

**THE THEORETICAL SYSTEM
OF KARL
MARX IN THE LIGHT
OF RECENT CRITICISM**

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The theoretical system of Karl Marx in the light of recent criticism by Louis B. Boudin

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LOUIS B. BOUDIN

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BY

LOUIS B. BOUDIN, LL. M.

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PREFACE.

The present volume is substantially a reprint of a series of articles which appeared in the *International Socialist Review* from May, 1905, to October, 1906.

It was my original intention to give in brief compass an account of the causes which called forth the so-called *Revisionist* movement, the questions raised thereby, and its net results, theoretical as well as practical. It soon became apparent to me, however, that such task was impossible of execution even within the space of twice the number (seven) of articles originally contemplated for the series, because of the extreme poverty of the English literature of the subject, and the consequent unpreparedness of our readers for such discussion. In treating of the causes of the Revisionist movement, the Neo-Kantian movement in latter-day philosophy had to be touched upon, but no mere reference or allusion to it would suffice because of the entire unfamiliarity of the English reader with that subject. The revision of Marxism could hardly be discussed with people who had but a bowing acquaintance with the doctrines of that famous system of thought.

I therefore concluded to present to the English reader, instead of an account of the movement to revise Marxism, an *exposition* of the teachings of Marx, and to draw upon the literature of Revisionism only in so far as it may become necessary or expedient in the course of such exposition, in order to accentuate some of its points or differentiate them from others with which they are likely to be confused. I have therefore refrained from entering here into any controversy with any revisionist Marx critic except in so far as was absolutely necessary for my purpose. And I hope at

some future time to be able to resume the argument, when I expect to take up the different critics and their criticisms one by one and draw conclusions with them.

I have also refrained from entering into any detailed statement of the Marxian economic theory as I did not intend to make this volume a primer of philosophy and political economy according to Marx, but rather an outline of the Marxian system of thought, with the accent on the *system*, that is the relation of its different parts to each other and the unity of the whole. It is not meant as a text-book of the Marxian teaching, but as an introduction to the study of Marx, and as an aid to the understanding of him. And in this connection I wish to say that in stating what I considered to be the true Marxian doctrine I never relied on isolated statements or expressions, but always looked to the spirit pervading the whole of his work, for the explanation of any dark point or the solution of any problem encountered.

In the arrangement of the matter I have followed the suggestion of the great Master: I have treated the Materialistic Conception of History as merely introductory to the study of the actual workings of the capitalist system. I appreciate that the problems of the Materialistic Conception of History are many and manifold, but I do not believe that it would have been wise to burden the reader at the very beginning with long and abstruse philosophic discussions. Besides, many of the problems of the Materialistic Conception of History which are considered grave, are so considered only because of the failure of many students of the subject to perceive that these problems are not peculiar to this particular philosophy, but are problems of philosophy in general.

There is one respect, however, in which the Materialistic Conception of History has a harder road to travel than any other system of thought that I know of: the persistent misrepresentations of friend and foe. I have therefore deemed it advisable to attach two appendices, wherein are

treated two points with respect to which these perversions and misrepresentations are most frequent and at the same time most glaring.

I hope that the volume herewith presented will give the reader, if not an adequate presentation of the Marxian doctrines, at least an adequate beginning for such presentation, and that it will serve as a stimulant towards an adequate discussion among English-speaking people of the great theoretical problems embraced within the realm of Marxism.

L. B. BOUDIN.

New York, February, 1907.

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THE THEORETICAL SYSTEM OF KARL MARX.

CHAPTER I.

KARL MARX AND HIS LATTER-DAY CRITICS.

Marxism—that theoretical system of which Karl Marx was the chief exponent, and which its adepts are wont to term “Scientific Socialism”—has reached a stage in its existence which marks it as one of those systems of thought which in the history of the intellectual development of the human race are epoch-making and stamp their character upon the age the intellectual life of which they dominate. While the fight for its existence is still raging, and it is growing in intensity from day to day, the character of the fight betrays the difference in its position. It no longer fights for recognition, so to speak, but on the contrary, it fights to maintain the position of an established doctrine, one might say *the* established doctrine, a position which it has assumed and occupied since the appearance of the last volume of *Capital* in 1894.

Marx-criticism is not any the less frequent or any the less vehement to-day than it was at any time during the life of his doctrines. Quite the reverse: At no time since the first foundations of the great system of thought which bears his name were laid down by Karl Marx, more than fifty years ago, have his assailants been so numerous or so active as they are now. Marxism—opposition to Marxism—is the moving cause, the burden of the song, the ever-recurring *Leit-motif*, of every new book, pamphlet, and

essay on philosophy, sociology, or political economy, that lays any pretensions to being abreast of the modern current of thought. There are now being published numerous periodicals—weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.—devoted exclusively, openly or covertly, to the fighting of Marxism. This is itself, of course, one of the manifestations of the dominating influence which the teachings of Marx and his disciples have obtained over the minds of human kind: it now requires the constant efforts of a great army of intellectuals to combat, and that with very doubtful success, the progress of the teaching which less than a quarter of a century ago would have been passed by one of them as a negligible quantity in the sum total of our intellectual life.

Aside however from its volume, the tone of the anti-Marx-literature of the present day shows the change in the position of Marxism. The tone of personal hostility towards Marx, the slighting estimate of his position in the realm of thought, and of the importance of his system in the development of ideas,—which were once common to the majority of Marx critics—are almost entirely absent from this literature. On the contrary, the distinguishing feature of this anti-Marxian literature is the homage which is paid by nearly everybody to Marx the man and the thinker. More important, however, is the fact that most of the new critics of Marxism do not treat it as a new-fangled doctrine the correctness of which is yet to be proven, but, on the contrary, as the old-established and accepted doctrine which they attempt to prove false, in whole or in part, and which, they claim, must therefore be revised, supplemented or superseded. No one, however, dares openly defend the theories which Marxism has supplanted. Almost everyone admits expressly the justifiability of Marx's criticism of the theories which predominated before his advent, and that Marx's theories were correct at the time they were first stated and a proper generalization of the data then at hand. What they claim is, that later develop-