

Reading Marx

Won't do it!

Peter Werbe

2022

a review of

How to Read Marx's Capital: Commentary and Explanations on the Beginning Chapters by Michael Heinrich. Translated by Alexander Locasio. Monthly Review Press 2022

My interest in reading this tome is so minuscule that I haven't even opened it. The title is off-putting enough.

The question never asked is why would anyone want to read the arcana of the inner workings of Capital's political economy? And, perhaps, who would want to?

The answers to both merge. There are two basic categories that fit the second question. The first is academics whose studies dig as deeply as possible into any subject. That is their gig no less than those whose field is quantum entanglement theory.

The second group are those who call themselves Marxists in the political realm, most coherently grouped around small, authoritarian political parties that adore some socialist dictator from the past or present.

Their memorization of the esoterica of Marx is to demonstrate their fealty as a good apparatchik to the organization. It's a necessity if they desire to elevate themselves within their grouplet since the more one can recite chapter and verse of *Capital*, it is understood by the Faithful and the party bureaucracy alike to be a sign of the Elect.

But isn't an understanding of the reigning system of exploitation necessary if we want to move beyond it? Yes, but it can be rendered much simpler, particularly if you are part of a class directly experiencing what Marx goes to such lengths to explain.

The Luddites in the early 1800s opposed the factory system being imposed on English tradesmen as destroying their convivial culture of labor. During the same period, the United Irishmen wrote in their publications in simple terms that land ownership was congealed labor. Pierre Proudhon declared famously in an 1840 book that "Property is theft!"

So, tell me why two volumes of a text so detailed, and to a large extent so arcane that it requires a separate explanation to make it intelligible, has a practical efficacy for those who oppose capitalism, that is superior to easily understood formulations.

Any number of admirable writers consider themselves Marxist historians such as E.P. Thompson, Peter Linebaugh, Silvia Federici, and Gerald Horne, whose writings have greatly influenced my view of the world, but their work often chronicles many rebels not influenced by or who preceded the works of Marx.

However, the question could be posed to anti-Marxists, why such antipathy to a philosophy that is reserved primarily for the academy and as the methodology of scholars?

It's because Marxism only appears in the real world as the ideology of police states, and is currently being resuscitated through a rehabilitation that requires a brain fog to ignore or forget the crimes and treachery of those who ruled and continue to rule in Marx's name.

Expanded commentary on opposition to Marxist thought and Marxists is contained in our Spring 2015 issue, FE #393. Its content is available either at FifthEstate.org/archive or the print edition.
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