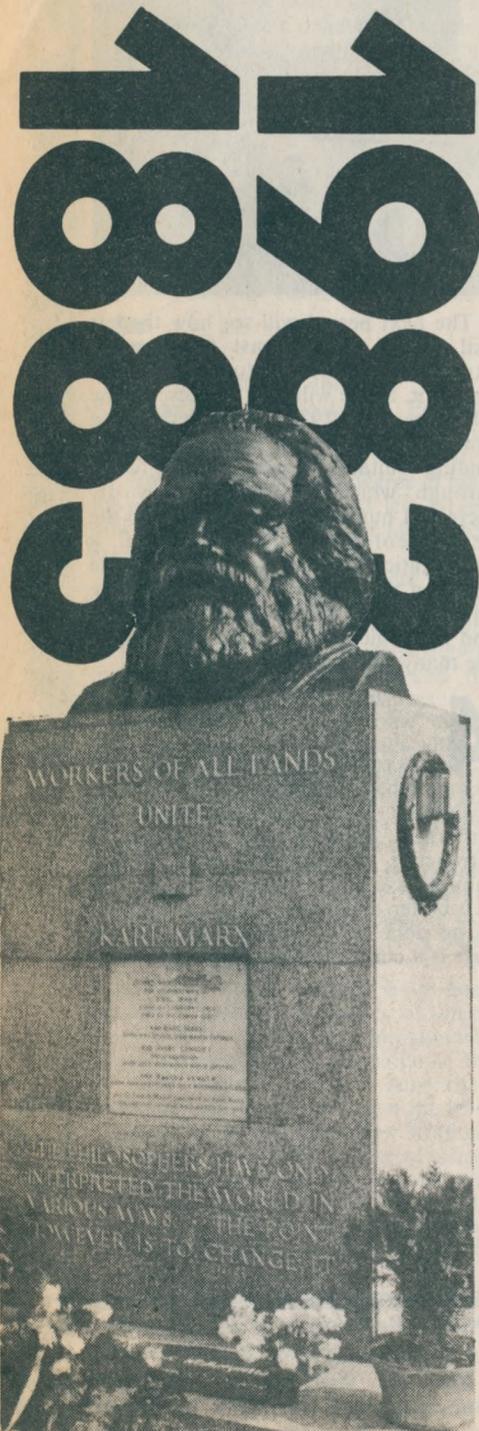


# MARX ESSENTIAL BUT NOT ENOUGH

JIM CAIRNS



I like Marx, have to say, "I am not a marxist". But if it were not for Marx I could not be what I am. If it were not for Marx I may never have seen the power and the importance of the real, the materialist, and the importance of work in determining what a person is. Unless one begins with the materialist conception of history, one may always remain an idealist — a man of the idea, a super man, a man-god, a patriarch.

It was not until Marx that the supremacy of idealism was critically rejected. Before Marx it was not the material world that determined what was, or what happened. The real world, things, people, labor, were all a reflection of the idea, of great men, of the supreme god. All the rest, people and things, were inferior, suppressed, distorted, merely to be used. Men had unlimited power over women, the power of life and death, the significance of which Engels noticed more than Marx. Men had all this power, but they created a god and claimed it had come from him.

It was inevitable that idealism and its elites would be opposed and diminished. But they remain powerful in the twentieth century. They are behind every suppression, every discrimination, every anti-life force.

But materialism grew fast. It is the idea, an idea alright, that it is not the idea that is supreme. To materialism, ideas reflect reality. It was really the renaissance that began to enthrone materialism. It was the materialism that believed that man could "create the world", and that science was the materialist way of looking at the world — science is the idea that becomes more and more an accurate reflection of the world.

It was Marx who gave renaissance materialism a political significance. He showed that power was based in people, people in classes, and that the material form of capital and the means of

production were the result of exploitation by the ruling class of the working class. No matter how much marxism became revised, rejected, attacked, demolished — and it was done in every generation — no matter how many forms of neo-marxism there were to be, idealism and its super-men and super-gods were ever more on the defensive. Never again could people, classes, labor, and the means of production be ignored if power was to be explained at all. The lowest and the poorest of people were granted a place in history reserved before only for heroes and great gods. After Marx, the substance of history became the everyday lives and needs and labors of human beings. They have remained so ever since.

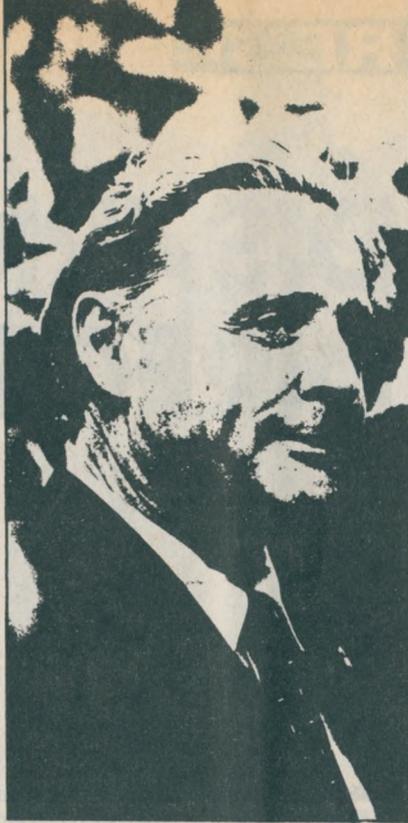
But Marx saw that it was all a matter of human consciousness. The consciousness of the working class of its own suppression, of exploitation and alienation. But Marx saw, too, that the consciousness the working class did have was *false* consciousness. How was false consciousness to be replaced by true consciousness? How did the working class acquire false consciousness?

Now we must be careful here. Consciousness can be irrational, especially the ruling *false* consciousness. How was the materialist conception of history, which assumes rationality, to deal with the irrational which seemed to dominate the working class and probably the ruling class too? Were ideas determined by the material, by the economic? Or could something go wrong? The materialist conception of history could not deal with the problem of irrationality.

The prophecies and expectations of power for the working class did not work out. Where revolutions have occurred, the working class did not obtain power. War was the significant example of human irrationality and the working class died in wars by the millions. Working classes, having failed so much, the colonial or black races came to be seen as the revolutionary class, not the white ones. Then the "instinct of revolt" was found, not in the working class, but in the "great mass", those millions of non-civilised, disinherited, wretched and illiterate". Violence was seen to have a "cleansing effect", and Engels decided that "it is precisely the wicked passions of man — greed and lust for power — which, since the emergence of class antagonisms, serve as levers of historical development". At the end of 1893, Engels had come to see that "history is the cruellest of all goddesses, and she drives here triumphal car over heaps of corpses, not only in war, but also in 'peaceful' economic development". How could history be seen any longer as the rational architect of proletarian success? Where were the "new societies" which were "pregnant in the old"?

But perhaps Stalin proved the most disturbing example of the irrational for marxist theory. It was decided in 1956 that it was slanderous to assert that the Stalin personality cult was due to the Soviet system itself. Stalin's irrationality arose from personal traits of character. He could not be explained by any rational economic or materialist interpretation of history.

But if a single individual could shape the character of society and project into its law, literature, and everyday life his own sadism, so that none could live or talk freely or honestly, if several millions of people could be imprisoned, and many tortured and killed, as Khrushchev claimed, and no one has denied, what



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then had happened to historical materialism and to the power of the working class after the revolution? Either the "cult of personality" arose from the irrational character of single individuals, making historical materialism false; or it arose from society itself, in which case socialist society was responsible and could be so again.

This problem remains within marxism unresolved, but marxists have split up into a myriad of views as a result.

It has become clear that power or character structure of individuals or classes is not the result of economic experience or of the way the means of production are owned or controlled. Ideas are not simply the result of materialist or economic conditions. False consciousness dominates and false consciousness is irrational in materialist and economic terms. Power and ideas are not an economic or materialist experience; they are a psycho-somatic experience or process which results critically from the suppression of human organic functions, in which the economic may play a significant part, and ownership and control of the means of production and the classes are a result of it.

Power is inevitably and inherently unequal because a majority of the people are made powerless and inert, while a

minority who inherit patriarchal power or, as in most cases, with a decline in patriarchal inheritance, acquire power by obsessive drives for it so as to compensate for more traumatic suppressions and contradictions in their own lives. Power cannot be obtained, or changed, by a powerless and inert majority class merely by setting up parliaments, any more than be revolutionary overthrow of the owners of the means of production. Democracy remains a system in which productivity is high enough to allow a permissive society; and revolution leaves the means of production controlled still by the patriarchal class in a system too low in productivity to allow the permissive society to develop. But it will.

If the world is to become conscious of itself, Marx is essential but not enough. In simple terms, there has to be a synthesis of Marx and psycho-biology. Economics and history are not enough. Materialism as well as idealism — both are a dualism and a split — have had their day. As Einstein decided: "We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive." And in the Soviet Union no less than in the United States.

Together, idealism and materialism have left the human species facing an imminent threat to its survival. If we can synthesise Marx's history and economics with biology and psychology we can see the world as it is, and begin to find ways to "create" man, and ways to deal with the universal problem of irrationality. We can begin to build a society which is, as Marx stated the aim, "an association in which free development of each" proceeds harmoniously with "the free development of all". There is a law of mutual reciprocity but it is discoverable in biology and psychology not in economics, war, violence, materialism or politics. They are part of the disease, not a prescription for cure.