

Karl Marx on Revolution

edited by Saul K. Padover

(McGraw-Hill; 682 pp.; \$17.50/\$4.95)

Peter B. Miller

Karl Marx on Revolution is the first of a projected thirteen volumes which, when completed, will constitute *The Karl Marx Library*. Since the main purpose of this project is the compilation of a definitive edition of Marx's works, Professor Padover, the editor, has naturally encouraged Marx to speak for himself. With the exception of a brief introductory essay and the addition of some chronologies, this first volume consists of Marx's classic analyses of European revolutionary upheavals from 1848 to the Paris Commune, arranged in sections on France, Germany and Spain, supplemented with shorter journalistic pieces, notes and letters, some first translated here.

The claim of "allowing Marx to speak for himself" is misleading. It obscures Padover's own efforts as well as the complexity of dealing with a theorist who is noted for his dialectical concerns. As with any work on Marx, where a consideration of the author's role is important in coming to grips with that work, Padover's participation is significant and informative. In introducing Marx, editing the things he lets Marx say, and arranging the way he lets Marx say them, Padover has offered a lesson in how one may select from Marx's entire corpus to grasp the important theme of revolution. This is by no means a simple lesson. It verges upon being an "interpretation" and touches those difficulties inherent in such a project.

Among the few words which are his own Padover makes another claim which may be misleading. "This volume," he tells us, "contains Marx's basic writings on every aspect of revolution." This is not quite true. *Karl Marx on Revolution* is a detailed historical study of the Europe of Marx's lifetime, dealing primarily with three countries. From

Marx's more theoretical writings there are but two brief selections from *The Holy Family* and *The Poverty of Philosophy*. There is nothing of that mysterious second stage of the revolution hinted at in the elusive Hegelian language of the early manuscripts. There is nothing at all from his economic analyses. There is nothing from the *Grundrisse*, which may perhaps be his most significant work on revolution, as it adumbrates those spheres of development which would keep capitalism going well past its originally projected nineteenth-century date of collapse.

It is doubtful whether any single volume could satisfactorily include Marx's works on all aspects of the revolution. That Padover's claim is unfulfilled is not so important as a consideration of why it was made in the first place—why he has begun with such an all-embracing theme, and why he has chosen the selections he has and considers them basic.

To begin with the revolutionary theme is not to make a nominal choice. At least since Marx there has been no agreement as to what constitutes the focal point or essential aspect of Marxism. The class struggle, the methodology and metaphysics of dialectical materialism, economic evolutionism and historical determinism, and most recently "alienation," have been offered as essential themes. Along with those many theoretical beginning places there is a great variety of movements and men who, as Padover notes, "have interpreted Marx to suit their own purposes." In part Padover finds Marx responsible for these theoretical and practical disagreements. "Such varied interpretations have been made possible by Marx's own ambiguities, exaggerations, imprecisions, and lacunae." The "revolution" may truly be the

most ambiguous and imprecise of all of Marx's notions. Yet it is here that Professor Padover begins, for if these varied interpretations have been made possible by Marx, still

the ambiguities and "terminological inexactitudes," in Winston Churchill's phrase, have also been the main source of Marx's strength, universality, and enduring appeal. His writings have become a sort of secular Bible, in which men in search of a better world find hope, rationalization, and inspiration. Marx's language, imbued with moral passion and historic sweep, lends itself, like the Bible, to a great variety of interpretations. And, again like the Bible, it has enormous vision and universality.

Apart from this introductory comment, there is little in *Karl Marx on Revolution* to draw our attention to matters of moral passion and historic universality. Circumscribed theoretically and historically, the revolution which Padover offers appears to exclude such considerations. The absence of their direct treatment, however, underscores the problematic nature of a visionary, historically sweeping understanding of Marx, the very problem with which Professor Padover begins.

This difficulty has been a prominent feature of Marxism since its inception. Although Marx's view of the revolution, in fact, initially derived from his criticism of Hegelian idealism and the development of his own dialectical materialism, such an understanding could easily become—in Engels's words—"an excuse for not studying history."

Engels went on to point out that "our conception of history and the revolution is above all a guide to study, not a lever for construction after the manner of the Hegelians. All history must be studied afresh." Marx's so-called political and historical analyses were such studies. *The Class Struggle in France, 1848-1850* was his first attempt to explain a section of contemporary history with the aid of his materialist conception and to find the dialectical relation between his grand theory and

specific historical events. Immediately after Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état*, Marx worked out anew that history of France from February, 1848, up to this event in *The 18th Brumaire*.

By choosing these selections and others like them, placing them in a context of his even more practical, specific, day-to-day comments on men and events, and arranging them in sections preceded by chronologies, Padover has stressed the concrete historical nature of Marx's work. Even the *Manifesto* is situated in a section which details party programs and strategy in the early days of the First International, focused around the Communist trials in Cologne. A section on "Revolutionary Theory" contains such pieces as Marx's notes on the Prussian king's treatment of the Silesian weavers' revolt in 1844 and a speech commemorating the seventeenth anniversary of the Polish revolution of 1830.

By extending a part of Marx's own methodology and showing revolutionary theory as it grows out of, and responds to, specific historical events rather than as it derives from metaphysical theory, Padover's work speaks to problems of present-day Marxism. The "revolution" has suffered setbacks well beyond those witnessed in Marx's lifetime. Since his death, in fact, we have been told by numerous critics that the revolution has been "refuted"—by nationalism and world wars, changes in the working class, Keynesian economics, technology and bureaucracy, to name a few. For whatever reason its failure to materialize, the revolution has become something of a myth, and the general loss of religious sense has made it difficult to treat myths as anything more than imaginary fictions and fancies.

If Padover's presentation of the revolution is incomplete and the circumscription of the revolution in such theoretical and historical terms seems a bit complex and removed, *Karl Marx on Revolution* is nevertheless a useful groundwork for answering those questions about the revolution which tend to be lost in its popular treatment.

In the Fullness of Time

by Paul H. Douglas

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Mary Topolsky

This autobiography of Paul Douglas could not have been published at a more opportune moment, for its story is in a sense a reflection of the larger forces at work in contemporary politics. One is left at the end of this long, informative volume with a disturbing enigma. Why is it that a man like Douglas, who should be enjoying the reverence of his countrymen and the gratitude of his party, has instead ended up repudiated by the electorate, forced to content himself with penning his memoirs and observing the antics of the backyard birds?

Part of the answer lies in his often strained but consistent affiliation with the Chicago machine. His strengths—his dedication to social justice and civil rights and against privilege—are a testimony to the finest moments of that organization. But his weaknesses—his hawkish policies on Vietnam, his confusion of the peace movement with communism, his paternal attitude toward minorities and his lack of touch with the mood of the electorate—are coincidental with the failings of that selfsame machine.

Douglas enjoyed a unique privilege for a Northern urban liberal: the ability to view things in the long run. Unlike most, who had only short-term, shallow goals to offer because they were at the mercy of constantly changing tides of public opinion threatening at any moment to remove them from office, the Senator, because he enjoyed the protection of Mayor Daley, was in a position to commit himself to a strong ideological stance. He was able, throughout the late forties, fifties and early sixties, to call for civil rights legislation, labor, anti-poverty, housing, welfare and Medicare legislation, as well as an end to the

excessive subsidization of special interests.

Early in the book Douglas presents us with his philosophy of history, which was inspired by his boyhood experience fighting a Maine forest fire. The conflagration, which lasted through two days and nights and only then was doused by heavy rain, led him to speculate that history, like fires, is the result of an accumulation of conditions that act and react upon one another, gathering momentum and reinforcing themselves until they are so perpetuated and accelerated that the smallest spark can generate a holocaust. He therefore dedicates himself to the task of preventing an accumulation of social maladjustments which will lead to such a social disaster. In doing so, he distinctly rejects a pendulum theory as an explanation of history. To his credit, this theory of long-run reform can only be the product of the statesman's mind, not that of the politician.

However, even given the patronage of Dick Daley, the going is anything but idyllic. For those who sentimentally harbor illusions about the much lamented Roosevelt coalition, a strong dose of the chapter entitled "The Composition and Power Structure of the Senate" is recommended. Here the author gives us a cameo analysis of the workings of the Senate, beginning with the paradox of why, although the Democrats held the Senate for all but two of the years from 1949-1966 and the White House for all but eight, it was close to impossible under our party system to govern coherently. Douglas views the Senate as consisting not of two but rather, he estimates, of three-and-a-half parties—the liberal Democrats, the conservative ones, the conservative Republicans, and then a few liberal GOPers,