MARX AND EUROPEAN SOCIALISM

I. Purpose and overview of lecture
   A. Analysis and critique of Marxism, a look at its origins, main influences on it
   B. Effort to set his theories in historical context, show how they were "realistic" or "scientific" and "Victorian" or "typically nineteenth-century"
   C. Examination of competing socialist theories in the latter half of the nineteenth century
   D. Attempt to show why Marxism generally attracted more followers than other ideologies
   E. Examination of the evolution of Marxism itself
      1. Changes and criticisms within the movement itself, its various wings and controversies

II. Problems of interpreting Marxism
   A. As is the case with many political ideologies, this "ism" has come to mean many different things to different people
   B. That was always the case, but there has been as well a definite evolution of Marxism, just as there has been an evolution of liberalism
      1. Marx himself commented, toward the end of his life, that he was certain of one thing—he was not a Marxist
         a) He said this in regard to the corruption of his ideas that his followers in France had introduced
      2. By the end of the century, there were distinct wings of the movement, each believing the other was no longer "truly Marxist"
      3. This process continued well into the 20th century, with the Russian Revolution, with Leninism and Stalinism, and with post-war developments, especially with Maoism
   C. Each of these periods have seen what appear to be fundamental alterations of Marx's thought
      1. Some identifiable core of meaning has perhaps remained, but it is not easy to identify
      2. The only safe approach is the historical one
a) That is, to resist saying what Marxism is "essentially" and rather show what it has been in history

(1) “Marxism” has changed in meaning nearly as much as “liberalism”

III. Origins of Marx's thought

A. Where Marx's ideas came from has been the subject of enormous speculation and controversy

B. Marx the synthesizer: Nearly all students of Marx agree in seeing him as a great synthesizer of things going on in various countries in the early 19th century

1. He was able to put together elements of German philosophy, English classical economic thought, and French socialism

2. However, to show how he did those things exceeds what can be done in a single lecture

C. The following points may be offered as the easiest to understand:

1. From thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo (the Classical Economists) he learned a certain theoretical approach to economics

   a) He borrowed ideas that helped explain the operation of the market, the investment of capital, land rent, and economic value

   b) Certain key Marxian concepts, such as the labor theory of value, come quite obviously from Ricardo, for example

2. However, Marx also subjected these thinkers to a fundamental criticism, primarily with the tools of German philosophy

   a) He did not accept the way that they defended capitalism as a desirable, rational or "perfect" system

   b) Marx tried to show how capitalism would not last forever; it destroy itself by its own contradictions (a Hegelian concept)

   c) The German philosophical tradition is undoubtedly the most difficult for modern American students to
gain any sense of

d) Again, at the risk of oversimplification, those ideas concentrated on the nature of historical change, of development over time

e) And that perspective in particular was important in providing Marx with a critical vantage point in looking at classical economics

f) the classical economics tended to see economic laws as unchanging, of eternal validity—the laissez-faire economy, in other words, was simply the "right" one

g) Marx maintained that laissez-faire was merely the reflection of a certain stage of development

h) Note: this was an idea to be found as well in Saint-Simon, without some of the peculiar vocabulary of German philosophy

i) German idealist philosophy also incorporated ideas of progress through strife, of the notion of the gradual perfection of humanity (of becoming "god-like")—ideas that of course pop up everywhere in the 19th century

3. Marx borrowed from the French Enlightenment and especially **French socialists** other kinds of ideas, ones that also "fit" into English and German thought patterns

a) Marx's vision, for example, of the future socialist state seems to have borrowed from Fourier, especially the idea of a non-repressive society

b) Marx's vision of how one got there was entirely different, however

c) And he reasoned his way in that direction by means of German philosophy, probably before he ever even heard of Fourier

d) In a related way, Marx's ultimate value system derived from an Enlightened-egalitarian perspective: The ideals of liberty, equality, and [especially] fraternity were the ones he instinctually felt were the best

e) He had a strong preference for egalitarian ideals, a strong identification with the lower orders, a revulsion from greed and egotism
D. Origins of Marx’s ideas in the *Judeo-Christian value system*, the prophetic tradition

1. Some scholars have looked much farther into the past and have seen Marx as a kind of modern prophet, heir of the prophets of the Old Testament

2. And in a more general way, they have seen "religious" leitmotifs or themes in his theories
   a) Marx’s system is thus one of contending forces of good and evil (proletariat and bourgeoisie)
   b) With the Elect (the socialist leaders like himself) leading their followers of faithful
   c) And a coming day of judgment: the Revolution

3. A further variation on this theme has been to point to Marx’s Jewish origin
   a) His profound hatred for the bourgeoisie, it has been argued, was part of his hatred of his own Jewish background
   b) He tended, similarly, to equate egotism and capitalism with Jewishness and Judaism

IV. The essence of Marx’s system, an overview

A. Perhaps Marxism's most fundamental premise: The relationship of people to the "means of production" determines their consciousness (how they act and think); that means of production determines even what is known as "human nature"

1. People change, in short, in fundamental ways over the course of history; “human nature” is not “fixed”

B. What is meant by "means (or mode) of production"?

1. It is a slippery concept in Marx's writings
   a) My interpretation: The way that people extract a living from nature determines the kind of social system they will have—or, more accurately, the two are interrelated
   b) Similarly, the way a person makes a living, and the class to which he belongs in making it, determines his/her basic mentality

2. Important corollary or implication: Classes are so organized that some do the "dirty work" and others reap the benefit
a) Such an organization is necessary to society but also the source of tension, of class hatreds
3. Specific example: if the mode of production is centered around plowing the land, then a certain kind of social system is appropriate to it
   a) That is, peasants who toil and an aristocracy above them who appropriate the excess value, or the surplus, created by the peasants
4. Similarly, an ideology will be formulated to "explain" or justify this state of affairs
   a) In this case, Christianity explained to the peasant that God wanted things the way they were

C. Change in the mode of production
   1. This is a closely related fundamental element of Marx's theories
   2. A change in the mode of production results in far-reaching changes in society, and thus in ideology
   3. Simplistically conceived: the plow is replaced by the power-driven machine
   4. This new mode of production requires a new kind of social organization
      a) People move off of the land, since fewer hands are required there
      b) Factories grow up, in part to produce things like tractors
      c) Factory proletarians begin to appear, dominated by a new exploiting class, the capitalist bourgeoisie
   5. Again, an ideology, or several related ones, appear to explain and justify
      a) Most characteristically: liberalism, which argues that the capitalist has a right to his position because of his demonstrated superior abilities
      b) Christianity can lend a helping hand by again asserting that God blesses the factory system

D. Development of class mentality
   1. Each class develops a certain mentality, corresponding to its position in the social organization, or its "relation to the means of production"
2. The bourgeois becomes a liberal individualist
   a) His way of living requires individual effort and enterprise, and he thinks that everyone should live by those principles

3. The proletarian, on the other hand, becomes a collectivist or a socialist because of his basic life experiences
   a) Individualism is alien to him
   b) He works collectively and discovers that he can protect his interests only collectively—through trade-unions, socialist parties, and of course the ultimate vision of working-class revolution

4. In short, people's basic identities are the creations of the economic systems in which they live
   a) Yet, those systems are in constant change, which results in changes in the people themselves

E. The contradictions of capitalism
1. Marx's most famous work, Das Kapital, is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the way that capitalism is changing into socialism
2. Feudalism similarly evolved into capitalism
3. Capitalism's evolution is part, in other words, of the constant change of history—no system is immune to change and transformation

F. The main aspects of the inevitable demise of capitalism (its "internal contradictions"):
1. Concentration and Pauperization (Verelendung)
   a) The concentration thesis stresses capitalism's inherent tendency to become more and more centralized and concentrated as it develops
   b) The more efficient industrial concerns out-compete the less; the larger absorb the smaller
2. Capitalism thus begins as a system of many small firms competing with one another in a free market
   a) It ends with a few large ones dominating the entire economy
   b) They have become huge corporations, where in fact the free market no longer means much
   c) Nor does, in fact, individual enterprise
d) In short, capitalist individualism by its inner logic creates over time a "socialist" (or non-individualist) economy of large corporations, planning, bureaucracy, etc.

e) In this sense capitalism "destroys itself"

3. Pauperization occurs at the same time, according to Marx, because the system puts increasing pressure on the proletariat

a) It of course destroys the businesses of all the small and uncompetitive firms

b) Their owners and workers go to work in the large firms

c) There the capitalist puts ever greater pressure on them, in order to deal with his declining profit margins

G. The coming of the revolution

1. Concentration and Pauperization cannot continue indefinitely

2. As the contradictions of capitalism become ever more obvious and ever more unbearable for the proletariat, the chances of a violent uprising grow

3. And once capitalism is "ripe," is fully developed, socialist revolution will easily succeed

4. The system will be essentially "socialistic" and the great mass of the population proletarian and exploited

5. The revolution will thus end private property in the means of production, socialize all property—a new stage of history will begin

a) Now production will not be based on capitalistic greed but rather on social need

b) “Liberation” in many areas will now be possible, since material need will no longer be a problem

c) Here is, in short, heaven on earth, the time when the god-like essence of humanity will be achieved

V. Development of socialist and anarchist movements in the second half of the 19th century

A. Marx's theories attracted a growing following on the Continent,
particularly where industry developed the most rapidly

B. By the turn of the century, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was the largest party, in fact as large as the next two parties combined (though not yet an absolute majority)

C. The great success of Marxism in Germany had an important influence elsewhere, in part because of the great success of Germany in other regards

1. Just as liberals looked to England, so socialists looked to Germany for a model (although of course socialism was not yet introduced in Germany)

D. However, the SPD and others like it were not really much like later Marxist-Leninist parties

1. First of all, their talk of revolution was mostly theoretical and subdued
   a) In practice, they were rather law-abiding and moderate, especially as the century progressed
   b) This was in part because of a fundamental Marxian premise: Revolution cannot come until conditions are ripe (and they were not yet ripe in Germany)

2. The reticence to push for revolution was due to other, more subtle factors, however
   a) The SPD became itself ever more bureaucratized and identified with the status quo
   b) It became a kind of state within the state, society within a society
   c) It provided insurance, strike funds, workers' schools, clubs, football teams, etc.
   d) Many of those who ran this vast machinery came to distrust or even fear the idea of revolution
   e) Socialists who were identified with revolution could be arrested or in other ways attacked by the state
   f) At that would mean loss of jobs for those who ran the insurance, strike funds, etc.
   g) Perhaps even more important in making revolution seem unattractive: Verelendung was not occurring; the material conditions of the workers improved, in spite of ups and downs and important local differences
   h) Workers, too, came to doubt that they "had only
their chains to lose” in a revolution

VI. The Revisionists

A. Within the socialist parties of Europe a growing body of men came openly to question the need or even possibility of revolution
   1. They called instead for a gradual path, for accumulating reforms that would introduce socialism incrementally

B. These ideas were put into an influential theoretical form by the German theorist and formerly close associate of Marx and Engels, Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932)
   1. His work, *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899) subjected Marx's theories to a searching re-evaluation
   2. Bernstein argued that Marx had been wrong to believe in pauperization, or even in concentration everywhere in the economy
   3. He showed with statistics:
      a) that workers were not getting poorer,
      b) that concentration was not occurring in certain parts of the economy (the service industries, for example),
      c) and that workers might never become the overwhelming majority that Marx predicted

C. Even though others had been saying much the same, Bernstein's "heresy" caused enormous controversy
   1. It was officially condemned in congresses of the SPD in following years

D. Nevertheless, the SPD continued a reformist practice right up to the eve of the war

VII. Anarchism and revolution

A. It was not so much the Marxists as the anarchists who upheld the banners of revolution in the generation before the war

B. The anarchists were a diverse lot, not united under one theory as were the Marxists, or even joining single parties in each country

C. Yet, they shared a number of concepts with the Marxists
   1. Both believed in the inevitability of class conflict, of
violence, and of revolution

2. Both expressed a fundamental rejection of bourgeois individualism, exploitative capitalism

D. There were equally important differences

1. Anarchists distrusted centralization, bureaucracies, and the principle of authority in whatever form

2. The Marxists argued that it was necessary to have workers' institutions, such as trade unions and parties, that were disciplined and authoritarian, but anarchists denied that necessity

3. The anarchists rejected, similarly, the need for the modern state, with its hierarchies, police forces, and bureaucracies

4. Marxists agreed that the modern state was an organ of class domination, and as such should be destroyed, but it was a necessary stage, and, moreover, a proletarian state would have to be formed
   a) A dictatorship of the proletariat, at least as a temporary device to destroy the old order, would use the power of the state

5. Anarchists generally found their greatest appeal in non-industrialized areas, especially in southern and eastern Europe
   a) They were also inclined to believe that individual acts of violence might contribute to the fall of the old order
   b) Thus, political assassinations were often attempted by anarchists (and denounced by Marxists)
   c) At this time (late 19th, early 20th centuries) the anarchists succeeded in killing a remarkable number of public officials and monarchs: Tsar Alexander II, President Marie Carnot of France, Empress Elizabeth of Austria, King Humbert of Italy, President McKinley of the United States, Peter Stolypin (Prime Minister in Russia), P.M. Carnovas in Spain
   d) They even succeeded in throwing a bomb into the Chamber of Deputies in France

E. Aside from such notorious acts, the anarchists advocated "direct action"—non-parliamentary measure, such as sabotage,
strikes, especially the "general strike"

1. The general strike would occur in the dreamed-of day when all workers would lay down their tools, and refuse to be exploited any more

2. This would cause the bourgeois-capitalist order to tumble, introducing an anarchist-socialist society

VIII. Leninism as synthesis of German social democracy and anarchism

A. Even though the anarchists and the Marxists saw each other as enemies, there was in a way a kind of combination of the two emerging in the decade before WW I

   1. That is, a merging of the Marxist analysis of society, the organizational talents of the Social democrats, with the revolutionary will and audacity of the anarchists

B. This will be the subject of a further lecture: the origins of Leninism