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## Introduction

In the history of nations, come times of peace and war, of battles and truces, of boom and bust, of development and retreat, and of activation and stagnation. This perfectly is the case with left-wing ideologies in Britain. Like all human ideologies, left-wing ideologies have been subject to significant peaks and ebbs. Yet, their significance in shaping the history of England in particular and of humanity in general can hardly be doubted. In fact, left-wing ideologies stretch far back to the ancient times, but the modern leftist ideologies can be traced back to the emergence of the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818 –1883), the man who was the first to give socialism, and thereby the whole labor movement of present day, a scientific foundation (Carver 42), and his friend and associate Friedrich Engels (1820 –1895). Marx was a man who set out not to interpret the world but to change it, and his ideas have gripped millions of human beings and are still shaking the world. Marx himself once stated, "He who no longer finds pleasure in building the world with his own forces, in being a world creator instead of revolving forever inside his own skin, on him the Spirit has spoken its anathema" (qtd. in Fischer 17). So, he refused to revolve forever inside his own skin: he wanted to be a "world creator," making the world intellectually his own and eventually contributing to its material transformation (17).

Such statement led many modern followers of Marx to believe that he was an idealist and a perfectionist. But Marx was, in fact, neither of these. Marx, who himself declared that "we are not concerned with imposing some utopian system," was never in favor of an idealistic vision, he was only trying to change the world around him and set things right. Marx was equally "allergic" to all the vague phrases of "two-wise pundits" who wanted to give a "higher idealistic twist" to socialism, i.e. to the materialist basis (which requires serious objective study if one desires to operate upon it) by "a modern mythology with its goddesses Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" (Fischer 144-50). Marx was, simply, a man who set out to change the

world around him and who never stopped asking about the truth of things and tracing their history up to the beginning of their creation. This is what distinguishes men like Marx; men who have not ceased to look for an answer to every question and to seek the truth; men who can be called, in the broadest sense of the word, "thinkers." To these, Marx belonged for he was mainly a thinker in the broadest and truest sense of the word—a great thinker in his own right.

Still, Marx's ideas were not totally novel. What did produce Marx was the intellectual atmosphere that was prevalent at his time. He was but a product of an academic and cultural circumference in which ideas about philosophy, history, and the nature of man (especially in relation to alienation vs. reconciliation with one's self) were circulated. Man is the product of his socioeconomic circumstances. He is not divorced from them or can even claim that he is an entity very much separate or apart from them. Although society is largely shaped by man or, better possibly, by the collective efforts of a group of men, man is extremely shaped by this same society and by his socioeconomic status. This applies pretty well to Marx who, since he was expelled from France at the demand of the Prussian government and moved to Brussels, suffered from financial problems, which were to persist until the end of his life. It was very rational and natural then that this Marx, who suffered from constant poverty and ill-health, would stick to a theory that would relate the existence of every social relation and norm to its economic basis. Therefore, Marx's theory of history, known as historical materialism, understands society as fundamentally determined by the material conditions at any given time. Marx's theory of history was an entirely new one. It viewed history neither as an accumulation of accidents, of the deeds of great men, nor as a process of constantly recurring ebbs and tides, nor as the work of mysterious forces, pre-destined by some other-worldly plan of redemption or damnation or by the destiny of the World Spirit, but as the development of the human race determined by the nature of labor (Fischer 81).

Marx identified five successive stages of the development of these material conditions. The first stage is called Primitive Communism—hunters and gatherers with no private property. The second stage is Slave Society, considered to be the beginning of class society. The third stage is Feudalism, where there are many classes such as kings, lords, and serfs, some little more than slaves. From that moment, new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society; a merchant class develops, out of its riches a capitalist class emerges, but the old social organization fetters them and keeps them down (Fischer 67). Yet, since the political organization of society is preventing the development of the capitalists' productive forces, an epoch of social revolution begins and the fourth stage, capitalism, emerges. But, like slave society and feudalism, capitalism also has failings and inner contradictions which leads to revolution—the working class to which the capitalist class gave birth, is the "grave digger" of capitalism (Marx and Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto* 1952: 60). The fifth stage is Communism, although Vladimir Lenin, basing himself on a thorough study of the writings of Marx and Engels, divided this into two stages: first, socialism, an intermediate stage of society in which most industry and property were owned in common but some class differences remained, and then, once the last vestiges of the old capitalist ways have withered away, communism: a final stage of society in which class differences had disappeared, people lived in harmony, and government was no longer needed.

However, a close study of Marx's historical materialism shows that, while Marx occasionally over-emphasized the "natural laws" of historical development, he never overlooked the fact that it is men themselves who make their history, even in a world of alienation in which the products of human activity have assumed a "ghostly life" of their own (Fischer 85). Marx states:

History does nothing, it 'possesses no immense wealth,' it 'wages no battles.' It is man, real living man, that does all that, that possesses and fights; history is not a person apart,