

Karl Marx's Scientific Socialism: A Defence

Preamble

The title of my paper is a twist on G.A. Cohen's groundbreaking 1978 book *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*. In this book Cohen defends Marx against a number of leading critics. However, in 2000 Cohen published a book entitled *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* in which he becomes a critic of Marx. Indeed, in this book Cohen declares his rejection of Marx. In this book Cohen argues that Marx's distinctive brand of scientific socialism cannot be justified because its central predictive claims have been falsified by history. In this paper I am going to defend Marx against Cohen's criticisms. Karl Marx's Scientific Socialism might be difficult to formulate and justify but I will argue that it does not fail for the kinds of reasons that Cohen cites. I focus on Cohen because what he has to say against Marx sums up and express widespread scepticism about the relevance of Marx for our present age. The issues that Cohen raises are issues that Marxists should confront. I think that even in Cohen parting shot to Marx, he has done Marxist philosophy a service by forcing Marxists to respond to what many take to be the leading problems with being a Marxist today. Hopefully, what I say will help to counter the kind of scepticism which Cohen directs towards Karl Marx's Scientific Socialism.

1. Introduction

1.0 *Cohen on Marx's Two Inevitabilitarian Claims about Class & Technology*. A central feature of Karl Marx's Scientific Socialism is his class analysis of human society and history. Working class struggle plays a central role in Marx's view about the dynamics of social change and in his hope for a communist future. What comes

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out of Marx's Scientific Socialism is the expectation that the working class, and a struggle for their interests as conducted by them and others, will play a leading role in the revolutionary transformation of human society from one dominated by the capitalist mode of production to one which comes to be organised in accordance with communist systems of production for social needs and communist schemes of distribution in the means of consumption.

One of my central concerns in this paper is how did Marx envisage working class struggles to work themselves out? What kind of social revolution did Marx envisage for societies progressing towards communism?

A common view is that Marx expected the leading agents of social change to be a mass movement of downtrodden heavy-industry-based proletarians. The change that they are supposed to effect is some kind of apocalyptic 'D-day' event in which, almost at an instant, capitalism would be extracted from human society and then progress towards communism be established. Cohen attributes such a view to Marx and then argues that Marx was wrong about such revolutionary expectations for the working class. There might have been a politically-engaged industry-based revolutionary proletariat in Marx's day, however, there are no such agents now nor is there the prospect for their emergence. G.A. Cohen attributes this expectation to Marx and claims that we now know that Marx was mistaken to hold and encourage such a view. (I agree with what Cohen says about the disappearance of traditional working class but I don't think much rides on it.)

Cohen maintains that Marx was not only wrong in his hopes for class struggle, Marx was also wrong about an allied expectation of technological development for communism. Cohen argues that Marxists should now reject Marx's Scientific Socialism because two of Marx's key predictions about class struggle and

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technological change have been falsified by the course (history) of the capitalist mode of production after Marx. Indeed the failure of, what Cohen describes as, Marx's two 'inevitalitarian' claims about class and technology has led Cohen to become a semi-Marxist or even an ex-Marxist.¹

As Cohen sees it the two inevitable claims which emerge from Marx's Scientific Socialism are as follows. First, the working class in capitalist economies were meant to grow and gather in strength and numbers. They were meant to organise deliver *a* revolution to human society. Second, *after* this supposed revolution the workers were meant to develop the techniques of production and deliver conditions of material abundance to human society. Supposedly, consumption would have ceased to be a zero-sum game and nobody will be left wanting any more of any material good.² Instead, Cohen writes:

The proletariat did, for a while, grow larger and stronger, but it never became, as the Communist Manifesto foretold, the 'immense majority', and it was ultimately reduced and divided by the increasing technical sophistication of the capitalist production process that had been expected to continue to expand its size and augment its power. And the development of productive forces now runs up against a resource barrier. Technical knowledge has not stopped, and will not stop growing, but productive power, which is the capacity (all things considered) to transform nature into use-value – that is, into sources of utility for human beings – cannot expand *pari pasu* with the growth of technical knowledge, because planet Earth rebels: its resources turn

¹ G.A. Cohen *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000), p.105.

² Cohen speaks of "material abundance so great that anything anyone needed for a richly fulfilling life could be taken from a common store at no cost to anyone." *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000), p.104.

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out to be not lavish enough for continuous growth in technical knowledge to generate unceasing expansion of use-value.³

Cohen's claims in this passage concern the bankruptcy of Marx's envisaged political and economic *means* to communism. Marx's supposed paths to communism, as paved by working class revolution and technological development, are not open to us and, according to Cohen, were never really available to us.

1.1 *The Ends of Marx's Communism* Cohen rejects what he considers to be Marx's intended means to communism but maintains that the *ends* of Marxism are as relevant as ever. Now, the political ends that Marx intends by his Scientific Socialism are a matter of controversy. This controversy is fed by Cohen's claim that Marx was not clear or, indeed, fully aware of the ultimate aims of his own communism. Cohen claims that Marx was so hung up on the means to communism that he did not put much thought into the nature of its ends. According to Cohen the ends of Marx's communism are rooted in 'distributive justice'. Cohen maintains this view in the face of Marx's explicit and repeated claims that he is not interested in such justice.⁴ However, Cohen is not content to take Marx's denials at face value and claims that Marx was confused about his own commitment to justice. For Cohen, a central aim of Marxian communism is to deliver egalitarian distributive justice to society. And, for Cohen, unlike Marx's (supposed) expectation, we are not progressing to a more equal society. In fact, late capitalist economies seem to be heading for greater inequality in

³ G.A. Cohen *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000), p.104.

⁴ For example see Karl Marx *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p.347ff, in *The First International & After: Political Writings Vol.3* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

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the distribution of income and wealth. Human society is drifting further from what Cohen considers to be Marx's confusedly intended political ends.

Marx's *means* to such egalitarian ends has failed according to Cohen. Therefore we should seek to reign in the growing economic inequality in our society by *arguing* for the justice of the Marxist cause and *advocating* a moral case for communism defined in terms of a commitment to egalitarian distributive justice.⁵ In the face of the failure of Scientific Socialism, Marxists must pursue philosophical ('moralising') means to secure Marx's intended political ends. Cohen thus gives Marxism an idealist cast. A revolution in thinking rather than the material conditions of our economic life will usher in communism.

Cohen seems to boil the essential concern of Marxism down to a 'Robin Hood' goal for socialist politics. Only persuasion rather than a pistol is the weapon we must use in order to get the rich to hand over their extra 'immoral' and unjustified holdings of cash. Our central goal must be to persuade the productive and rich in late capitalist society to give up more of what they earn by selling the talents and skills they happen to have in the market place. They should come to cooperate in schemes of income transfer which result in them having less and the poor having more. There should not be huge disparities in the distribution of income and wealth across persons. Indeed, there should be distributive equality.⁶

⁵ On the need for moral advocacy, Cohen writes: "... what the Labour Party has to do from a Socialist point of view, and what Socialists in it have to do, is to engage in more principled advocacy. When people have nothing to lose but their chains, you don't have to tell them that it is wrong that they have nothing, but when people who have a lot to lose are in a society where other people have nothing, then you have to emphasise the wrongness of that position to get them to act." 'Interview with G.A. Cohen' *Imprints*, Vol.1 no.1 June 1996, p.23.

⁶ Cohen is unclear about the kind of egalitarianism that he thinks that Marx and Marxists must be committed to in his book *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* He talks about egalitarianism as if it is a relatively clear and unambiguous political commitment. Unlike Cohen's overtly egalitarian writings, in which he defends a version of Richard Arneson's case for equality of opportunity for welfare, income equality seems to be a leading concern of Cohen in his book. Cohen's concern for the justice of income-equality is evidenced by him pointing out facts about salary differentials such as in "1988, the ratio of top executive salaries to production worker wages was 6.5 to 1 in West Germany and 17.5 to 1 in the United States" and by suggesting that, by such tokens, West Germany had an ethos which was more friendly to the aims of egalitarian justice than the United States

Cohen is mistaken about Marx's intended *means* to communism and this paper sets out why Cohen is wrong. Cohen is also wrong about the political ends of Marx's communism. Elsewhere I argue that it is wrong to saddle Marx with a commitment to distributive justice.⁷ It is especially a mistake to attribute a concern for income equality to Marx. Income equality is a totemic issue for many Socialists including Cohen but it was not a concern for Marx. This paper is primarily concerned with Marx's views about the means to communism. I will just say something about what I consider to be the ends of Marx's communism since without a correct view of the ends, we can't really appreciate the means to communism that he had in mind.

Marx explicitly and repeatedly states that he is not interested in traditional claims about socialist justice. What Marx *does* say he is interested in is ending 'alienation' in human life and extending the conditions of an Aristotelian view of the human good and 'freedom as self-realisation' to each and every one.⁸ This requires progress to an economy that can do without the mass use of 'wage-labour'. That is labour which is paid to perform mundane, menial and mindless tasks day-in-day-out, and labour which is taken up by someone simply for the sake of money. Communism requires that we achieve an economy in which wage-labour is shoved to, and kept at, the margins of our economic life and the margin of any one person's working life. A Marxian view of freedom requires each should be free from their brute material needs and enjoy security of access to (at least) basic material goods without the compulsion of wage-labour. Beyond this, Marxian freedom requires that we develop systems of

(p.144). Cohen's commitment to the justice of income equality is what seems to drive his critical writings against leading liberal egalitarians such as Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls. The theories which Dworkin and Rawls defend license a greater degree of income inequality than Cohen believes can be justified.

⁷ See my 'Against Bringing Marx to Justice *A Marxist Critique of G.A. Cohen's Moralisation of Marx*' *Studies in Marxism* 2006.

⁸ This point against Cohen is also made by Brian Leiter in his paper 'The Hermeneutics of Suspicion: Recovering Marx, Nietzsche & Freud' in Brian Leiter (ed.) *The Future of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.80 footnote 30.

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distribution in the means of consumption that track the variation of needs across a population. Marxian freedom requires emancipation of the human mind from the fictions and fantasies religion and the spiritual tyranny which religious authorities exercise over human life. Marxian Freedom requires that each should become able to gain meaning, value and community with others through the development, exercise and expression of one's creative capacities and powers. Marxian freedom requires that we perfect systems of production which both address some aspect of human need and enable producers to derive some sense of self-realisation in the work that they do. Marx states that communism is a society,

...after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour,..., after labour has become not only a means to life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!⁹

Income equality is neither necessary nor sufficient to advance such political ends. It is wrong to condemn Marx's view of working class revolution and technological development for failure to deliver on the goal of income equality or any other kind of distributive equality. Marx's Scientific Socialism, and the efficacy of his proposed means to communism, should be judged by political ends that he would unambiguously endorse.

⁹ Karl Marx *The Critique of the Gotha Programme in The First International & After: Political Writings Vol.3* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p.347.

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Cohen defines Karl Marx's Scientific Socialism as 'the study of the nature of, and route to, socialism, using the most advanced resources of social science and within the frame of socialist commitment'.¹⁰ In his account of Scientific Socialism, Cohen gets the Karl Marx's 'frame of socialist commitment' completely wrong.

1.3 *The Means to Marx's Communism*. Ok so much for Cohen on the ends of Marxism I will now turn to Marx's envisaged means to communism. In what follows I will discuss the two inevitabilitarian claims which he claims lie at the heart of Marx's scientific socialism. I will first discuss Marx on the nature of class struggle and social revolution. I will then go on to discuss Marx and his hopes for technological development.

2. Marx's Post-Manifesto Hopes for Class Struggle.

2.1 *Cohen on D-day Revolution in Marx*. Cohen thinks that Marx's hope for the coming of communism hinges upon the arrival of an apocalyptic event in which an organised mass of alienated and exploited industry-based wage-labourers dramatically rise up and revolt against the capitalist mode of production. The proletarians will gather their spades and then bury capitalism and the rule of capitalist class interests.¹¹ But Cohen claims that this is never going to happen.¹² He writes:

“...the proletariat did not, and will not, gain the unity and power anticipated for it in Marxist belief. Capitalism does not produce its own

¹⁰ G.A. Cohen *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹¹ *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.112.

¹² *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.107.

gravediggers. The old (partly real, partly imagined) agency of socialist transformation has gone, and there is not, and will never be, another one like it. Socialists have to settle for a less dramatic scenario, and they must engage in more moral advocacy than used to be fashionable.”¹³

According to Cohen, the dramatic scenario hoped for by Marx could have taken a legal or illegal form. The legal form of revolution would respect existing constitutional process. The workers would simply elect parties and politicians which would pursue egalitarian policies through their exercise of state power. The illegal form of revolution may involve workers coming to storm capitalist factories and the forcibly seize the apparatus of the bourgeois state. Cohen records some uncertainty about which dramatic scenario Marx might have had in mind but he mostly writes as if Marx envisaged that the illegal form of revolution would occur at some point.

According to Cohen the revolution that Marx had in mind would occur over quite a short space of time. It would be something like a ‘D-day’ event which results in the wholesale extraction of the capitalist mode of production from human society in almost an instant. Actually, Cohen boils down the revolutionary period down to a crucial month in which Marx expected the transition from capitalism to communism to occur. In his book, Cohen talks about a man called Tim Buck who was the general secretary of the Canadian Communist Party when Cohen was a youth. Cohen, at that time, presumed that Buck knew the precise ‘month’ of the revolution since he must have had ‘an expert grasp of the laws of history’.¹⁴

¹³ G.A. Cohen *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000), p.112.

¹⁴ *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.42. Cohen states that he believed that the General Secretary had such powers and knowledge but does not say whether his belief was shared by Tim Buck too.

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Cohen talks about a revolutionary month, however, I am going to call the view of revolution that he attributes to Marx ‘D-day’. For Cohen, Marx believes in the coming a D-day workers’ revolution. Cohen then claims that *after* the D-day revolution, the workers will be highly entrepreneurial and deliver technology-driven abundance of goods to human society. Thus Cohen writes:

“The guarantee of future abundance served as a source of rebuttal to the suggestion that inequality might re-emerge, in a new form, after the revolution – peaceful or bloody, legal or illegal, fast or slow – which the proletariat could and would accomplish.”¹⁵

Ok that is what Cohen says about Marx. He claims that Marx was wrong to hold such positions. I agree with Cohen that it is wrong to hold such positions and any socialist who does hold these positions on revolution should re-consider. However, I am going to argue that Marx did not hold these positions and it is wrong to attribute such positions to Marx.

2.2 *The Communist Manifesto & After*. The suggestion of a D-day form of revolution is found in *The Communist Manifesto*. Cohen takes *The Communist Manifesto* as central to understanding the content of practical political upshot of Marx’s Scientific Socialism. Cohen is not alone in this. Dominant figures in the early days of Marxism after the death of Marx such Frederick Engels, Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxembourg make *The Manifesto* central in their account of Marx’s revolutionary expectations.

¹⁵ *If You’re An Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.104.

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Indeed, in his rejection of Marx, Cohen quotes freely from figures such as Engels and Luxembourgh and takes them to be speaking on behalf of Marx.

However, my view is that we should not set much store by the failed prophecies of the *Manifesto*. We shouldn't do so for the following two reasons. The first reason concerns the circumstances surrounding Marx's composition of *The Manifesto* and the second reason relates to what Marx himself came to believe about the prophetic content of *The Manifesto* in his own lifetime.

First: the circumstances of the writing and publication of *The Manifesto*. *The Manifesto* was published in 1848. It was hurriedly written by Marx towards the end of 1847 in six weeks 'with little time for deliberation or revision'.¹⁶ He was commissioned, and harried, to produce such a document by The League of Communists as a response to the revolutionary fervour that bubbled up in Europe at the time, and the need to provide worker movements with focus for, what was expected to be, their imminent seizure of state power.¹⁷ Thus the *Manifesto* contains claims regarding a triumphant workers' class struggle; the achievement of a workers' state and a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. It also contains the sweeping theoretical claim that the 'history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle'. With such assertions Marx does play to a certain expectation for dramatic social change and a self-image which groups such as the League of Communists had at the time.

¹⁶ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.104, introduction by A.J.P. Taylor.

¹⁷ The League of Communists were a group who were already "committed to the object of 'the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the rule of the proletariat, the ending of the old society which rests on class contradiction and the establishment of a new society without classes or private property'." The League provided Marx with a file that contained three tentative drafts for a statement of principles and plans before he commenced writing. See Eric Hobsbawm's introduction to *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso, 1998), p.3ff. Also see Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. xi introduction by David McLellan.

At the end of section two of the *Manifesto* there are a list of measures for the working class to adopt once they seize state power. These include the ‘centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly’; the ‘centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State’; the ‘extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; bringing into cultivation of wastelands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan’; and the ‘equal liability of all to labour’ and the ‘establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture’.

However, the worker uprisings of 1848 ultimately came to nothing. Twenty-five years after Marx came to reflect on the practical content of *The Manifesto*. In an 1872 Preface to *The Communist Manifesto* Marx explicitly distances himself from its dramatic expectations and demands. He writes:

However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, correct today as ever. Here and there some detail may be improved. The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions... for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section two. That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry in the last twenty five years, and of the accompanying improved and extended party organisation of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February Revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the

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proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details become antiquated. One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes’.¹⁸

This passage was written after a period of over two decades in which Marx was mindful of the failure of the 1848 worker uprisings. It was a period in which Marx devoted himself to the study and theory of history, and an analysis of the robustness and necessity of capitalist mode of production in the historical process. The chief and considered results of Marx’s post-*Manifesto* (1848) thinking are contained in Marx’s 1857 manuscript *The Grundrisse*; his 1859 *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (and especially the 1859 Preface where Marx sums up his philosophy of history); his published *Capital Vol.1* (1867) and the drafts of the remaining volumes of *Capital*. We must look to these writings for Marx’s mature and more considered view of the dynamics of revolutionary change which courses human society towards communism.

In these writings the ‘development of productive forces’ and not ‘class struggle’ (as *The Manifesto* would have us believe) is decisive for revolutionary movement towards communism. In Marx’s 1859 *Preface to a Contribution to Critique of Political Economy* we have a summary of his theory of history in which the *Manifesto*’s claim about the ‘history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle’ does not feature. Instead we find the view that the level and development of productive forces governs the history of human society and the nature of the economic relations which come to dominate in any particular mode.

¹⁸ Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), introduction by A.J.P. Taylor, p. 53.

Why did the development of productive forces, instead of class struggle, come to be centre stage for Marx? In the 1872 Preface Marx speaks of the ‘gigantic strides of Modern Industry’. The ‘strides’ that he is refers to concern the degree to which machinery and automation had come to be incorporated in the capitalist mode of production. These strides are detailed in *Capital Vol.1* ch.15. These strides are important for Marx’s communist vision because of what he documents in *The Grundrisse*. Here Marx’s expects movement towards, and delivery of, a capital-intensive future in which wage-labour is shoved to the margins of the economic base of society.¹⁹ This hope is grounded in Marx’s post-*Manifesto* study of tendencies within the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, as regards *The Grundrisse*, David McLellan points out that when the word ‘revolution’ occurs in this text “it is applied to the progressive nature of capitalism... the revolutionary activity of the proletariat is never alluded to.”²⁰

The Manifesto leading us to expect that revolution, when it arrives, will be dramatic and swift. However, in Marx’s post-*Manifesto* writings, rather than the expectation of D-day revolution, what we find in Marx’s *1859 Preface*, is the view that revolutionary movement from capitalism to communism, just as with all other historical transitions from one mode of production to another, occurs over an ‘epoch’.²¹ Thus Marx came to expect that revolutionary movement from a society based on the capitalist mode of production to a society based on communism would

¹⁹ Karl Marx *The Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p.705.

²⁰ David McLellan ‘The *Grundrisse* in the Context of Marx’s Work as a Whole’ in *Situating Marx: Evaluations & Departures* (London: Chaucer & Co., 1972), p.14. See McLellan’s introduction to *Marx’s Grundrisse* (London: MacMillan Press, 1980 second edition), selected & edited by David McLellan, p.12. Marx spoke of the *Grundrisse* as ‘the result of fifteen years of research, thus the best period of my life’. This manuscript was misleadingly titled ‘Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Okonomie’, or ‘Groundwork to a Critique of Political Economy’, by its original editors. The sub-title of *Capital* is ‘A Critique of Political Economy’. As McLellan argues it is evident from the content of the *Grundrisse*, and from how Marx refers to the manuscript, that its scope and role in his thought is much more wide ranging than it simply being a ‘rough draft’ of *Capital*.

²¹ Karl Marx *1859 Preface to a Critique of Political Economy* in David McLellan (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.425.

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occur at least over decades if not a century or two. Marx did not expect a sudden shift from a human society driven by a capitalist mode of production to a society based on communism. Instead, what is clearly suggested by Marx is the view that revolutionary movement from capitalism to communism will be piecemeal, protracted and prolonged. Marxian social revolution is epoch in length and evolutionary.

2.3 *The D-day View of Revolution after Marx.* My suggestion of an evolutionary reading of Marx might bring Eduard Bernstein's book *Evolutionary Socialism* to your minds. I will say something about the similarities and differences between my view and Bernstein's in a moment. First I want to say something about the hold that the *Manifesto* view of revolution has had on what are common taken to be leading Marxist thinkers.

Engels continued to hold onto the *Manifesto*'s expectation of D-day revolution even after Marx's death and took himself to be speaking on behalf of Marx when he recounted the prophecy. In an 1883 letter Engels wrote:

Since 1845 Marx and I have held the view that *one* of the ultimate results of the future proletarian revolution will be the gradual dissolution of the political organisation known by the name of the *state*... At the same time, however, it was always our view that in order to attain this and the other far more important aims of the future social revolution, the working class must first take possession of the organised political power of the state and by its aid crush the resistance of the capitalist class and organise society anew. This is to

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be found already in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1847, chapter II, conclusion.²²

Here there is no hint of the reservations that Marx came to hold and published about his expectations of the working classes and his rejection of the relevance of the measures listed at the end of chapter two in the *Manifesto*. Moreover, according to David McLellan, Engels had no knowledge of the existence of *The Grundrisse*.²³ Engels is generally sound in his summaries of Marx's theoretical positions. His discussions about Marx's historical materialism and Marx's economic theory do provide useful glosses to what Marx has to say about the course of human history and the laws of motion which inhere with the capitalist mode of production. However, as regards guiding us in the practical political implications of Marx's scientific socialism he is less useful.

The expectation of D-day proletarian revolution is championed by Frederick Engels, especially in his *Anti-Duhring*. Cohen freely quotes from Engels' *Anti-Duhring* for his account of the central claims of Marx's Scientific Socialism. *Anti-Duhring* contains the 1848 *Manifesto*'s vision of the dramatic uprising and subsequent dictatorship of the proletariat. This contrasts sharply with Marx's post-1848 suggestions of an 'epoch-length' and 'evolutionary' view of social revolution. It is important to bear in mind that scholarly investigation into the relationship between Marx and Engels does call into question the assumption that they spoke with one voice. According to John O'Neill there is doubt as to whether Engels 'read' the whole manuscript of *Anti-Duhring* to Marx as Engels claims in the preface; there is no

²² 'Engels to van Patten (1883)' *Karl Marx & Friederich Engels: Selected Correspondence* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936), p.416. It was only five years later that Engels came to recognise Marx's reservations about the *Manifesto* measures in his 1888 preface to the English edition of *The Manifesto*. See Karl Marx & Frederick Engels *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Verso, 1998), ed. E. Hobsbawm, p.86.

²³ David McLellan (ed.) *Marx's Grundrisse* (MacMillan Press, 1980 second edition), p.2.

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evidence of convergence in views in the published correspondence of Marx and Engels around the period of the composition and publication of *Anti-Duhring* and there is suspicion about the ‘letters and notes of Karl Marx that Eleanor Marx is said to have destroyed because of possible embarrassment they might have caused Engels’.²⁴

Marx died in 1883. Around 1890 there was a concerted attempt by leading Socialists to work out the practical implications of Marx’s Scientific Socialism. According to Adam Przeworski in his book *Capitalism & Social Democracy* Frederick Engels and Karl Kautsky dominated the interpretation and reception of Marx’s ideas at that time. *The Communist Manifesto*, *Anti-Duhring* and Kautsky’s *The Class Struggle* became the central texts used by Marxists to understand their immediate and longer term political objectives. Przeworski writes:

“We must not forget, in the midst of the contemporary discussions of Marx’s thought, that the Grundrisse and several other notes written by Marx after 1853 were not known to Marxist theoreticians until recently, while his early manuscripts were first published in the 1920’s and did not become known until the 1950s. Whatever is the thought that can be recognised today as that of Marx, this is not the thought that underlay the activity of socialists during the greater part of the history of the working class movement.”²⁵

Rosa Luxemburg followed on from Engels and Kautsky and gave new life and momentum to the *Manifesto*-view of revolution in her 1898/9 ‘Social Reform or

²⁴ John O’Neill ‘Engels Without Dogmatism’, p.48, in *Engels Today: A Century Appreciation* (London: MacMillan, 1996).

²⁵ Adam Przeworski *Capitalism & Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.48.

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Revolution'. This article contains her famous attack on Bernstein and her defence of a D-day view of revolution. Cohen simply takes up this tradition of Marxist thought developed by Engels, Kautsky and Luxemburg as representative of Marx's own views. He then condemns Marx for the predictive failure of such views. Cohen freely quotes from Engels and Luxemburg in his critique of Marx. However, Cohen is wrong to condemn Marx for the failure of predictions which were peddled by Engels, and perpetuated by twentieth century Marxists, long after Marx gave them up.

2.4 Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism*. There was of course the famous challenge to the Marxist Orthodoxy of Engels, Kautsky and Luxemburg and the hope for D-day revolution by Eduard Bernstein in his 1899 book *Evolutionary Socialism*. In this book Bernstein advances an evolutionary view of socialism which Bernstein suggests is, in part, inspired by some of what Marx says but is mostly arrived at through a critique of Marx. Bernstein claims that there are suggestions of the rejection of the D-day hope and an endorsement of an evolutionary thesis in some of Marx's writings. For instance, Bernstein draws our attention to the 1872 Preface that Marx wrote for *The Communist Manifesto* as some evidence of distance that Marx sought to put between his considered view of revolutionary social change and the dramatic revolutionary ambitions of *The Manifesto*.²⁶ However, Bernstein claims that Marx is not consistent on the matter and that Marx at times seems content to recount the *Manifesto* expectation of revolutionary social change. (Bernstein lumps in Engels continued commitment to D-day as proxy for Marx's view as well.) Thus Bernstein asserts his evolutionary thesis mostly in terms of a critique of Marx.

Bernstein's analysis is deficient in a number of ways. Firstly, as far as making a judgement on Marx's view, he suffers from the same problem as Engels, Kautsky

²⁶ Eduard Bernstein *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), p.155.

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and Luxemburg. None of them had access to key post-*Manifesto* documents from Marx such as *The Grundrisse*. There is more to the evolutionary thesis in Marx than even Bernstein gives him for. Second, because of Bernstein's limited view of Marx's own writings, Bernstein's account of what is evolving in capitalism and where that evolution can and should end up is at odds with Marx. There is no mention of hopes for technological progress in Bernstein's book. In fact he raises a sceptical point about prospects for technology coming to replace mundane and menial human labour in the economy.²⁷ Bernstein hope is for evolution towards an essentially capitalist economy serviced by producer cooperatives. That political goal falls far short of Marx's hopes for communism.

2.5 'Burst asunder' – *Capital Vol.1 & its suggestion of D-day Revolution*. As I have said Bernstein makes his claim that Marx is inconsistent on his view of the *Manifesto* promise for D-day revolution because he takes what Engels says about the practical political upshot of scientific socialism as a proxy for Marx's own view. However, Bernstein also cites what he takes to be direct evidence from Marx as a direct example of Marx's own inconsistency on hopes for revolution. Bernstein directs our attention to a passage at towards the end of *Capital Vol.1* (1867) in which Marx discusses the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation.²⁸ In this chapter Marx seems to be echoing the *Manifesto* view of D-day revolution. He writes:

Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates...., the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class

²⁷ Eduard Bernstein *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), p.220.

²⁸ Eduard Bernstein *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), p.207.

constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist production process. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.²⁹

A swift reading of this passage would seem to suggest that an apocalyptic D-Day proletarian revolution is in the offing. Cohen reads this passage swiftly and marries Marx's talk of 'burst asunder' with the *Manifesto's* concluding talk about the forcible and sudden overthrow of all existing social conditions.³⁰ However, Marx actually only says that the capitalist 'integument' will 'burst asunder'.³¹ That is, the *ideological* shell of capitalism will burst asunder. Before this passage Marx has just spent over 900 pages exposing and shattering the pretence of bourgeois economic theory and its claims about the justice and efficiency of the free market capitalist economic system. Marx wanted *Capital* to be read by working people. He wanted them to view their own situation in a new way and to cease buying into bourgeois claptrap about the coincidence of capitalist class interests and the interests of society in general. Bourgeois claims about capitalism being the "Eden of the innate rights of man... [and] the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property & Bentham" come to be seen as absurd given the struggles that masses of people have in making a living and in trying to lead a good life.³² Once this is achieved then the unfettered right and

²⁹ Karl Marx *Capital Vol.1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p.929.

³⁰ See his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.145.

³¹ Integument – any outer protective layer or covering, such as a cuticle, seed coat, rind or shell.

³² Karl Marx *Capital Vol.1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p.280. See also Frederick Engels *Socialism: Utopian & Scientific* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972), p.61.

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rule of private capital in the economy – which bourgeois theorists recommend to us – starts to be questioned.

Marx's expectation is that, with the aid of his theory, people in their droves won't put up with a life of grind which laissez-faire capitalism presents for them. This then sounds the death knell of the 'unfettered' right and rule of private Capital over the economy and the beginning of Socialist incursions into Capitalist freedoms. Marx does not state it here but what seems clear from what Marx says elsewhere is that what he expects to follow from a revolt against the supposed economic efficiency and justice of bourgeois rights is gradual socialist reform of society's systems of production and distribution in the means of consumption.

2.6 *Marx's Reformism. Capital Vol.1* was first published in 1867. Three years prior to its publication Marx spoke of the prospect of gradual socialist incursions into capitalist freedoms in his 1864 *Inaugural Address to the First International* of working men's associations and socialists groups. (Note: This address was *before* the publication of *Capital Vol.1* in 1867) Here Marx remarks upon the failure of the 1848 worker revolutions and the continued misery of working people but also points out progress that had been secured by, what he terms, the 'political economy of the working class' over the 'political economy of the middle class'. The middle class included those who were content with what the 'blind rule of the supply and demand laws' delivered to their lives. Workers, through increased class consciousness, became increasingly dissatisfied with their lot in life. In his address, Marx speaks approvingly of the introduction of the 'Ten Hours Bill' in England, against bourgeois opposition, which came to restrain what private Capital could demand of Labour in the factory. Marx speaks of the "immense physical, moral and intellectual benefits hence accruing

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to the factory operative” and also points out that: “Most of the Continental governments had to accept the English Factory Act in more or less modified forms.” Marx further predicts that “the English Parliament itself is every year compelled to enlarge its sphere of action.”³³

This prediction from Marx has been confirmed by subsequent political events. Since Marx’s day we have indeed experienced the gradual enlargement of the State in every leading capitalist economy. In financial terms: In 1870 the average level of State spending as a percentage of national income across all of the leading capitalist economies was 10.7%. In 1996 the average was 45.6%.³⁴ In terms of activity; the State has come to restrain the right of private capital by imposing, for example, standards for health and safety at work; minimum wages and maximum working times; rights to union representation; rights to sick pay, paid maternity leave and paid holidays away from work. The State has instituted bodies which subject the product portfolios, pricing strategies and profits of corporate capitalist business to political regulation and control. This represents further incursions into what used to be the almost unfettered right and rule of private capital in Marx’s day. The State also imposes a tax contribution on returns to private capital uses of such monies to finance non-market public sector production and non-market schemes of welfare-income. This represents further curbs on capitalist freedom to profit (consume) from the economic product.³⁵

³³ Karl Marx *Inaugural Address to the First International* in David McLellan (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.579.

³⁴ For the figures which illustrate the dramatic rise of the State in capitalist economies over the twentieth century see Dennis C. Mueller *Public Choice III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.503.

³⁵ We do live in what seem to be dark neo-conservative times in which capitalism seems to be ascendant again. There has been some rolling-back of socialist incursions in capitalist private property right.

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2.6 *Reformism & the Obstetric Motif in Marxism.* I have argued that Marx came to reject a ‘D-day’ conception of social revolution and instead came to see the nature and effects of working class struggle in ‘drawn-out’, evolutionary and epoch terms. This drawn-out conception of proletarian revolution fits with Marx’s “obstetric” view of communist political practice.³⁶ The obstetric view holds that the premises of a new communist society are born within the capitalist mode of production, and that an appropriate development of such premises must obtain before the birth of communism society proper.³⁷ Capitalism is pregnant with the premises for communism and communists are cast as midwives in the historical process. The central political task for Communists is to lessen the ‘birth-pangs’ of desirable economic, social and political developments which can *speed* human society towards communism. Communists must ally themselves with those economic and political forces which can course human society towards Marxian freedom.

Marx’s obstetric conception of political practice is expressed in his 1871 text *The Civil War in France* where he writes:

The working class... have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par decret du people*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances

³⁶ The ‘obstetric’ description of Marxian political practice is taken from G.A. Cohen.

³⁷ Marx writes: “Communism is not for us a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence.” *The German Ideology*, p.187, in David McLellan (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society is itself pregnant.³⁸

This is an echo of the view we find in Marx's earlier *1859 Preface* where he writes:

...mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or at least in the process of formation.³⁹

Cohen considers that the Obstetric Motif in Marxism has done enormous damage to the prospects of establishing communism in human society. He claims that it has induced a political complacency in classical Marxists and avoidance of the “uncertainties and hard choices which responsible politics must contend.”⁴⁰ Cohen's judgement about the truth and utility of the Obstetric Motif in Marxism is driven by what he assumes to be the political ends and means of Marx's communism. For Cohen the Obstetric Motif must be judged by its failure to deliver the 'global' end of egalitarian justice. Also it must be judged by its failure to fulfil the promises of a D-day working class revolution and, after this, a technology-driven abundance in goods.

In the introduction I argued that Cohen is wrong about the normative ends of Marx's communism. In section (2) I argued that Cohen is mistaken to think that the coming of a D-day revolution is part of Marx's Scientific Socialist ambitions. (I will

³⁸ Karl Marx *The Civil War in France*, in *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels: Selected Works in One Volume* (Moscow: Progress Publishers & London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991), p.277.

³⁹ See David McLellan (ed.) *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.426.

⁴⁰ *If You're An Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.76.

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take up the issue of technology and abundance in the next section.) Marx did not shy away from responsible politics in his post-*Manifesto* writings and activism. He came to realise that politically-driven improvements in the human condition arrive in a piecemeal fashion in response to ‘local’ problems and possibilities presented to us by the economic base of society. Thus, there would not be the need for a statutory minimum wage unless capitalist employers tended to depress the income of wage-workers to a subsistence level. There would not be the will to address this problem unless it was felt that the money-interests of those struggling to get by on poverty pay *should* be addressed through political regulation of the economy. For Marx, the will to address such issues must be shaped mostly (not exclusively) from the struggle and pressure which wage-workers can and should press upon the political system for themselves. Sympathetic communist fellow-travellers (such as Marx and Engels) play a role in showing them how and why they should struggle for their interests. Socialist politicians and activists can bring into being and sustain the means of struggle, such as union and socialist party organisation. Once the means and aims of struggle are made transparent, Marx believed that it was inevitable that workers will take on the historical task of challenging the otherwise unfettered right and rule of private Capital over the economy and over the course of human life in general. Marx expected that workers could, would and should conduct such struggle both at the factory gate and at the level of the State.⁴¹ Marx expected the rise of mass worker movements in his time

⁴¹ In 1873 Marx wrote: “...The political movement of the working class naturally has as its final object the conquest of power for this class, and this requires, of course, a previous organisation of the working class developed up to a certain point, which arises from the economic struggles themselves.

But on the other hand, every movement in which the working class comes out as a *class* against the ruling classes and tries to coerce them by pressure from without is a political movement. For instance, the attempt in a particular factory, or even in a particular trade, to force a shorter working day out of individual capitalists by strikes, etc., is a purely economic movement. The movement to force through an eight-hour *law*, etc., is a *political* movement. And in this way, out of the separate economic movement of the workers there grows up everywhere a *political* movement, that is to say a movement of the *class*, with the object of achieving its interests in a general form possessing general, socially binding force. Though these movements presuppose a certain degree of previous organisation, they are equally a means of developing this organisation.

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to bring democracy based upon universal franchise into being. In his article on ‘The Chartists’ Marx documents his expectation that the coming of democratic politics would secure advances in working class interests and tend human society towards communism.⁴²

Socialist political reckoning has brought certain problems with the operation of the capitalist mode of production into view and particular solutions. Statutory employment, consumer and parental rights are a socialist ‘solution’ to the problem which people face in their interests as workers, consumers and parents, given what the unfettered capitalist mode of production demands of people. The institution of public sector/service production is a ‘solution’ to the problem of capitalist market failure. It is a political response to either non-existent/inefficient capitalist market supply or a lack of effective demand for goods (such as healthcare, education, security and culture) which we have a common interest in securing.⁴³ The expansion of public sector/service production is a ‘solution’ to the fact that the capitalist mode of production fails to provide a population with adequate opportunities for employment and incomes. It is also a ‘solution’ to the problem of underconsumption caused by the capitalist mode of production.⁴⁴ The introduction of schemes of State welfare is a ‘solution’ to the problem that the capitalist free market alone cannot provide certain

Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organisation to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, i.e. the political power, of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against, and hostile attitude towards, the policies of the ruling classes. Otherwise it remains a plaything in their hands,…” Karl Marx ‘Letter to Friedrich Bolte’, p.642, in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels *Selected Works in One Volume* (Progress Publishers: Moscow & Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1991 revised edition).

⁴² Karl Marx ‘The Chartists’ in *Surveys from Exile: Political Writings Vol.2* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), ed. David Fernbach, p.264.

⁴³ It is also a ‘solution’ to the value of ‘associative’ production and the socialist demand that such social needs should be met where producers work to, what Alisdair MacIntyre terms, goods internal to their particular social practice rather than sacrifice values to the altar of market imperatives and capitalist profit. For further discussion and defence of this point see my paper ‘The Sense in Which Communists Must Be Communitarian *Alisdair MacIntyre & the Problem of Alienation & Communism in the Philosophy of Karl Marx*’ (typescript, 2004).

⁴⁴ This Keynes-inspired solution enabled the State at various times in the twentieth century to shore up demand for capitalist goods in the face of high unemployment and deficient effective demand. The State provided capitalist firms with a further consuming base which they could sell to, and upon which they could profit, by placing purchasing power in the hands of public sector/service employees.

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people with incomes which enable them access to the means of consumption. The introduction of laws and financial penalties for externalities, such as pollution, which capitalist industry and commerce are apt to inflict upon communities is a ‘solution’ to the problem which the capitalist mode of production presses upon human society and our common interest in living in a clean and safe environment.

2.7 Cohen’s Odd Recognition of Marx’s Reformism. Such developments constitute a series of gradual socialist reforms of the economic basis of human society which have taken place, in varying strengths, in every advanced capitalist nation. Cohen acknowledges that reformism forms an aspect of Marx’s expectations for social change and constitutes an ‘evolutionary’ dimension of his Scientific Socialism. I agree with this characterisation of Marx’s social theory and take the post-*Manifesto* texts which Cohen cites to be leading evidence of the evolutionary strand in Marx’s Scientific Socialism.⁴⁵ However, I am puzzled about how Cohen can square his acknowledgement of Marx’s adherence to reformism/evolution with a commitment to the D-day form of revolution which he extracts from the *Manifesto* and then uses to condemn Marx’s Scientific Socialism. The D-day form of revolution promised in the *Manifesto* is premised on the inevitable ‘immiseration’ of the proletariat. There is no expectation of piecemeal improvements in the condition of the working classes. As the famous closing line of the *Manifesto* predicts, the workers will have “nothing to lose except their chains.” The implicit suggestion of the *Manifesto* is that reformism only acts to stave off the real D-day revolution which must occur in order to deliver communism to human society. The *Manifesto* directs us to expect that things must get much worse before becoming “dramatically” and in a D-day way better. The

⁴⁵ *If You’re An Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.71.

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Manifesto would seem to demand the kind of political indifferentism, that is, a ‘do-nothing’ approach to the course of history and the suffering which the capitalist mode of production presses upon people, which Marx raged against in an article which he published in 1873.⁴⁶ Anyone who takes the prophecies of the *Manifesto* seriously must be committed to political indifferentism. Marx came to be against political indifferentism, and Cohen acknowledges this; therefore, in addition to the considerations given in section (2), Cohen should not take the *Manifesto* seriously as a statement of Marx’s scientific socialist expectations for social change and revolution.⁴⁷

3. Class Struggle & Technological Development

3.0 *Reformism Is Not Enough*. Such piecemeal socialist victories were anticipated and encouraged by Marx. Such movement reflects his ‘drawn-out’ rather than ‘D-day’ conception of revolutionary movement from capitalism to communism. Marx came to see the work of class struggle and the effects that it would have on the shaping of our politics and economy in much more evolutionary terms. Also, such socialist achievements are welcome but they do not exhaust communist goals. According to Marx these are ‘palliatives’ for lives which still revolve wage-labour. As I said in the introduction, a central communist goal is to progress to an economy without wage-labour.⁴⁸ Marx writes:

⁴⁶ Karl Marx ‘Political Indifferentism’ in *The First International & After: Political Writings Vol.3* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), ed. David Fernbach, p.327.

⁴⁷ Cohen writes: “Reform movements without a revolutionary dimension were dangerous because they led the proletariat astray. But it does not follow that success in achieving humanising reforms was to be avoided for fear that it would pacify the proletariat. I cannot think of a text where Marx or Engels affirms this repugnant view, whoever might have held it later.” *If You’re An Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.72.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx *Value, Price & Profit*, p.215, re-printed in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels *Selected Works in One Volume* (Progress Publishers: Moscow & Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1991 revised edition).

“At the same time, and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wages system, the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerrilla fights incessantly springing up from the never-ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and social forms necessary for the economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!’ they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wages system!’”

Marx thinks that developments *within* the capitalist mode of production deliver the opportunity for us to progress to an economy which can do without the need for the mass employment of wage-labour. Capitalist economic development can deliver the material base for communist forms of production and communist systems of distribution in the means of consumption.

3.1 In the above passage Marx refers to ‘the present system [engendering] the material conditions and social forms necessary for the economical reconstruction of society’. I

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will say something more about that now and Cohen's neglect of such predictions in Marx.

At the heart of the Obstetric Motif in Marxism is the idea that the premises of communism are born within, and developed in, the capitalist mode of production. Cohen takes it that there is only *one* premise for communism which is developed within capitalism. This premise concerns that rise of working class consciousness and an eventual 'D-day' proletarian revolution. Cohen takes this premise from *The Manifesto*. According to *The Manifesto* capitalism simply begets its own "gravediggers". In *The Manifesto*, Marx expects a 'crowd' of gravediggers to turn up, bury capitalism and *then* install socialism in human society. Cohen supplements this *Manifesto* expectation with the expectation that the gravediggers will come to subject distribution of income and wealth to the demands of egalitarian justice. Furthermore, Cohen attributes to Marx the expectation that the gravediggers will develop production technology so that an 'abundance' of goods will become available for human society. Such abundance is necessary to sustain a scheme of egalitarian justice.

Note that, according to Cohen, relevant developments in technology and the techniques of production for communism were meant to happen *after* a D-day proletarian revolution. That is, Marx did not envisage the capitalist mode of production as contributing to a relevant development of productive forces for communism. The proletarian gravediggers will come to develop productive forces for communism to obtain. This is what Cohen thinks that Marx had in mind. Cohen claims that Marx was wrong in this prediction because what actually happened is that the crowd of gravediggers were 'ultimately reduced and divided by the increasing technical sophistication of the capitalist production process that had been expected to continue to expand its size and augment its power'.

Cohen does not cite any textual evidence of the view of the post-D-day-revolution entrepreneurial task of the proletariat which he attributes to Marx. There is none.⁴⁹ It is mere supposition on his part. As I indicated in section (2), it is clear from Marx's post-*Manifesto* writings that Marx expected revolutionary technological change to be delivered to human society *by* the capitalist mode of production. Marx came to expect capitalists to develop production technologies which would then serve as a basis for communism. The relevant development of productive forces that Marx has in mind is not one that achieves an 'abundance' of goods but one which aims at shoving wage-labour to the margins of the economic base of human society. Marx expects technology to replace menial and mundane labour. Capital rather than the mass employment of wage-labour will come to provide for consumer needs.

Marx expected capitalists to develop labour-reducing capital-intensive production processes.⁵⁰ Capitalists were expected to do this *because* of the rise of working class consciousness and the struggle for better pay and conditions of life at the factory gates and through the state.⁵¹ Marx encouraged working class struggle but he also believed that, ultimately, such struggle will lead to the diminution of wage-labour work in society. Capitalists would design labour and labour-struggles out of the production process because they want to minimise on costs, maintain their control of production and thus maximise on profits. Rather than contradicting Marx, the effects of capitalist technological change which Cohen singles out actually confirms Marx's prediction. Cohen is wrong to say that the course of capitalist technological development and its associated decline of wage-labour employment and political

⁴⁹ See section 3.2 below for my dismissal of the claim that Marx sets such an entrepreneurial task for the proletariat in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

⁵⁰ Karl Marx *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p.705.

⁵¹ Karl Marx *Capital Vol.1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), ch.15 on 'Machinery & Large Scale Industry'. See especially p.563 where Marx writes: "it would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working class revolt."

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struggle constitute a refutation of Marx. Traditional working class industry-based wage-labour jobs have disappeared as have the movements of union/political activism upon which they were based. The exercise of their collective power through unions and political movements, which Marx encouraged in his lifetime contributed to the capitalist turn away from the use of wage-labour and towards technology. Capitalists have indeed developed production technologies in a way which led to a massive decline in the demand for secondary sector (heavy industry) wage-labourers. (The same sort of technology-driven decline in wage-labour employment has occurred in the primary goods sector of the capitalist economy.) But these are *good* developments which are relevant for communism and which Marx came to predict in his post-*Manifesto* writings.

Such developments are good because of how Marx sees our essential interests in life. Communists such as Marx want people to be free from the burden of alienating wage-labour. Communists want people to produce in ways which are more worthy of human nature. A capital-intensive economic base as delivered by the capitalist mode of production is a necessary 'premise' for communism which aims at ending alienation in human life and delivering conditions of freedom as self-realisation. Rather than contradicting Marx, the development that Cohen singles out confirms Marx's expectation and hope.

3.2 *The Grundrisse vs. The Critique of the Gotha Programme on Revolutionary Transition*. Marx's expectations for technological development and his expectations of shakeout of labour factors from the production process in *The Grundrisse* do not square with the view of revolutionary transition that is attributed to him from his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Many claims that in the *Critique* Marx sets out a

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course for post-capitalist society which involves, first, a society in which workers secure a return in proportion to their 'labour contribution' before a second stage in which we secure a society which tracks the standard 'from each according to their ability to each according to their need'. This two step plan is inconsistent with the *The Grundrisse* which anticipates mass unemployment of labour factors given technological developments within the capitalist mode of production.

In my view Marx is not committed to a first stage of post-capitalist socialism in which workers are paid in accordance with their contribution. To my mind his discussion of such a scheme lampoons socialists who base their political ambitions on the supposed injustice of capitalist exploitation and simply aim to secure a better return for workers within what would be a bourgeois economic system rather than struggle for an economic and social life beyond bourgeois horizons.

Conclusion

Cohen claims that we should reject Marx's Scientific Socialism because its central predictive claims about class struggle and technology have been falsified by history. I have argued that Cohen's account of Marx's predictions is wrong. Cohen places far too much weight on *The Communist Manifesto* and neglects the wealth of what Marx has to say about the nature of revolutionary social change in his post-*Manifesto* writings. I have argued that rather than the expectation of D-day revolution, Marx came to view revolutionary movement as more 'Drawn-out'. Instead of instant and wholesale revolution Marx came to expect evolutionary socialist progress towards

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communism. Marx's evolutionary expectations are rooted in his obstetric conception of political practice, which lies at the heart of his Scientific Socialism.

I have argued for an evolutionary thesis in Marx. However, I don't want to leave you with the impression that for Socialists in general, and Marxists in particular, that our situation is rosy and that immediate prospects for further socialist movement in human society are good. Our situation is obviously not rosy. Part of the motivation for calling a conference such as this is that, as Socialists and Marxists, we seem to be at a loss about our current economic and political condition. We are in relatively dark neo-conservative times. The bourgeois outlook has come to reign over our economic life.

Even so, the position that we are in now is vastly different to the position that Marx was in. Marx anticipated evolutionary and piecemeal socialist advances in human society. Over 100 years after Marx, we have the task of defending socialist advances that have been secured. Neoconservative peddlers of the bourgeois outlook on economics and life are triumphant but they tend to forget that late capitalist societies still operate on a socialist base in which the right and rule of private capital is still restricted in a host of ways. Neoconservatives seek to breach those restrictions and give the operation of private capital a freer hand. Our task is to resist it, in part, by puncturing the pretensions of bourgeois ideologists in our time.

Marx sought to puncture the pretensions of bourgeois theory in his own day. He also sought to engage a mass movement working class of heavy-industry-based-proletarians in that resistance. That group of working class have been reduced in number and strength. Cohen rejection of Marx is premised on the commonplace view that the decline of a mass industry-based working class movement, and the end of *classic* struggle between proletarians and industrial capital, refutes Marx's Scientific

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Socialism. This is because Marx is supposed to have pinned his hopes for revolutionary social change upon a continued growth of *traditional* proletarian power.

I don't think that the credibility of Marx's Scientific Socialism rests on the existence of traditional proletarian power. Other forms of resistance have emerged.

First, the original worker struggles of Marx's time did lead to the formation of unions, social democratic and socialist political parties within the political superstructure which remains with us today. Such movements have sponsored, driven and implemented socialist reforms. Such organisation still provides a means to challenge the right and rule of private Capital over our economic life and over society in general. Beyond this, the history and tradition of Trades Union, Social Democratic and Socialist activism has shaped *feelings* of resistance against the right and rule of private capital in late capitalist society. There are now deep anti-free-market-capitalist sentiments which prevail within the populations of late capitalist societies, which seem to be more powerful and enduring than the union and political structures which helped shape them. For example, in March 2006 the Conservative French Government attempted to introduce a law which would give employers greater freedom to fire young 'first time' workers. France has the lowest rate of Union membership of the leading industrial nations and yet millions of people took to the streets in opposition to this law. The French Government backed down and pulled the law from their statute books.⁵²

Marx's life was not a failure because communism did not arrive fully-formed in his lifetime. He did what he could to maximise prospects for the good life for the vast majority given what the economic conditions of his time and the state of theory allowed. That is what we must do. As I said in the introduction Marx's central

⁵² See report in *The Economist*, April 29th – May 5th 2006, p.42. France has 8% of their working population as members of a union. This contrasts with the US at 12%; Germany at 23% and the UK at 30%.

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ambition is the achievement of a society beyond wage-labour. No one should be compelled to perform alienating capitalist wage-labour in order to make ends meet.

In the course of the twentieth century the performance of capitalist wage-labour ceased to be a condition for access to the means of consumption. Conditional schemes of state-sponsored income came into force. Unlike in Marx's day, people in certain sorts of need – such as the elderly, the sick & the unemployed – gained rights to welfare income. Other people – public sector/service workers – gained a right to income which is conditional on the performance of production for certain social needs. The technological advances that Marx anticipated can underwrite an economy in which we can secure a right for each adult to gain an unconditional basic income. No a single adult would then be compelled to perform menial labour for the basic necessities of life. The implementation of such a scheme would constitute a further advance towards Marx's communism.

Marx never claims that progress towards communism will be linear and that human society won't errors and detours. Engels spoke of errors and detours in a letter he wrote after the death of Marx.

“Local lights and lesser minds, if not the humbugs, will now have a free hand. The final victory is certain, but circuitous paths, temporary and local errors – things which are even now are so unavoidable – will become more common than ever. Well we must see it through. What else are we here for? And we are not near losing courage yet.”⁵³

⁵³ Marx & Engels *Correspondence 1846-1895* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1936) ‘Engels to Sorge’ p.415

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What else are we here for? The Socialists and Marxists amongst us should not lose courage in the face of Cohen's critique of Marx.