real foundation for knowledge or truth, the postmodern scepticism permits at best only interpretation, 'fiction', as some would call it. It may with Foucault claim that in holding this view one need not 'go so far as to say that fictions are beyond truth'; but such concession is only verbal and ritualistic, a homage that the good old 'concept of truth' yet exacts from the postmodern sceptic. What in effect ensues is a pragmatism which, as with Richard Rorty for example, contends that the only kind of truth that counts is the power to enter into meaningful conversation with the members of one's own interest group, or 'interpretive community' who share the same 'good in the way of belief'. Similarly, a nihilistic orientation and recognition of the undoubted historicity of values combined with a refusal to admit any other validating principles leads post-modernism to sport an ultra-relativism which denies the very possibility of any universal values like equality, fraternity, justice, etc. This we have already noticed. But there is an aspect of postmodernism's stance on values which makes it even more nihilistic than would be the case otherwise, which deserves to be noticed and to which Norman Geras has drawn our attention. The argument here is that post-modernism's cognitive relativism, associated with its idealism of discourse or language leaves us with no values at all, not even the otherwise permitted, historically conditioned particular values, though we were still, as noted above, without any rational criteria to evaluate them, to choose or decide

between them. As Geras has argued, 'if there is no truth, there is no injustice. Stated less simplistically, if truth is wholly relativised or internalized to particular discourse or language games or social practices, there is no injustice. The victims and protesters of any *putative* injustice are deprived of their last and often best weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story, which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes.' Of course, one cannot insist that there is just one true image of a person or description of an event or state of affairs. Different angles of vision and personal beliefs, different political, cultural or other purposes, different linguistic and conceptual frameworks, will shape and colour the content of any description or narrative, yielding a plurality of possible representations of whatever is the subject at hand. 'Yet there is, for all that, *a way things were down there*, a reality constraining the range of adequate description, interpretation or explanation', the basis for a more or less true, relatively but nevertheless *objectively* true, description, interpretation or explanation. Postmodernism's cognitive relativism, pushed this way or thus far, simply blocks this last kind of judgement and thus opens the door wide for a moral relativism which is ultimately destructive of all values—though many of the postmodernists are in the habit of denying that they are relativists at all.

Postmodernism claims to be a radical social theory, if not *the* radical social theory for our postmodernist times. Many who would still be on the left have even seen it as a replacing advance over Marxism. But its basic thrust and detailed principles or positions are destructive of any kind of radical politics. We have already noticed its emphasis on the fragmented nature of the world and human knowledge, and the impossibility of any emancipatory politics based on some kind of 'totalising' vision. The view that there are no systems and no history susceptible to causal analysis rules out any possibility of getting to the root of many powers that oppress us, and with it any aspiration to some kind of serious united opposition, or general human emancipation. The fragments alone can be the sites of our struggles, and the most we can hope for is a lot of particular and separate resistances, an oppositional politics fragmented and parcellized into many disconnected pieces.. Radical politics has been traditionally seen as having to do with the overarching power of classes or states and opposition to them. This is now effectively pushed out of consideration, giving way to the fractured struggles of 'identity politics', 'new social movements', or even the 'personal as political', to a reformist politics devoid of any overarching political or social vision. We once again witness the much proclaimed postmodernist 'rupture' ending up as a continuity. For this is surely not very different from those traditional forms of liberal 'pluralism' which denied that there was any concentration of power or systemic source of domination in capitalist society, and argued in defense of a 'pluralist politics'. It would appear that the new post-modernist discourse is 'post modernist', rather 'anti-modernist', only in its rejection of modernism in one of its forms – Marxism, while adopting the universalist language of another – liberalism, the ruling form of the modernist project.

A significant aspect of postmodernist social theory, which more than anything else exposes its real nature and pretensions to radicalism, is the way it treats the question of capitalism. Rooted essentially though somewhat ambiguously in the golden Age of post-war capitalism, the sixties,

postmodernists have accepted an ahistorical notion of a capitalism that delivers, and failed or refused to see it historically and as it actually exists and works — an essentially irrational economic system, full of inherent contradictions and problems and, despite current triumphalism, in deep crisis everywhere. In fact, as Wood has put it, 'the postmodern sense of epochal novelty depends on ignoring, or denying, one overwhelming historical reality: that all the ruptures of the twentieth century have been bound together in a single historical unity by the logic — and the internal contradictions — of capitalism, the system that dies a thousand deaths.' Postmodernism's self-description and the form of periodization it relies on — modernity transiting, 'rupturously', to post modernity — obscures the most important part of the way the things really were and are out there, that is the historical development and actuality of capitalism. And the way its epistemological scepticism has gone on to question and throw out all notions of 'structure' or 'system', capitalism is simply 'off limits' for purposes of study and analysis as a structured whole or a system — least of all as an irrational, exploitative system whose accumulative logic puts its disfiguring mark on everything within its reach, which reach, via market, extends far beyond our economy, politics, morality, culture etc. into the deepest recesses of our social and personal life. Capitalism, as a totalising system that it is, can hardly be said to exist in postmodern discourse. And if you cannot even *think* capitalism as a system, you cannot understand or criticize it, let alone oppose it. You may as well lie back and enjoy its consumerist and other pleasures — which is indeed what most postmodernists are doing. The denial or rejection of anti-capitalist politics, as old fashioned, out of date left politics, or a dangerous 'totalising' or 'universalist' enterprise, has its inevitable fallout. When the irrationality of the structural logic of capitalism comes to threaten people with its multiform consequences and problems which are neither understood nor opposed and which mess up and disorient even the alternative politics of 'identity' and 'new social movements', which, in any case, as with the conventional old politics, does not take you very far in this situation, a 'capitalism is off limits' approach can only lead to cynicism and depoliticisation, if not outright reaction.

There are those who, like Alan Wald, have hoped for postmodernism having the same politicizing effect on young people today that existentialism had on youth in the West in the 1960s and early 1970s. But so far the evidence has been only to the contrary. Deep epistemological scepticism and profound political defeatism have gone hand in hand in postmodernism, pointing the way to disillusion, apathy and inactivity. The capitalist social order today tends to produce and reproduce political apathy. Culture of depoliticization is a hallmark of monopoly capitalism which infects even the most oppressed sections of society. Post-modernism feeds into monopoly capitalism's culture of depoliticisation. The claims to be a radical social theory, however, persist. But, as Michael Ryan, in a book written sometime back to find common ground between Marxism and post-modernism, noted; 'millions have been killed because they were Marxists; no one will be obliged to die because she/he is a deconstructionist.'

Post-modernism does have a certain sophistication to its critique of 'modernism' so-called including Marxism, though critics have also seen it as a 'hairsplitting philosophy' as Marx in his time described the early 'dissection' of Hegelian philosophy. It has revelled in proclaiming Marxism to be dead and

buried but scholars, in a way similar to Marx and Eagles' characterization of the new German philosophers in the opening paragraphs of *The German Ideology*, have found it generating much noise but little understanding. While it certainly knows that all is not well with the world, post-modernism indeed offers little to help make it a significantly better place, only some petty, fragmented interventions and a sophisticated way of making peace with its many wrongs. This is so primarily because postmodernist theory precludes even the notion of capitalism as a system at a time when this world is in fact being shaped, rather mis-shaped, by global capitalism both at the centre and in its semi-peripheries and peripheries. It is indeed amazing that for all its rhetoric against 'metanarratives' postmodernism fails or refuses to see the ongoing 'meta-narrative' of our times, that of capitalism, and does so when continuing beyond its historical time, capitalism has exhausted its creative potentialities and is now a bearer of only destructive possibilities for the future of humankind.

Postmodernism rejects 'metanarratives' of human emancipation, and views 'fragments,' all that is there to social reality according to it, as the only possible spaces for any kind of 'emancipatory' politics. In doing so post-modernism does tap into some real concerns or causes of our time — democracy and decentralisation of power, economic and social justice, environmentalism, feminism and sexual liberation, human rights, rights of ethnic groups and minorities, and so on — but without providing any effective answers to the problems involved. The task here is to understand the historical material conditions that block the realization of the objectives which these concerns or causes represent and the kinds of transformations that would make their realization possible. But any serious effort of this nature is bound to take us back to capitalism and its systemic logic. And here post-modernism far from being a help is, in fact, a positive liability; its fragmentation of both theory and practice and refusal to see the systemic nature of capitalism only weakens our capacity to understand and to resist capitalism, which is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for a successful pursuit of the above-mentioned concerns of or objectives.

It needs to be noticed that there is nothing particularly 'postmodernist' about these concerns which postmodernism claims as its own. If anything they are quintessentially 'modernist'. Most of them are deeply rooted in Enlightenment values — a humanist pride in our existence, faith in reason and science and knowledge, hopefulness about a future of progress and a world fit for every human being, etc. — and all of them long part of the general history of the socialist left, and still central to its struggle for a more humane society which it believes socialism to be. A failure to see this is yet another evidence of postmodernism's remarkable insensitivity to history which also accounts for this supposedly radical theory's deafness to the reactionary echoes of its attack on 'Enlightenment' values. It has been suggested that while both sides of the twentieth century's ambiguous history, its horrors and its wonders, have played a part in forming the postmodernist consciousness, 'the horrors that have undermined the old idea of progress are less important in defining the distinctive nature of today's postmodernism than are the wonders of modern technology and the riches of consumer capitalism' so that 'post modernism sometimes looks like the ambiguities of capitalism as seen from the vantage

point of those who enjoy its benefits more than they suffer its costs'. It is surely pertinent to note that, questions concerning capitalism and post-modernism apart, among the more worthwhile benefits they have enjoyed in the West, and even elsewhere, quite a few are those accruing from a pursuit of Enlightenment values, which pursuit is supposed to have continued as a questionable feature of modernity. The postmodernist elites may well disown, condemn and reject these values now, but the overwhelming mass of common humanity the world over, suffering from injustice and exploitation, poverty, disease and ignorance, all sorts of economic and social backwardness, can ill afford to do so. They have indeed refused to abandon these values. As O'Neill has rather cryptically remarked: 'No, it is not these people who have abandoned idealism, universalism, truth and justice. It is those, who already enjoy these things who have denounced them on behalf of the others.'

The people need to defend and uphold Enlightenment values in full recognition of the fact that capitalism, in its contradictory progress has both sustained and destroyed these values and that in its current phase it subverts and destroys them more than ever before. If 'modernity' has indeed anything at all to do with these values, then modernity is well and truly about over, terminated by capitalism. Enlightenment too could be declared dead, almost. May be socialism will revive it. Be that as it may, the vital fact is that the reality generating the world's most serious problems, today and for our future, has a name and it is not modernity but capitalism. And postmodernity is no answer to it. The antithesis to capitalism is not post-modernism, it is socialism.

The material, moral and cultural crisis of our time, further underlined and accelerated by the Soviet collapse, has found its response in various forms of backward looking philosophies, newer versions of old rightwing ideologies, religious and other fundamentalisms. These have flourished the world over, even when they have no answers to the real problems of the common people. The backward parts of the world have been having more than their share of reactionary theories and practices. The economically and technologically advanced Western world, while having its share of these, has pre-eminently responded with a supposedly forward looking social theory of its own, post-modernism, which, however, is not without its almost inevitable weak or loud, despairing or hopeful, echoes among the academics and intelligentsia of the backward parts. This theory too has little understanding of and no answers to the problems that common people face, and is an ally of reaction in its own way. But it has a feature which perhaps, for good or ill, could be regarded as distinctively its own: *political impotence*. Professing an epistemic skepticism, explanatory agnosticism and historical cynicism, it has generated new orthodoxies of relativism and revived or reinforced many old ones, to provide a way of seeing, knowing and acting in the world where we are informed that to speak of 'reality' is ancient folly, that 'the way the world is, is no particular way at all, if indeed we can know enough about it in the first place even to assert that', that there is no 'objective truth' any longer, nor any values or ideals that can be rationally defended or validated, that all social analysis is blinded and indeterminate and, therefore, all action beyond a timorous reformism a dangerous adventure, that there are no structures or causes, and the 'system' or 'social structures' that radicals seek to change are, theoretically speaking, simply non-existing, that all this, and whatever else there is, is real

only as object' for discourse and 'discourse' is all that is left to us to engage in, indeed the only worthwhile activity for those who are really knowledgeable about things or feel concerned about them. No wonder it has been suggested that the Chinese rulers could well have distributed copies of Derrida, Foucault or Laclau to the protesting students and workers at Tiananmen Square. This would have surely dispersed them more easily and readily than water cannons or bullets. They would have read and realized the futility of it all, repented their waywardness and returned home peacefully, to the safety and pleasures of post-modernist discourse!

Post-modernism is hardly the philosophy or social theory to help us confront the hard and harsh realities of the contemporary capitalist world. It simply does not have the resources for that. It came up very much as a fashion and fashions change. It is very likely that a decade or two from now, it will no longer be the major point of reference it is today, especially among certain elite intellectual or academic circles. Its political impotence or defeatism apart, it is too feeble philosophically to have anything like the intellectual staying power of Marxism it claims to replace and to which people will soon turn, or return, if for no other reason than the one adduced by Althusser: 'the feebleness of current theoretical thinking is such that the mere reappearance of those elementary but necessary ingredients of authentic thought — rigour, coherence, and clarity — will at a certain point contrast so markedly with prevailing intellectual attitudes that all those who are bewildered by what has happened are bound to be struck by them'. Marxism, of course, has a great deal more to offer than 'rigour, coherence, and clarity', only a body of logically authentic thought. The acknowledged achievement of its theory and practice — apart, it is its scientific potential, ethical commitment and revolutionary politics in behalf of victims of capitalism, indeed its overriding relevance for our globalised times, which will make people turn or return to Marxism.

It is now universally recognised that the world is in deep trouble. And there is no assurance that it can eventually transcend its current crises. Marxists are, thankfully, far from being the only ones striving nowadays to tell the truth about the world and act on the truth which is theirs. But if the challenge is seen as anything more than finding more or less effective answers to its isolated problems, if it is to articulate a programme of action, both inspirational and practical, whose analysis of the world is holistic enough to go to the roots of its troubles in order to identify the barriers, material-ecological as well as social structural that need to be overcome to find truly effective and lasting answers, then it seems inconceivable that this can be done without turning to Marxism — at the very least, without assigning a major role for the Marxist tradition. Of course, this Marxism can neither be the ancient 'official' Marxism or the recently fashionable 'post-Marxism'. It will be authentic Marxism that is conscious of its own limitations and hence open, in the spirit of its classical tradition, to other critical and non-complacent currents of thought and action. It will also need to have the capacity to digest and transcend its costly defeats, particularly the recent collapse of the regimes calling themselves Marxist.

More than anything else, it is this political defeat, and not any theoretical refutation, which is the fundamental cause of the current retreat or recession of Marxism. A theoretical refutation of Marxism has indeed not been forthcoming; critics have been happy demolishing, as always, only strawmen

or vulgar and 'lazy' Marxism. The authentic Marxist tradition remains alive and relevant as ever. A dialectical materialist orientation still helps us in understanding the world and our place in it, and resolving knotty philosophical problems — which also have important implications for our political theory and practice — concerning the relations between being and consciousness, change and determinacy, the general and the particular, the relative and the absolute, the concrete and the abstract, the internal and external in causation, the partisanship and objectivity of science, and so on. Historical materialism is still the most powerful framework available for understanding and spotlighting the constraints and possibilities in the current world disorder, though it does not predict, or for that matter promise, human survival and transcendence, which is ultimately a matter of effective human intervention. To speak of the end or *final demise* of Marxism is to betray a wishful prejudice and rank ignorance of the intellectual and political history of our time. As Norman Geras has put it:

'Judged as an intellectual tradition of the kind of breadth and wealth that this one has encompassed, the very question of its end is comical. No less. Of no other intellectual tradition of remotely comparable achievement would such a question even be posed. With historical materialism, Marxism contributed fertile analytical resources to our understanding of history. It mounted a powerful critique of the evils of capitalism. And it set itself to seeking forces for, and ways of, challenging and overcoming them. This to say nothing of what it offered more generally to the whole culture of a century and more through a legion of thinkers writers and artists. The celebration of its end is at best wishful thinking and at worst a form of intellectual intolerance'.

Geras' statement on Marxism as a critical intellectual tradition makes a point which is important enough to bear repetition in this summing up of my argument concerning Marxism, a point which is also a more specific reason why Marxism remains relevant and need have no fears about its survival. Historical materialism, as the historical and theoretical basis of Marx's critique of capitalism, thereby also provided for the theoretically and politically ambitious liberationist project of classical Marxism: a socialist transition to a communist future for humankind. Marxism, in its anti-capitalist thrust is the critical science of human emancipation. Yes, if you like, the metanarrative of science in the service of human emancipation in our time. Within Marxism as a theory and its authentic practice which has linked it to radical or revolutionary popular movements all over the world, two elements have been central: the aim to critically understand the present day societies where exploitation and inequality continue to exist; and the intention to go beyond criticism of the present in order to build a new society, an exploitation-less society of freedom and equality. Hence Marxism's rejection of capitalism and the argument for its negation in socialism, a call to replace capitalism with a more rational and humane social order. This call to replace capitalism has lost none of its urgency today. For this reason alone, if nothing else, the body of theory that underlies and addresses this call remains as vital and relevant now as it ever was.

The first historically effective response to this call, the effort to build socialism in the Soviet Union has no doubt failed. Socialists will long continue

to debate this failure, even argue whether it was a massive setback or the disappearance of a liability. They certainly need to analyse and understand this failure, to digest the experience of this political defeat. But the failure of this particular project or even of a whole epoch of such projects, can have no bearing on the need for socialism or on the validity of the theory which articulated that need and continues to do so. To quote Justin Rosenberg, 'the real ground of socialist politics was never the existence of the Soviet Union but rather the existence of capitalism'. Socialism always was, and remains, about capitalism. It is, as it always has been, the specific anti-thesis to capitalism. As long as there is capitalism, the socialist project will have a solid historical foundation, socialism will remain on humankind's agenda for the future. Of course, after what has happened, there is a need for a better, perhaps more precise understanding of what socialism and the struggle for socialism entail – for instance, what its transitional forms or routes are going to be in different parts of the world or what the practice of revolutionary socialist politics today involves especially in countries with bourgeois democratic regimes, etc. It has to be an understanding which is fully sensitive to our skeptical times, and adequate enough to cope with the new, unanticipated situation in the world where the first experiment in socialism has failed and capitalism has reacquired its global domination.

Such or similar renewals of socialist understanding are certainly needed but they are purposeful only within Marxism and not without it. Marxism, in its basic propositions remains the necessary theory for understanding, criticizing and struggling against capitalism, as it exists today and works out its logic of accumulation at its centres and in the peripheries. It is all the more necessary because of the renewed global domination of capitalism, a late capitalism at that, which has meant increased economic exploitation of the people everywhere, more ruthless plunder of human and natural resources of the earth, a worldwide moral, cultural and ecological devastation, and all sorts of regressive and disintegrative developments that have followed in its wake. Surely this domination, and its displacement or delegitimation, however partial or temporary, of the socialist alternative and hope, has something to do with the new resurgence of more or less sophisticated reactionary philosophies, aggressive promotion of a rapacious, consumerist individualism, the murderous outbreak of chauvinistic nationalism and racism, xenophobic tribalism and homophobia, religious and other fundamentalisms. That the renewed ideological hegemony of capitalism presently prevents people from seeing all this is a fact. But the situation is changing with every passing year. And as people learn through their experience, they will find Marxism helping them to put the right meaning into it, to penetrate the thick veil of bourgeois ideologies and see the truth of this world and the real source of their misfortunes. The world is acknowledgedly in deep trouble today, plagued by a myriad problems. In so far as it is the world of global capitalism, Marxism remains indispensable for those who would confront these problems with any hope of success. I will only add that this world is increasingly populated not by lovers of capitalism, or its mere victims, or by cheerful robots as C. Wright Mills called them, but by some very angry human beings, those still fighting under the darkened skies for a world fit for everyone. Marxism is where they will find the necessary intellectual weapons for their struggles.

What is at stake in the current crisis, therefore, as I stated in the beginning, is not Marxism whose necessity and future, as a critical intellectual tradition and theory of socialism, are well-assured, but the present and future of socialism *in our time*, and this is my basic concern in these notes.

Appendix

On the 50th anniversary of India's Independence A Marxist argument*

To borrow from Tom Paine's metaphoric rejoinder to Burke's attack on the French revolution, admiration for the 'plumage' of India's 'national development' should not prevent us from seeing its failure in 'the dying bird'. The world indeed looks very different from below, when the poor and oppressed of 'our nation' look at it.

The most important fact of modern times, over the past few centuries, is the 'meta-narrative' of capitalism which is still on, more dominant globally than ever before, and more lethal too, for it is now a capitalism living beyond its historical time, its creative achievement all behind it and only destructive potentialities ahead, a threat looming large over the future of humankind reminding us of Marx's prophetic poser: 'socialism or barbarism'. The structural logic of capitalism, the law-like tendencies of its capital-accumulative process, which Marx explicated, have meant uneven and unequal development within and across countries, generating wealth and affluence at one end and poverty and deprivation at the other (even when this is somewhat curbed in the advanced centres of capitalism). Worldwide, the inexorable consequence has been a gap between the centre and the periphery of global capitalism, an ever-widening gap between wealth and poverty at the two poles. Hence a worldwide struggle against capitalism, which in the periphery meant a struggle to get out of this global system in order to be at all able to build a better life for the common people.

A major breakthrough in this struggle occurred (as anticipated by Marx and Engels) in the aftermath of the First World War — an Europewide revolution, triggered off by the Russian Revolution. But of this only the revolution in Russia survived — elsewhere it was let down by social democracy and strangled by capitalist counter-revolution — leaving Lenin and Bolsheviks confronting a totally unanticipated situation, and a problem: what does their poor and backward country do in the midst of global domination of capitalism? History had played a trick on the doctrine of Karl Marx: instead of 'socialism being built on a base provided by the economic, political and cultural achievements of capitalism, a backward country was called upon to build it. Lenin saw this as a struggle where 'defeat' was a distinct possibility, and wrote: 'struggle, and struggle alone, decides. ...how far we shall advance'. But the struggle, particularly after Lenin's departure, was not adequate enough.

Based on author's *Five lectures in Marxist Mode*.
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A deeply deformed socialism was built and now, seventy years later, a finally defeated Russia has been sucked back into global capitalism. What has happened was not inevitable. But the fact remains that we are now left with only the 'experience (that) will benefit other revolutions', the least that Lenin had hoped for in the event of defeat, and the still unsettled question: what does a backward country do in a situation of global domination of capitalism?

Modern India and its struggle for freedom is a 'meta-narrative' within the global meta-narrative of capitalism. Before 1947, we were part of a global system, well-integrated into a world market economy. We *were* globalized, but we did not like it. Our globalization then also had a name, imperialism, and we struggled against it, precisely because it meant the accumulation of wealth in England and poverty in India. Like other Third World countries we wanted to get out of this globalisation to be able to opt for an independent, self-reliant development in the interests of our common people. Herein lay the essential meaning of our long struggle for freedom.

We won our freedom in 1947. To understand what really happened in this historic event, it helps to think of what did not happen at the time. There was no revolutionary overthrow of the British imperialist rule in India, no accompanying economic or social or even political revolution. The Gandhibourgeois led freedom struggle (a defensible and better description than any other) ended in a compromise and settlement with imperialism which transferred political power from the foreign rulers to the Indian rulers, leaving the old socio-economic and state-bureaucratic structures largely intact which, in turn, with all their structural compulsions, became the basis for the post-colonial 'national development'. This development has carried the full impress of the way freedom was finally 'won' in 1947.

The post-colonial rulers in India, having gained power in the state, 'went on to set up a 'national project' of self-reliant economic development to supplement the recently won political freedom with the more important economic freedom for the Indian people. The Soviet Union was seen as an example of successful state intervention in economy (which the Indian bourgeoisie itself deemed necessary), the Cold War allowed the new rulers a certain manoeuvrability of action, and Nehru's 'socialistic pattern of society' soon provided the necessary ideological underpinning for the post-colonial process of national reconstruction, with its focus on the state sector to build up the economy, affirmative action for the most disadvantaged sections of society and economic growth in general which was to benefit the people at large. The project was not lacking in vision and it soon had significant achievements to its credit. But despite Nehru's awareness of the 'terrible costs of not changing the existing order', this project was no radical break with 'the existing order', vindicating Marx who had, in his analysis of the failed German revolution of 1848, already said that henceforth the bourgeoisie could not be relied upon to make success of even a bourgeois democratic revolution.

The Nehru era was the golden age of India's national project, though it was never without its critics. The slogan was 'growth with justice'. Acting as 'the executor of the economic necessities of the national situation', as Engels once put it, the Indian state indeed ensured growth in the economy but the hope for justice to people was largely belied. The years that followed revealed the inherent limitations of the Nehruvian national project and saw its rapid disintegration. The structural logic of 'the existing order' prevailing, the economy was soon 'some strange kind of corrupted capitalist growth', as Romesh Thapar saw it, or 'a type of capitalist development in the interests of a narrow section of Indian society', as V.K.R.V. Rao put it. As it finally came up, it could be more firmly described as an India-specific capitalism which reminded one of Marx's observations about countries which

suffer not only from the development of capitalist production but also from the incompleteness of the development. Alongside of modern evils a whole series of inherited evils oppress us, arising from the passive survival of antiquated modes of production with their inevitable train of social and political anachronism. We suffer not only from the living but from the dead.'

As capitalism, its structural logic meant unequal and uneven development in the country-'two nations' (the rich and the poor) and 'internal colonialism' (in relation to the country's more backward parts). As for its specificity, this is how I put it sometime back:

Its historical specificity has given it a strong comparador and lumpen character, presided over as it is by a bourgeoisie born old without ever having known youth, with none of the possible virtues of youth and all the vices of old age. Here all the exploitative and oppressive evils of belated capitalist development, semi-feudalism, bureaucratically-corrupt public sector and bloated bourgeois politics daily enter into and reinforce each other. All pervasive black money, flourishing as a parallel economy, only intensifies the structural biases of a white money of scams and swindles, even as it serves to sustain, with help from politicians, policemen and sundry state functionaries, an essentially illegal, secular or communal *mafiosi-led* parallel political polity, which has today come to acquire an almost legitimized coexistence with the formally legal state in large, especially urban, parts of the country. A long time ago, apropos the essentially *secondary* character of such capitalist development, Karl Marx had written: 'as is well known, secondary diseases are more difficult to cure and, at the same time, ravage the body more than original ones.'

Outside of economy it was soon a case of the 'state as private property,' and any kind of power in the state a means of 'rapid private accumulation; on official admission, even of the funds directly allocated for poverty alleviation, only 'the leakage', a barse fifteen per cent, reached the people — the state in India far from being a part of any solution itself became a part of almost every problem. Democracy, fought for and won by the people, still valuable to them and throughout defended by them against subversion from above, yet only vindicated Bagehot's classic observation about its being 'the way to give the people the greatest illusion of power while allowing them the smallest amount in reality', even as it also served to legitimise the ruling class domination in

society. 'Democratic politics' itself, once practiced as 'Hindu Undivided Family', as economic problems surfaced, steadily degenerated into an utterly unscrupulous, no-holds-barred infighting among the beneficiaries of the system for power and pelf in the state, where as they violated the rules of their own game, it was now truly the end justifying the means, literally any means; it was Malraux's 'politicians' politics' in its worst sense.

The national project was fast ending up as a class project but not recognised as such. It had its beneficiaries, and there was a consensus of the arrived and the complacent about it. Nationalism too had its uses, the emerging reality could be obscured in its name. Such was the domination of the ruling class ideas that even those who saw capitalism, saw it more as our very own 'national economy', and, together with faith and force of habit, it ensured the prevalence of the view that the 'national project' was still on. But there was nothing much in it for the vast masses of the common Indian people. To borrow from Tom Paine's metaphoric rejoinder to Burke's attack on the French Revolution, the 'plumage' of India's national development' was yet that of a 'dying bird'. The world looked very different from below, when the poor and oppressed of 'our nation' looked at it. However, the definitive collapse of the national project was still in the future.

Mid-sixties onwards the post-colonial national project in India floundered and fast degenerated, its economic crises underpinning and moving in step with the crises of the political system, 'democratic politics' and all that. If India's 'national economy' generated any number of potentially explosive issues, its 'national politics' regularly turned these issues into problems, problems into running sores and these sores into tragedies for the Indian people, in Punjab, Kashmir, almost everywhere. By the end of the eighties the national project was virtually over. Soon enough a dead-end economic crisis or financial bankruptcy of sorts, produced by the previously pursued policies, coincided with the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War and its eventual disintegration, depriving the Indian ruling classes of whatever little manoeuvrability they still had and leaving them more vulnerable than ever before to the offensive of a recharged global capitalism. Given the strong comprador or lumpen strain inherent in their character, led by their major political formation, the Congress-I, with their other political formations in tow, they succumbed, and hiccups and protests notwithstanding, opted for what is turning out to be a junior partnership within the global capitalist system. As beneficiaries of 'growth' during the Nehru era and afterwards, and now with a substantial economic strength of their own, globalization also provides them with new avenues of profit making at home and abroad. Therefore, this 'succumbing' can also be seen as a natural progress for Indian capitalism. India was again globalised, this time through a largely voluntary submission of the Indian rulers. The national project finally and definitively collapsed in 1991.

The evidence of this collapse is there in the disintegration of values and degradation of life all around us, in the continuing poverty of our people and growing consumerism of the elites and a society at once cynical and fearful about the future. It is there in official statistics and pages of the private media and so-called 'national mainstream' which bearing the impress of India's corrupt and corrupting, somewhat lumpen capitalist development, is an increasingly dirty affair — corrupt, communal and criminalised, a repressively

homogenising mainstream. The evidence is there in the visionless and so obviously laboured efforts of the powers-that-be to flog a tired and flabby patriotism into some semblance of life in this fiftieth year of India's independence. (including a Colgate sponsored selling of Vande Matarams on the television by distinguished Indians;) And this evidence is pathetically present in the impotence (or is it hypocrisy?) of the supposedly 'stirring' calls being made on the occasion — in Parliament for a 'second freedom struggle' and by the Prime Minister to 'begin the struggle for economic freedom'! One wonders what these past fifty years have been about. A Finance Minister took India back into globalization, asking us not to be afraid of the East India Company, opened up India to the multinationals, on the dishonest plea that 'the nation has been living beyond its means' — 'nation' indeed, when a good majority of our people have simply no means to live and most others none to indulge any 'living beyond'! His successor, more honest and ideologically committed, has been publicly pleading with the former globalisers in London to come back to India for another equally long stay (and then gone to town with this pleading in Washington and elsewhere): 'You came to India and stayed for 200 Years. Now come prepared to invest and stay for another 200 years, and there will be huge rewards'. The post-colonial national project is indeed over and done with.

Capitalism is today so powerful and pervasive as to have become invisible, and it is all the more powerful for being invisible. You no longer mention or recognise it. It is there, but without a name as it were, a harmless, nay benevolent, phenomenon called 'globalisation', recently arrived on the world scene to help the poor and backward countries out of their problems. Globalisation, nevertheless, has a proper name, capitalism, its world economy or market is a capitalist world economy or market. Harvard economist Robert Reich's phrase 'secession of the successful', is vividly expressive of a crucial feature of any capitalist market society. Globalisation of India means that the 'successful' of Indian society, the ruling elites of India, have decided to 'secede' from the common Indian people. A capitalist market society is also a case of 'the economy is doing fine, the people are not', as a President of Brazil once reported it in Washington. Therefore, the Indian economy may do 'fine' (with its growth rates, etc.) but, given its structural logic, the Indian people will not; for them the consequences of the current globalization are not likely to be much different from those of the globalization they had struggled hard and long to finally escape in 1947. Their peripheralisation this time could well be much worse.

The ruling classes of India have though their different political formations, decided to 'secede' from the people and opted for 'globalisation' as their strategic option for the future. The Indian people yet again face the question, whose full implications were somewhat obscured in 1947 due largely to the interim successes of the Soviet Union: what do *they* do in the current situation of global domination of capitalism? The historical experience in India and elsewhere in the Third World makes it abundantly clear that they will find no answers in capitalism, national or globalised. The choice for them remains socialism or peripheralisation. This is not to posit socialism as achievable today or tomorrow, or even the day-after for that matter, but to posit it as an

alternative strategic goal, as the principle governing people's politics today, which links together their immediate, ongoing and emerging, struggles in an ultimate project of revolutionary transformation of our society, as the goal of a long transitional process, whose specifics and speed will depend upon the objective material conditions and the nature and balance of the class forces involved at each stage of the struggle for it. Immediately, it means saying 'no' to globalization. This is not to argue for any kind of 'autarky' in economic development but to pose the issue of whether this development will be governed by *external* imperatives, those issuing from the requirements of the world capitalist market (export-led growth, etc.) and the associated consumerism of the rich, or primarily by *internal* imperatives, those flowing from an assessment of our own resources and the needs of our people.

The issue, in other words, is that of priorities: development for what and whom? Is it to satisfy the basic needs of the people or the consumerism of the elite in our society? The argument is for a pro-people socialism-oriented endogenous development process which draws on our own strengths, our domestic resources and capacities, including those of the hard working poor who still remain the most creative and productive in our society, a development which gives the common people, in both urban and rural areas, a positive stake in the economy and mobilises them for building a better society and, let me add, for the inevitable struggle against global imperialism and its local allies or partners. This has to be the alternative strategic option of the Indian people.

Technological backwardness is often pressed as an argument to counter the plea for such autonomous economic development in a Third World country. Here, apart from the fact that in India at least we are not that lacking in either technology or the talent for it, we need to overcome the widely prevalent fetishism of science and technology, which at times (as, for example, with Nehru and his 'temples of modern India', etc.) has even gone to the extent of expecting them to do the job of a social revolution, which they simply cannot. As with economics so with technology, the question again is one of priorities: technology for what purpose? Once this question is asked, the argument for getting access to the most modern Western technology, via globalisation, even if that was certain which it certainly is not, loses much of its force. If the purpose is to satisfy the consumerist hunger of the privileged part of our population with the most modern gadgets and designs, and the goodies of the West, then rushing into globalisation indeed makes some sense. But if the purpose or priority is to meet the needs of all the people for decent food, clothing and shelter, clean water, proper sanitation and health protection, education and cultural opportunities, and the like, then devoting scarce resources to the most modern technology is simply wasteful, because there is little in the latest technology of the West that could make a significant contribution. In fact what is most useful and relevant in technology, Western or otherwise, for improving the way of life of the masses, is widely known; moreover most of it is already available at home and what else is needed, is obtainable in the normal course of managed trade.

A socialism-oriented autonomous economic development as a strategic option for our people is premised on *politics and not 'the market'* commanding the economy (which, however, does not rule out an useful role for the market).

If such development is necessary in the interests of our people and they have no choice but to attempt it if they would avoid peripheralisation, with the people *really in power* it is also possible. The failure of the world's first experiment in socialism notwithstanding, there is much in its experience to help guide this attempt and be hopeful about it: for example, in the still unparalleled achievements of the early years of the post-revolutionary societies in Russia and elsewhere despite their economic backwardness, in Cuba's heroic struggle to save the gains of its socialist revolution, in Lenin's socialist project during the few years that he survived the October Revolution, in the experience of the 'Mao years' in China, and so on. An uncharted territory, we can still enter it with confidence.

The crux of the matter is people's power in the state, their 'political supremacy' in society, as Marx put it. Not a phony 'empowerment' from above, but people fighting and winning power for themselves through their own struggles, is central to securing a pro-people economic development in the country. 'National politics' of the day is almost exhausted so far as promotion of people's interest is concerned, it is today virtually parasitic on these interests. The traditional or mainstream Left, content all these years to operate only on the terrain of bourgeois politics, has finally lost out to it, and does not seem likely to recover its original commitment to revolutionary politics or socialism. But life continues to stir on the ground, the terrain where the real struggle for people's power begins — some old radical initiatives persist and many new ones are emerging everywhere, involving women, dalits, tribals, nationalities, ethnic or religious minorities, human rights, ecological concerns, etc., and any number of popular struggles at local levels. They all face serious problems of theory and practice. The people will surely have to go through the hard and painful school of experience and survive the all too many wrong battles they are misled into fighting before they learn to fight the right battles of their own. But learn they will. Globalisation itself, as it proceeds apace, will clarify as nothing else could, the real issues of Indian economy and politics, the issues of class divisions and exploitation, of the rich and the poor within the nation, and thus help people see through the ruling class politics of different varieties and come to a politics of their own, articulate their diverse struggles with a class-based people's politics, at both local and national levels, and confront the strategic option of the ruling classes, globalisation, with their own strategic option of a socialism-oriented autonomous economic development in the country. They will need to do so, the alternative is only their further peripheralisation within the global capitalist system.

The post-colonial national project may have collapsed and, in terms of their objective interests, the paths of the ruling elite and the people may have diverged as never before, but nationalism yet remains a very strong sentiment among our people. Many of those who would agree with me may still regard the struggle for a socialism-oriented autonomous economic development as a national struggle, a continuation, as it were, of the Indian people's earlier national struggle for freedom. Contributing to the confusion here is the increasing use or popularity of the concept 'national popular, in academic and political circles on the left. This calls for a brief comment and clarification.

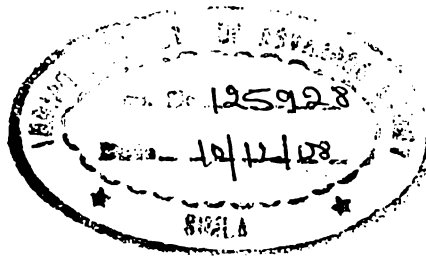
Nationalism, however 'ambiguous' an identity, and undoubtedly a powerful social, political and ideological force in our times, is yet a historical

phenomenon with class and society-specific character, potentialities and limitations, and, therefore, capable of manifesting itself in diverse forms. Located as we are in the Third World and with the still alive, though much faded, memories of our long struggle for freedom, we in this country are conventionally inclined to see nationalism as a liberationist force or ideology. But this is not always or necessarily the case with nationalism. With the ruling classes in the normal pursuit of their interests, or when faced with situations of crisis, nationalism has often taken all sorts of anti-people, imperialist or statist or racist or fascist forms, providing ideological support to ruling class politics and political domination at home and abroad. In our own country, more particularly in recent decades, nationalism has been used by the post-colonial rulers to cover up or find alibis for their defaults, to conceal the social reality of our much-divided and exploitative society, to divert people away from their real concerns and mobilise them behind ruling class politics. One political formation of the ruling classes has even come up with a Hindu-chauvinist nationalism, 'cultural nationalism' as they call it, to gain popular support and in the name of '*swadeshi*' better defend and promote the interests of India's 'national' capitalism.

Nationalism in India before 1947 was indeed progressive; under a different, more advanced class leadership and programme, it could have been radical, even revolutionary. It was progressive because it aimed at resolving the basic structural contradictions of Indian society, congealed in imperialism, whose resolution alone could clear the path for the Indian people's struggle for a better life. The struggle to resolve them, *against* imperialism, was our national struggle for freedom. But after 1947, with the post-colonial rulers having facilitated a historically specific form of capitalist development in the country, the basic contradictions that now need to be resolved to clear the path for the Indian people's continuing struggle for a better life lie *within* the nation, and their resolution is a matter of struggle within, against the Indian ruling classes; therefore, strictly speaking, this struggle cannot be viewed simply as a national struggle. In fact the Indian people's continuing struggle against imperialism, globalisation's neo-colonialism, too is now a part of this new struggle within, and not a continuation of the old pre-1947 anti-imperialist struggle, because the neo-colonialist 'integration', rather reintegration, into the global capitalist economy is now occurring by the grace of, through the opportunities provided by, indeed at the invitation of, the new rulers at Delhi. Nationalism or a national perspective only obscures this most basic of all issues facing the Indian people.

Thus, the struggle for a people's strategic option as against 'globalisation' that the Indian ruling classes have opted for, the struggle for a socialism-oriented autonomous development — which alone can also be an ecologically sustainable development as against a globalised Indian capitalism, subject to the capital-accumulative or profit-making imperatives of the market — is not a national struggle as such, nor a continuation of the earlier national struggle in India, though it can be and needs to be seen as its transcendence in a strictly dialectical sense, that is, a struggle that carries forward the best traditions and hopes of the earlier liberationist struggles of the Indian people. It is in its basic character a class struggle in the proper Marxian sense which eschews its narrow economistic or reductionist interpretations. No doubt a great deal of tactical resilience is necessary in relating it, theoretically as well as practically,

to the obviously important question of nationalism. But even if this struggle is viewed as a national or 'national-popular' struggle of the Indian people it can be nothing else but fighting the 'anti-nation within the nation', as the Latin-Americans have learnt to call it, or 'rescuing the nation' from its ruling classes, or, as Marx would have put it, the people 'establishing itself as the nation', and thus remains, in its essential content, a class struggle; it is not a collective struggle of *all* Indians for a common goal, for the goals within have diverged. The national task, recovering India for its people, is now, as it were, also a class task of the Indian people. Such has to be the precept of the Indian people's struggle against globalization and for a better life today.



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