

MARX, KARL is on my mind.

In casual discussion of social values (politics in other words) I often find that if I say that we are all Marxists in response I see a look of horror. "But he was a Communist" they will say, as though that equates him with Stalin, someone with whom Marx is unlikely to have got on.

I try to explain that it was capitalism to which Marx applied most of his analytical energies. "But how can we be Marxists?".

Mostly for my own benefit, not having total recall of every footnote in Das Kapital, I put forward the simple argument that capitalism divides us into two major groups plus an uncomfortable third group into which I place myself.

The first group are the exploiters, the commodifiers of others as objects to be bought and sold. As a worker you are a member of the second group and you just might, if you have highly desired skills, be a little more valuable than a barrel of oil or a ton of coal but you are far more troublesome because you require holiday pay and toilets and dinner breaks and national insurance contributions. During a lock down you cannot simply be stored in a warehouse. It is you that must take the hit.

The exploiters benefit when they keep the rights of the exploited to the barest of minimums. Remember the slogan, "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day." That was during the General Strike of 1926 caused by the response of the mine owners to Churchill's disastrous budget of 1925. They wanted more from the miners while paying them less. Such a response is today deeply embedded in the minds of many capitalists.

I mentioned a third group. As a professional educator I have so often convinced myself that, even if slightly, I have been making the world a better place: opening minds and all that. At times during Thatcher it felt more like preventing the world becoming a worse place. In 1997, for too long I deceived myself that now things were really going to get better and that I would play my part. This was not the case. I worked hard at mitigating the negatives and, from time to time, there were some victories but eventually I had to admit that most of my career has been spent working against the grain of government.

What bothers me is that, thinking I was on the side of the exploited, I may have been doing little more than making them satisfied with their lot. It is not natural for me to be a member of a political party. Being a member of my local union executive committee was enough: all those meetings!

A fellow student once asked me if it was better to have a masters degree or to have written Animal Farm. Aldous Huxley did not form a Committee of Public Safety.

Neither did he mount a barricade. He did, however, contribute to a language in which the exploited could challenge the exploiters.

I want more and deeper analysis of how human exploitation takes place plus a goodly dollop of reasoned anger. Recently my anger has consisted of screaming at the screen.

Cliff Jones 9th April 2020

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