

# KARL MARX: THE CULTURAL MEMORY OF THE MACEDONIAN PEOPLE AND THE PEOPLES OF THE EASTERN BLOC – RECEPTION AND PERCEPTION

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**Abstract:** This The severe economic crisis raised the question: Was Marx right? Or, as Terry Eagleton writes: WHY Marx was right. A reactualization of his ideas, his philosophy or his diagnosis and cures, as well as his economic and social studies, has recently become attractive once again. The acceptance and reactualization of Marx these days, especially in the Western countries, could bring us/open alternative ways of practicing politics, policy making and activism (take, for example, the "Occupy Wall Street" movement); or non-acceptance of Marx and a further global crisis could lead to a rebirth of the extreme right. Are Marx's ideas a philosophy, a view of the world or a practical "know-how"? "Marx was right about self-destruction of capitalism", says Nouriel Roubini. Does he inspire and will be inspiring new tendencies and ways of (more or less) global activism and are his ideas a phenomenon that will redefine global politics and society? Are Marx's ideas truly part of cultural memory in the so called Eastern bloc or were they perverted by the past system(s), which was/were using this philosophy for re-creation of its own bourgeoisie. What is today's /nowadays reception and perception of Marx in these countries and how do people react to the possibility of their memory becoming their present tomorrow!? document gives formatting instruct-

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Writing about Karl Marx nowadays presents a two-fold difficulty. First of all, he has been making a certain comeback in intellectual fashion and becoming an increasingly frequent subject of academic research or observation. Second, Marx's reception and perception has a somewhat schizophrenic character – namely, he is seen both as a person with individual work (whether philosophical or political is subject for a different and for further debate), and through the prism of socio-political systems, particularly those of Eastern Europe, which modelled themselves on the basis of his ideas.

Why is Marx back into "intellectual fashion", especially in the highly-developed, modern western world,

which, *grosso modo*, did not hold the most positive of attitudes towards the founder of the communist theory in previous years!? The answer, it appears, is again to be sought for in a heterogeneous manner, based on the insights and events from a number of fields, though with a single, common focus. More specifically, standing on the threshold of another Black Friday on the stock markets, of debt crises, famine and fear for day-to-day survival, the world seems to realise it has reached an impasse. This, at least, refers to the highly-developed western world, which used to feed on a diet of liberal and neoliberal economism. Where is the exit from this cul-de-sac, at the end of which we hit a wall, and, as we know, it is useless to beat our heads against it, since, according to the theory of probability, large-scale fatal consequences would be inevitable? Above all, the issue of economic crises is usually considered from the viewpoint of market supply and demand and the limitations of resources. Unarguably, this is an important factor, but it represents only one of many dimensions, as the crises of the past, the present, as well as the inevitable future also have cultural, humanist, philosophical, ontological, and if you will, gnoseological elements, which are often overlooked. Set on a horizontal axis, the ideas of Smith, Keynes and Marx embed the evolutionary postulate of mental-humanist reality, especially if it is presumed that the factor of time appears as included, or rather, predominant, in this axis. As regards time, Benvenist (Benvenist 1975, 15) maintains that it does not constitute a factor of evolution, rather a mere framework within which it transpires. If this is true, then man turns into the chief factor, which implies that we are bound to adopt an anthropocentric viewpoint in order to understand in what way man and the environment interact with one another so as to initiate different

receptive and perceptive focal points when it comes to presenting and engraving a person and his work in the cultural memory.

## II. SMITH AS THE PLUSQUAMPERFECT

The negation of the tasks and the role of the state as well as the negation of the liberal concept of free market exchange of goods is the precursor of modern consumerism. However, this consumerism, which must give way in the face of reality, lies on a neoliberal matrix, so its current dominance and view of itself as the present will already force it to withdraw tomorrow and in the future it will be viewed as the perfect. This, then, renders Smith's ideas part of the distant past, the past perfect, regarding expectations of evolution and reality, with a high likelihood of what awaits us in the future. Market economy contains the immanent logic of the invisible hand of the market, which functions well and has been given a masterly description by Smith, yet it is a logic that excludes the man who is /+human/, /+culturally elevated/, /+conscious/. This market logic is guided by the low degree of evolution, which entails food gatherers and cooks, hunters and housewives, all the while oblivious to solidarity or the necessity of a painting, a book or a theatre performance, a museum exhibition, or an opera. The state only has to take care of the infrastructure and the education of the poor. But, why are they poor? Is it due to their low level of production? Their laziness? Or is it due to the avarice of the powers controlling the market? It is due to the American dream, which convinces them: "tomorrow you can be rich, too, so don't change the world, leave it as it is – impotent, spiritually void, tyrannical, exploitative,... do not judge it, but fight to become the exploiters of the future." And the exploiters will only constitute 1%. The remaining 99% will serve capitalism, the *spiritus movens* system of the human food chain.

### III. KEYNES: PRESENT TODEY, PERFECT TOMORROW

Although in the present Keynes' ideas are the most popular ones, preferred even by leading economic experts, still, much like Smith's ideas, not only will they be buried in the past very soon, but largely over and done with, never to be revived. And why would this be so? The interventionism of the state in the capitalist society is a contradictory position in itself. The imposition of consumerism creates a system of communicating vessels, crashing and colliding in a domino effect. One only has to decompose today's world debt crisis into its constituent parts, its most fundamental cells, in order to find the answer to the question of why Keynes' philosophy cannot face a bright future. Namely, stimulating consumerism presupposes a situation in which you want to buy goods you do not have the resources for. The happy solution is near at hand: taking out loans from commercial banks (mind you, not state banks, nor banks that stimulate social development, but banks aimed at making profits, which are highest when you fail to repay the loan). The banks grant a large number of loans, many of which the people and the companies are not able to pay off. People start losing their real estate, their acquired fortune, and the banks insist on collecting the loans, but eventually, they have nothing more to take from the impoverished debtors, so, in the end, they meet their inevitable doom, too. And, the result of this? The present-day debt crises, crossing into the next stage or in the next tumble of the financial sector, which during more severe turmoil, will trigger a system of communicating vessels in the real sector.

### IV. RECEPTION AND PERCEPTION

Thus, it is necessary to juxtapose Smith's and Keynes' views. Not unlike other theorists, Marx cannot be considered

in isolation. Through the overview of the development of economic thought, along with an emphasis on political economy, we can obtain indicators of the manners and reasons why Marx and his ideas, both separately and comparatively, are viewed through the prism of socio-political systems. Hence the return of Marx in vogue, through the crises and unsustainability (of yesterday or certainly tomorrow), and in the teachings of the leading theorists of economics.

The countries of Eastern Europe often have a perverted image of Marx: he is seen as the author/ideologist of the system that used to reign in their societies. While in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia his image implies certain ambivalence, as many used to lead a good life back in the day, or at least a life that was better than it is today, in the other countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc, the old system often evokes emotions of hypernegativity. Their conviction that the "Red October" was a consequence of Marxism, and that their manner of life at the time was a ramification of the system associated with this historic moment, by the principle of Aristotle's syllogism leads to the conclusion that their general attitudes towards Marx are, simply, negative.

Therefore, a logical question is often raised: what is the level of mental human/humanist development, the degree of awareness, i.e. the past or current stadium that man is to achieve, in order for the teachings of the muse of today's presentation to come to life?

In ultima linea, Marx' opponents raise two, fairly well-grounded and logical questions:

1. Considering the eleventh thesis of Feuerbach, how much can Marx' theory be characterised as philosophy, and how much as politics and activism?

2. How is it possible to achieve classlessness in a setting that comprises not only lowered awareness and a biological product (man) born without equal traits, but also a so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat". That is, even

if this phrase may be symbolic, highly metaphorised and strongly allegorical, nevertheless, dictatorship still signifies a regime, a government by means of force (even violence!), which is a *contradictio in adjecto* to the asymptotic line of equality, lack of subordination and abolishment of class division.

As regards the first query, in the analysis of the philosophical work of a theoretician of Marx and Marxism, Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov, Gajo Petrović puts forward an extremely relevant, useful and helpful view, wisely noting that “Marx was predominantly preoccupied with philosophy in his youth, while later his theoretical activities increasingly gravitated towards different theoretical areas, primarily political economy” (Petrović 1977: V).

The second question embeds an inherent philosophical matrix, which cannot be given an unequivocal answer. Practically, the claim that the *homo sapiens* has not reached the adequate level of mental and humanist development is a sign of self-belittlement. In a broader sense, the claim that all men are not born with equal capabilities leads to the necessary conclusion that one may form an alliance of super-humans as opposed to the rest who belong to an inferior class. In fact, the answer to the second question is not as complex as it is dangerous, since it negates equality by virtue of humanity.

The above stated conditions lead us into wondering whether people from said geographical areas will remember what they learnt during their lessons in Marxism or, like all students, will only remember that Marxism was just another subject to study and pass?! Only time can provide the answer and, undoubtedly, it has been working to Marx’s advantage.

John Hutnyk in *Bad Marxism (Capitalism and Cultural Studies)* wrote: “At the moment of the analysis of Moses, Freud asks the question of the value of his own writings, and he gives the answer, according to Derrida, that one

‘can only justify the apparently useless expenditure of paper, ink, and typographic printing, in other words the laborious investment in the archive’ by putting forward a novelty, a discovery (1995/1996:12).

Freud’s discovery, in the Moses text, is that of the destructive impulse. ‘Was it worth it?’, might have been Freud’s and Derrida’s question, and it is a question I want eventually to put to Derrida’s work on Marx”.

In our view, the question of whether Marx’s canon was WORTH IT OR NOT, is a superfluous one. The answer is found in the claim, whose detailed elaboration will be provided, that, not only is it worth it, but it is the only path to take.

As a matter of fact, the shift from pro-Marxist to anti-Marxist thought (termed only nominally) occurred in the ten years starting from the mid-70s until the mid-80s and marked a period during which, as Eagleton notes (Eagleton 2011, 4), the West makes vital changes. Traditional industrial production transitioned into post-industrialism, accompanied by the culture of consumerism, communications and information technology. Businesses became “small, decentralised, non-hierarchically ordered [...], without market regulation, and the working-class movement subjected to savage legal and political assault. Traditional class allegiances were weakened, while local, gender and ethnic identities grew more insistent. Politics became increasingly managed and manipulated” (ibid.).

The downfall of the Soviet Union, particularly of the Eastern Bloc, contributed to this upheaval.

“What helped to discredit Marxism above all, then, was a creeping sense of political impotence. It is hard to sustain your faith in change when change seems off the agenda, even if this is when you need to sustain it most of all. After all, if you do not resist the apparently inevitable, you will never know how inevitable the inevitable was. If the fainthearted had managed to cling to their former views for another two decades, they would have witnessed

a capitalism so exultant and impregnable that in 2008 it only just managed to keep the cash machines open on the high streets. They would also have seen a whole continent south of the Panama Canal shift decisively to the political left. The End of History was now at an end. In any case, Marxists ought to be well accustomed to defeat. They had known greater catastrophes than this” (Eagleton 2011:6-7).

The world of today demonstrates that the catastrophe has been surmounted. There have been changes in the conception of the entire idea and ideology as well as in the perception of their founding father. The aforementioned ambivalent views, which are product of the mixture of the understanding of the prevalent paradigm and of the system, instead of the idea, on the one hand, and the objective circumstances affecting a serious turning point and indicated in Eagleton’s citations, on the other, have slowly melted together. The contemporary global flows, which have come about by virtue of the end of the ‘80s and which have brought us back to the pre-Marxist age, which, *ex definitione*, is supposed to involve a lower level of socio-political, economic and humanist consciousness, nowadays move towards resuming the study and reaffirming of these ideas since their mass pogrom during said decade.

#### V. SOME MARGINAL NOTES ON MARX’S WORK IN JOURNALISM

In our orientation towards “Das Kapital”, we have diverted our attention from Marx’s other works. Regardless of how famous, a portion of them are of great importance for his cultural and political views regarding social events in the time segment within which he existed. Namely, the newspaper articles that he primarily wrote for New York Daily Tribune are especially important for his views, as they represent his own writings, yet completely

detached from the overall receptive-perceptive hermeneutic apparatus applied in approaching Marx’s works from the aspect of cultural memory, that is, of the collective memory of the founder of communism. Now they are undergoing reaffirmation and are being tentatively reissued, almost without any commentary, although they can give birth to a philosophy, an imagology and a political activism and economism. These writings can be termed “critical essays”, as his newspaper articles have no correspondence whatsoever to the contemporary concept of journalism. The editor of the volume of Marx’s newspaper writings, Jim Ledbetter states: “That is to say: they contain essentially nothing that would today be called ‘reporting’: no first-hand accounts of events, large or small; no interviews with sources, official or otherwise. They are critical essays constructed, as so much of Marx’s work was, out of the research materials available to him in the British Library.” (<http://www.marxsite.com/Marx%20as%20a%20Journalist.html>)”

In support of this thesis we will only consider one of Marx’s texts, penned in London on August 6, 1852 and published on August 21, 1852 in New York Daily Tribune. It deals with the subject of elections in England, or more specifically, with the opposition of Tories vs. Whigs.

His descriptions abound in personal imprints and assessments from a class perspective:

“The year 1846 tore down the traditionally venerable lion’s hide, under which Tory class interest had hitherto hidden itself. The year 1846 transformed the Tories into *Protectionists*. Tory was the sacred name, Protectionist is the profane one; Tory was the political battle-cry, Protectionist is the economical shout of distress; Tory seemed an idea, a principle; Protectionist is an interest. Protectionists of what? Of their own revenues, of the rent of their own land. Then the Tories, — in the end, are

Bourgeois as much as the remainder, for where is the Bourgeois who is not a protectionist of his own purse? They are distinguished from the other Bourgeois, in the same way as the rent of land is distinguished from commercial and industrial profit. Rent of land is conservative, profit is progressive; rent of land is national, profit is cosmopolitical; rent of land believes in the State Church, profit is a dissenter by birth.”

Although journalism is normally required to deal with facts, rather than truth, since truth is a philosophical category, Marx endows his articles with a tone of engagement, an ideological colouring and a look through the lens of ordinary citizens.

He ends his article entitled “Corruption at Election” (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/08/20.htm>) with the following crescendo:

“The bribery and intimidation practised by the Tories were, then, merely violent experiments for bringing back to life dying electoral bodies which have become incapable of production, and which can no longer create decisive electoral results and really national Parliaments. And the result? The old Parliament was dissolved, because at the end of its career it had dissolved into sections which brought each other to a complete stand-still. The new Parliament begins where the old one ended; it is paralytic from the hour of its birth.”

These excerpts and ideas, which he authored when the 19<sup>th</sup> century was breaking in half, provide us with hesitant, yet fairly valuable observations of the answer to the question why the present time marks a renewed interest in Marx. Obviously, little has changed in the essence of the political and economic scene. The cyclical nature of the chapters of history has disabled progress. Caught in a loop, the space-time continuum must find a way to resume a straight course.

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Let us introduce the conclusion with a paraphrase of Sartre’s words: Marxism is not anachronous because the problems it tackles have not been resolved. This is the reason why Marx has regained importance at the start of the third millennium and is being taught in a number of centres and from a variety of aspects: culturological, philosophical, political, economic, etc. – in fact, both multi and interdisciplinary.

An ever-increasing number of copies of “Das Kapital” has been sold in recent years, and the Marxist thought has spread and been viewed as the saviour. This has been confirmed by the precise vivisection of the current state of affairs, which Marx performed back in the 19th century: “The owners of capital and of businesses will instigate and stimulate a need in workers to buy their expensive goods, apartments, houses and technology, thereby obliging them to take out expensive mortgages to a point of unsustainability, and, eventually, the unpaid debts will cause the banks to go bankrupt.” Even Archbishop Reinhard Marx absolves him of the sin of regarding religion as the opium of the masses and, alluding deliberately to the work of his more famous surnamesake, in the book entitled “Das Kapital: A Plea for Man” he delivers a bitter attack on capitalism: “Capitalism without humanity, solidarity and justice has no morals and no future”, Marx writes (<http://www.dw.de/catholic-archbishop-pens-his-own-das-kapital/a-3752782-1>).

Due to its avant-garde nature, Marx’s philosophy has no counterbalance. Anti-Marxism means only regression. Or, in Sartre’s terms: “I have often remarked on the fact that an ‘anti-Marxist’ argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea. A so-called ‘going bey-

ond' Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond. As for 'revisionism', this is either a truism or an absurdity. There is no need to readapt a living philosophy to the course of the world; it adapts itself by means of thousands of new efforts, thousands of particular pursuits, for the philosophy is one with the movement of society."

Finally, some of the right-wing theoreticians (e.g. Vaninsky, mentioned in the book by Zheljko Rutovikj, "Marx's New Fame") also admit that Marx's ideas have not been defeated. On the contrary, Vaninsky agrees with the thesis that the key lies in progress in production, not in demand; that capitalism plants the seed of its own division, which will destroy it from within. In the simplest of terms – destruction will ensue when the limited resources are wasted on consumerism, in lieu of the necessary production to bring about progress.

Rather than concluding, we predict: the reception and perception of Marx have been subject to slow change and almost reascending to their peak, which they had first reached during the 1970s, owing to the economic benefits of the Marxist idea and the strong philosophical opinions in this area. Along with the constant trend of the neoliberal economism towards crisis and the lowering of people's living standard, this change has caused a "turn to the left" (according to the political Cartesian coordinate system). Even if unaccepted, Marx's ideas will win, because their opponents keep self-destructing. In fact, it is exactly those quasi or insufficiently developed systems of the post-October expansion of communism that will cause the untimeliness of such processes to bring about a rebirth of capitalism on Russian-Chinese ground, whereas, pre-

ssured by the last phase of the pre-Marxist observations, Western Europe will accept this looping as the sole exit towards finding the right course.

Marx's perception has followed a sinusoidal movement: from an utter lack of understanding and unpopularity, through a basis for revolutions and the establishment of new systems, through their downfall and up to a reaffirmation. Such a perception follows as a result of the recognition of the results, and not of the ideas. And vice versa – a recognition of the crisis and the tumble, the decrease of the benefits of the neoliberal economism and capitalism, which contributes to a line of increase. Time will show whether this rise will lead to an end in the form of an asymptotic line to the vertical axis. At least for the time being, and in the lack of an alternative, this is the only prediction capable of being made at this point in time and for some temporal segment in the future.

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