

Marx: Money must go

In the section of the Communist Manifesto devoted to "German or 'True' Socialism" Marx and Engels said of "German philosophers, would-be philosophers and beaux esprits" influenced by socialist ideas that "beneath the French criticism of the economic function of money, they wrote 'Alienation of Humanity', and beneath the French criticism of the bourgeois State they wrote 'Dethronement of the Category of the General', and so forth".

What Marx forgot to add was that it was precisely in these sort of terms that he had expressed himself in the first article he wrote after becoming a socialist in 1843. This article, a criticism of a book on the Jewish Question was published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* in Paris in 1844. It is important because it showed a clear understanding that the establishment of socialism involves the disappearance of both the state and money, a view Marx held to for the rest of his life but which has been largely forgotten by the great majority of those who call themselves Marxists (but who in fact stand for a state capitalism in which money would continue to exist).

The first part of Marx's *On the Jewish Question* while supporting the granting of full political rights to religious Jews (as non-Christians) within existing society, argues that political democracy is not enough as it does not amount to "human emancipation", which can only be achieved "when man has recognised and organised his 'forces propres' (own powers) as social forces, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of political power" (Marx/Engels. *Collected Works*, Volume 3, Moscow, 1975, p.168).

The second, shorter part applies the same sort of reasoning to money: "emancipation from . . . money", writes Marx, "would be the self-emancipation of our time" (p.170). Unfortunately for modern socialists, his attack on money took the form of a criticism of the "actual worldly jew, the everyday jew" as portrayed in the still widespread but inaccurate popular image of jews as sharp traders and "men of money". Thus, after writing that "money has become a world power and the practical jewish spirit has become the practical spirit of the Christian nations. The jews have emancipated themselves insofar as the Christians have become jews", Marx gives as an example the situation in America as described by Thomas Hamilton in *Men and Manners in North America*:

The devout and politically free inhabitant of New England is a kind of Laocoon who makes not the least effort to escape from the serpents which are crushing him. Mammon is his idol which he adores not only with his lips but with the whole force of his body and mind. In his view the world is no more than a Stock Exchange, and he is convinced that he has no other destiny here below than to become richer than his neighbour. Trade has seized upon all his thoughts. and he has no other recreation than to exchange objects. When he travels he carries, so to speak, his goods and his counter on his back and talks only of interest and profit. If he loses sight of his own business for an instant it is only in order to pry into the business of his competitors.

So Marx's argument was not directed against the Jews as people (from one point

of view it can be seen as a contribution to the debate then going on among Jews and ex-Jews - like himself - as to their future) but rather against the sort of society described by Hamilton which now exists, to a greater or lesser extent, in all countries. The argument that the solution to the Jewish Question lay, not in the Jews disappearing by becoming atheists or Christians as others had suggested, but in the establishment of a moneyless society in which 'Jewish . . . (money-making) behaviour' would be impossible, was bound to be regarded as anti-Semitic by religious Jews and Jewish nationalists in the quite different political and historical context of the 20th century. This charge is nonsense; otherwise it would have to be pinned on all advocates of Jewish assimilation and on all critics of the Jewish religion (and as an atheist Marx was naturally a critic of Judaism, with its ridiculous rituals and rules governing all aspects of everyday behaviour, as of all other religions).

This no doubt explains why the second part of *On the Jewish Question* - which is basically an attack on money and a call for the establishment of a moneyless society as the way to achieve 'human emancipation' - has not been given the same circulation as some of Marx's other writings of the same period, for example *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. In a sense this is a pity since in it are to be found some of Marx's strongest denunciations of money and its effects on relations between people:

Practical need, egoism, is the principle of civil society, and as such appears in a pure form as soon as civil society has fully given birth to the political state. The god of practical need and self-interest is money. Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of man - and turns them into commodities. Money is the universal self-established value of all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world - both the world of men and nature - of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it (p.172).

Selling is the practical aspect: of alienation. Just as man, as long as he is in the grip of religion, is able to objectify his essential nature only by turning it into something alien, something fantastic, so under the domination of egoistic need he can be active practically, and produce objects in practice, only by putting his products, and his activity, under the domination of an alien being, and bestowing the significance of an alien entity - money - on them (p.174).

Of course this criticism is still rather philosophical - capitalism (a term which Marx doesn't even use) is identified with individualism, "a world of atomistic individuals who are inimically opposed to one another" (p.173). Marx argues that in such a world it is money that emerges as the god to which everything else is subordinated and which completely dominates people's lives.

Very soon however, Marx (who, it must be remembered, was still working his way towards a full understanding of capitalism and socialism) identified "private property" rather than "egoistic need" as the root cause of people's domination by money, in the sense that it was private property society that led

to human beings being obliged to pursue their self-interest as the means to survive. In some unpublished notes he made in 1844 after reading James Mill's Elements of Political Economy (which marked the beginning of what was to become a life-long study, and critique, of political economy) Marx argued that in private property society people produce with a view to exchanging their products for money, so that what they produce becomes a matter of indifference to them as long as they can sell it, and that it is this that leads to money dominating their lives:

Within the presupposition of division of labour, the product, the material of private property, acquires for the individual more and more the significance of an equivalent, and as he no longer exchanges only his surplus, and the object of his production can be simply a matter of indifference to him, so too he no longer exchanges his product for something directly needed by him. The equivalent comes into existence as an equivalent in money, which is now the immediate result of labour to gain a living and the medium of exchange.

The complete domination of the estranged thing over man has become evident in money, which is completely indifferent both to the nature of the material, i.e., to the specific nature of the private property, and to the personality of the property owner. What was the domination of person over person is now the general domination of the thing over the person, of the product over the producer. Just as the concept of the equivalent, the value, already implied the alienation of private property, so money is the sensuous, even objective existence of this alienation (p.22).

Earlier in these same notes on Mill Marx had explained in more detail how human beings came to be dominated by the products of their own labour, while at the same time giving us a glimpse of how things would be different in a moneyless society:

The essence of money is not, in the first place, that property is alienated in it, but that the mediating activity or movement, the human, social act by which man's products mutually complement one another, is estranged from man and becomes the attribute of money, a material thing outside man. Since man alienates this mediating activity itself, he is active here only as a man who has lost himself and is dehumanised; the relation itself between things, man's operation with them, becomes the operation of an entity outside and above man. Owing to this alien mediator - instead of man himself being the mediator for man - man regards his will, his activity and his relation to other men as a power independent of him and them. His slavery, therefore, reaches its peak. It is clear that this mediator now becomes a real God, for the mediator is the real power over what it mediates to me. Its cult becomes an end in itself. Objects separated from this mediator have lost their value. Hence the objects only have value insofar as they represent the mediator, whereas originally it seemed that the mediator had value only insofar as it represented them. This reversal of the original relationship is inevitable (p.212).

This is still fairly philosophical but the meaning is clear enough: in a "truly human" society (to speak like Marx at this time) human beings would produce

products to satisfy their needs, and their products would "mutually complement one another"; this movement of products from the producer to those who needed them would not take place via money but would be directly organised under conscious human control; in addition, the value of a product would be the value humans put on it in terms of usefulness or capacity to give pleasure. With private property and production for money, on the other hand, this cannot happen: not only does the movement of products from producer to consumer come to be "mediated" by money, but the value of a product comes to be judged not in human terms but in terms of a sum of money; finally, the whole process of the production and distribution of wealth escapes from human control and is dominated by an alien force, money.

In his well-known Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (which were also never published in his life-time) Marx, in what could be regarded as a prophetic vision of the sort of commercial, advertisers' world we have to suffer today, expanded on the point about the pursuit of money becoming the main aim of life in private property society:

The need for money is therefore the true need produced by the economic system, and it is the only need which the latter produces. The quantity of money becomes to an ever greater degree its sole effective quality. Just as it reduces everything to its abstract form, so it reduces itself in the course of its own movement to quantitative being. Excess and intemperance come to be its true norm.

Subjectively, this appears partly in the fact that the extension of products and needs becomes a contriving and ever-calculating subservience to inhuman, sophisticated, unnatural and imaginary appetites. Private property does not know how to change crude need into human need. Its idealism is fantasy, caprice and whim; and no eunuch flatters his despot more basely or uses more despicable means to stimulate his dulled capacity for pleasure in order to sneak a favour for himself than does the industrial eunuch - the producer - in order to sneak for himself a few pieces of silver, in order to charm the golden birds out of the pockets of his dearly beloved neighbours in Christ. He puts himself at the service of the other's most depraved fancies, plays the pimp between him and his need, excites in him morbid appetites, lies in wait for each of his weaknesses - all so that he can then demand cash for this service of love. Every product is a bait with which to seduce away the other's very being, his money: every real and possible need is a weakness which will lead the fly to the gluepot (p.307).

In an earlier passage Marx had once again contrasted this with the situation that would obtain in socialism, where the object of production would be to satisfy real human needs, above all the need for human relations with other human beings. This - a society in which people would relate to people, not as "atomistic individuals", but as a "true human community" - was Marx's somewhat philosophical definition of socialism at this time.

Nobody reading these passionate denunciations of money can be left with any doubt that Marx stood for a moneyless society. Although he abandoned some of the more flowery philosophical language in his later published works such as A

Critique of Political Economy (1859) and Capital (1867), he never abandoned his view that money should be abolished through the establishment of a society based on common ownership and production directly for human need. Indeed, his later analysis of the process of capitalist production was still based on his early view that in capitalist society the producers (the working class) were dominated by the product of their own labour which had escaped from their control and confronted them as an alien, exploiting force (capital). But, then, the distinction between an "early", philosophical and a "later", scientific Marx has never been all that convincing, since not only are the views of the so-called early Marx to be found in his later writings, but also his early writings are not just philosophising as to the true nature of humanity, as the following passage from the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 shows:

An enforced increase of wages (disregarding all other difficulties, including the fact that it would only be by force, too, that such an increase, being an anomaly, could be maintained) would therefore be nothing but better payment for the slave, and would not win either for the worker or for labour their human status and dignity. Indeed, even the equality of wages, as demanded by Proudhon, only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labour into the relationship of all men to labour. Society is then conceived as an abstract capitalist.

Wages are a direct consequence of estranged labour, and estranged labour is the direct cause of private property. The downfall of the one must therefore involve the downfall of the other. From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it follows further that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone is at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation - and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are but modifications and consequences of this relation (p.280). ALB