

KEY WORKS

The Poverty of
Philosophy
(1847)

Communist
Manifesto (with
Friedrich Engels)
(1848)

The Class Struggles in
France, 1848 to 1850
(1850)

A Contribution
to the Critique of
Political Economy
(1859)

Das Kapital
(1867)

*“History
repeats itself—
first as tragedy,
the second time
as farce”*

KARL MARX



MARX AND ENGELS AT THE SECOND COMMUNIST CONGRESS
In June 1847 a secret political society, the League of the Just, made up mainly of emigrant Germans, met in London. Marx and Engels joined the League, which became known as the Communist League, and wrote its manifesto – the Communist Manifesto.

MARX

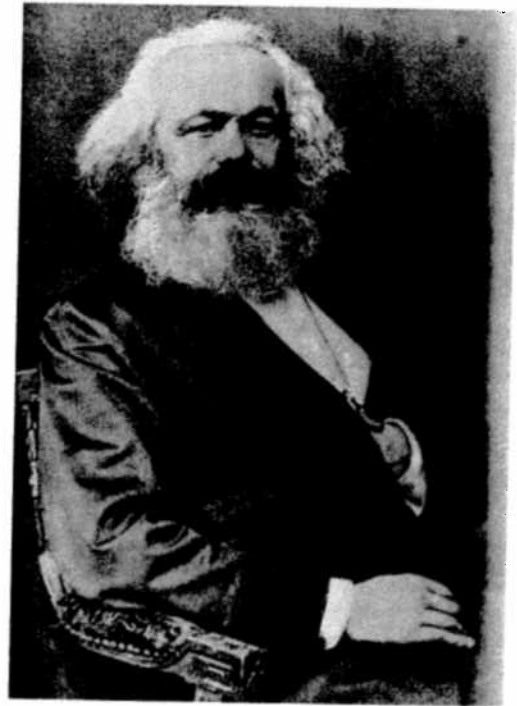
HISTORY TRIES TO BECOME A SCIENCE

Marx believed that he had put the explanation of historical development on a scientific footing, thus enabling mankind to predict the future development of society with scientific accuracy.

KARL MARX (1818–83) was born in the German town of Trier. His parents were Jews who converted to Lutheranism when he was six; but he himself was militantly anti-religious by the time he was a teenager. His creed even then was: “Criticism of religion is the foundation of all criticism.” As a student he studied first law, then philosophy and history, and wrote his doctoral thesis on ancient Greek philosophy. His open hostility to religion meant that an academic career was closed to him, so he became a newspaper editor, though only briefly. Actually he did extremely little paid work in the course of his life: instead, he chose to live in poverty most of the time and pursue his studies and his writing.

When the newspaper he was editing was suppressed, in 1843, he went to Paris, where he met the young Friedrich Engels. This began what may well be the most famous, and certainly the most influential, literary collaboration in history. Engels came from a rich German business family that lived in Manchester, where they owned a textile business. In effect he maintained Marx financially for the rest of Marx’s life, thus enabling him to produce his

work. It was in the years immediately after he met Engels that Marx elaborated the basic system of ideas that was to become known as Marxism, which became the intellectual foundation of Communism. It also claimed to be the only true socialism. Engels functioned always as Marx’s sounding board and in-house critic and collaborator in all this, and displayed exceptional talent in these roles: but Marx had genius, and was unquestionably the dominant partner intellectually.



KARL MARX

In 1845 Marx was expelled from France and Germany for his revolutionary activities. He eventually settled in 1849 in London, where he spent many hours in the Reading Room of the British Library. He is buried in Highgate Cemetery.

Posterity has not been unfair to Engels in naming their ideas after Marx, but nevertheless Engels was far from being a negligible personality.

LIVED AND DIED IN ENGLAND

When Marx was expelled from France in 1845 he went to Brussels, where he and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848. Marx was duly expelled from Brussels in the same year, and after some fitful and abortive wanderings he ended up in London in 1849. He spent the rest of his life there, which was to be another 34 years. Most of his writings consisted of brilliant pamphlets

and articles, but there was one full-length book, his masterpiece, *Das Kapital*, (which means simply Capital), published in 1867. It is, beyond any question, one of the most influential books in the history of the world. Marx died in London in 1883, and lies buried in Highgate Cemetery.

CHILD OF HEGEL

One reason why Marxism was to prove such a rich system of thought was that it fused together three intellectual traditions that were each already highly developed: German philosophy, French political theory, and British economics. It can therefore not be categorized simply as "philosophy" in the normal sense. Nevertheless it contained a major philosophical dimension, and was to exercise an immense influence on a great deal of subsequent philosophical thinking. So no history of philosophy in the modern era could possibly disregard it.

The philosophical element in Marxism was nearly all taken from Hegel, and has continued from that day to this to be expressed by Marxists in Hegel's terminology. It is worth giving a checklist of ideas that are at the heart of Hegelianism and are also central to Marxism: one, that reality is not a state of affairs but an ongoing historical process; two, that because of this, the key to understanding reality is to understand the nature of historical change; three, that historical change is not random but obeys a discoverable law; four, that the discoverable law of change is the dialectic, with its repeated triadic movement of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; five, that what keeps this law perpetually in operation is alienation, which ensures that each successive state of affairs is eventually brought to an end by its own internal contradictions; six, that the process is not under the control of human beings, but is driven forward by its own internal laws, and human beings are swept along by it; seven, that the process as thus described will continue until a situation is reached in which all internal contradictions have been resolved: there will then be no alienation, and therefore no longer

any force at work promoting change; eight, that when this conflict-free situation is reached, human beings will no longer be swept along by forces outside their control, but will be able for the first time to take their destiny into their own hands, and will become themselves the arbiters of change; nine, that this will for the first time make human freedom and self-fulfilment possible for human beings; ten, that the form of society within which this freedom will be exercised, and self-fulfilment achieved, will not be the atomized society of independently functioning individuals that is envisaged by liberals, but an organic society in which individuals are absorbed into a whole that is much bigger, and therefore more fulfilling, than their own separate lives.

But after these ten great similarities with Hegel comes the big difference, which is something Marx took from his near-contemporary, another German



DAS KAPITAL
Described as the "Bible of the working class" in a resolution of the International Working Men's Association, *Das Kapital* was published in Berlin in 1867. In what was one of the most influential works of the 19th century, Marx predicted the supersession of capitalism by socialism. Only the first volume was completed and published in Marx's lifetime, the second and third volumes, edited by Engels, were published after his death.

"From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs"

KARL MARX AND FRIEDRICH ENGELS



REVOLUTION IN EUROPE
During the 19th century the nationalist sentiment that sprang up throughout Europe provided the ideological impetus for several rebellions against existing imperial powers. This plate depicts a scene from the 1848 revolution in Berlin.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
During the 18th and 19th centuries the advent of mass production brought about revolutions in the production of textiles, iron, steel, and coal. Agricultural nations in Europe and North America became industrialized, and populations began to migrate into cities. Britain led this revolution and by the 18th century it had become the dominant international trading power.



MARX'S DAUGHTERS
Marx was an affectionate father. Unfortunately, of his seven children, only three grew to maturity. This photograph taken in 1864 shows Marx with his daughters Laura, Eleanor, and Jenny, together with Engels. Marx's daughters were almost the only people who could read his writing and were therefore responsible for transcribing his manuscripts.

philosopher called Ludwig Feuerbach - who, like himself, had been a Left Hegelian. Whatever it is of which reality basically consists is believed by Marx to be not something spiritual but something material. He is, he insists, a materialist, not an idealist. So this whole vast historical and dialectical process that we have just followed through in ten theses is seen by Marx as happening to the material forces of which he believes the world to consist. This is why he called his system "historical materialism" or, alternatively, "dialectical materialism," two names which describe it appropriately. The two terms are interchangeable, but "historical materialism" seems the more apt when talking about human affairs, "dialectical materialism" when talking about non-human aspects of the universe. Engels was to write a good deal more than Marx did about the latter.

ECONOMICS AS FUNDAMENTAL

With regard to human affairs, the way Marx believed that the dialectic operated was something like this. The irreducible thing that human beings have to do if they are to live at all is to get the means of subsistence: they must have the wherewithal to feed, clothe, and house themselves, and to meet other basic wants. Producing these things is the one task that cannot be avoided. But as soon as the means of production have developed beyond the most primitive stage it becomes in the interest of individuals to specialize, because they find they are all better off if they do. And this

makes them dependent on one another. Production of the means of life becomes a social activity and is no longer an individual one. Within this mutual dependence, which is of course society itself, the defining characteristic of each individual is his relationship to the means of production: what he does to get a living determines most of the basic things about his way of life, and is also his contribution to society as a whole. It determines who else's interest in the division of the social product is the same as his own, and whose is in conflict with it. This gives rise to the existence of socio-economic classes, and also to the conflict between classes.



POLARIZATION OF THE CLASSES
Marx's theory defines social classes economically. He believed that technological advance would concentrate ownership and control into fewer and fewer hands, so that the capitalist class would get ever smaller while the working class grew larger.



THE MEANS OF SUBSISTENCE
In order to achieve a level of subsistence, human beings must meet their most basic needs. Marx's theories describe how the means of production develop that meet these needs. This illustration shows a slum dwelling in London's East End in 1872.

However, the means of production are in a continuous process of change. So the relationship of people to them, and therefore to one another, has to keep changing. With each major change in the means of production the composition of social classes is changed, and with it the character of the class conflict. Marx sees each of these different levels as developing dialectically. At the ground-floor level, the fundamental determinant of all social change is the development of the means of production. Riding forward on the back of this, and being both made and unmade by it, comes the development of social classes and the conflict between classes. Then above this comes what Marx calls "the superstructure": social and political institutions, religions, philosophies, the arts, ideas; all such things, he says, grow up on the basis of the economic substructure, and are ultimately determined by it.

“THE
PHILOSOPHERS
HAVE ONLY
INTERPRETED
THE WORLD
IN VARIOUS
WAYS; THE
POINT IS TO
CHANGE IT”

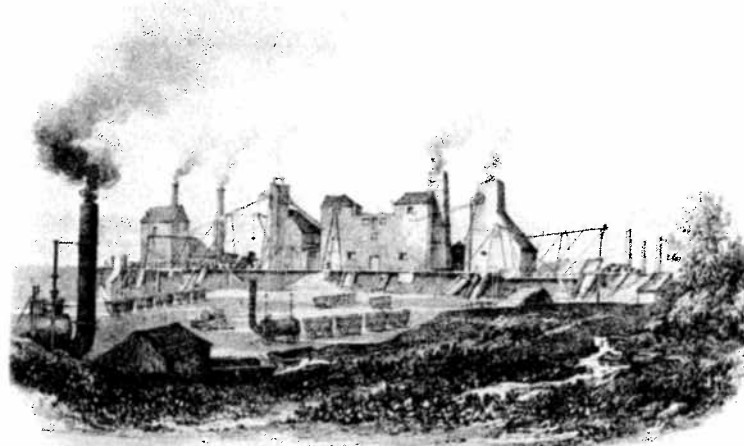
KARL MARX

A Marxist historian of philosophy could also point out that it was with the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, towards the end of the 18th century, that we get the first philosopher who sees knowledge as a product, namely Kant. That would be typical of the way Marxists analyze intellectual



THE LOWER MIDDLE CLASS
European society was radically changed by industrialization. The gradual shift of the population away from the countryside and towards the industrial centres led to the development of cities and to a more complex society. In the picture above, a typical English lower middle class family of the 1890s pose for a photograph outside their cottage.

Examples will help to illustrate some of these points. Marx drew attention to the fact that in the earliest stage of industrialization, when transportation of heavy raw materials was still done chiefly by boat, and when mills and factories were still dependent on water power, industrial towns grew up along river banks and sea coasts, and on the shores of lakes. But the development of steam power, including steam-powered trains, freed the development of industrial towns from this constraint, and then they began to grow up closer to their sources of raw material, or their chief markets. Here is an outstanding example of a change in the means of production bringing about changes in the substructure. It came as a great illumination when Marx pointed out these things, because no one had consciously perceived them before: it permanently changed the way historical development was viewed. Like so many good ideas, it seems obvious once somebody has actually had the idea, and then it becomes difficult to understand how people previously failed to think of it.



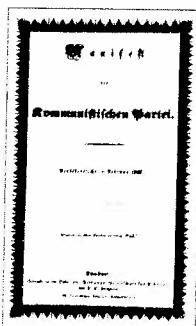
THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORTATION DURING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
Demand for reliable and cheap access to raw materials and markets resulted in major improvements to Britain's transportation facilities. Initially, this development took the form of improved roads and canals. Later on, railroads became the preferred means of transportation: seen here is an early steam train at Hetton Colliery, County Durham, in the early 1820s.

PROTECTION OF WORKING CHILDREN
 By the beginning of the 19th century in Britain the appalling conditions and abuses of factory labor, particularly of women and children, began to cause public concern. One of the most important pieces of legislation passed to protect children was the Factory Act of 1833. Among other things it set the minimum working age at nine years and limited children's working hours to eight.



A DISPLAY OF WEALTH AND POWER
 Photographed in 1890, this drawing room is a typical example of the opulent taste of the British ruling classes. The crowded, ostentatious display of arts and crafts was

popular with the bourgeoisie, who, according to Marxists, used the arts to serve their own interests – to glamorize their achievements in an overt display of their wealth and power



COMMUNIST MANIFESTO
 Published in 1848, the *Communist Manifesto* became the most celebrated work in the history of the Socialist movement. Written by Marx and Engels, it argued that all history had hitherto been a history of class struggles. The manifesto ends with its famous call to the workers of all lands to unite.

developments. The arts are seen by them as serving the interests of the ruling class, by putting across ideas and values that promote those interests, or display their wealth and power, or glamorize their achievements, or divert the attention of other classes from politics. Similar functions are served by religion, "the opium of the people." A whole analysis of society and its history has grown up on the basis of this way of seeing things. And although scarcely any serious thinkers nowadays would accept the validity of the analysis as a whole, there can be no doubt that much of it is insightful, and has made a major contribution to what might be called the modern outlook.

THE REVOLUTION

Marx saw the Industrialist Capitalist society of his day as the last-but-one stage of historical development before the advent of the conflict-free society. He thought that the relentless development of modern technology was bound to go on putting more and more people out of work, with the result that the masses would become more numerous, more alienated from the means of production, and more impoverished, while ownership and control of the means of production would become concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. This would increasingly polarize society into two classes, the capitalists and the workers. The conflict between them was bound

to grow ever more bitter until the workers, in their overwhelming superiority of numbers, would rise up against the capitalists and overthrow them, taking the means of production into their own

“WHAT THE BOURGEOISIE PRODUCES...IS ITS OWN GRAVEDIGGERS. ITS FALL AND THE VICTORY OF THE PROLETARIAT ARE EQUALLY INEVITABLE”

KARL MARX

hands. This revolution would be, in a double sense, the end of history, because it was the climax towards which events were inevitably moving, and after it there would be no more dialectical change. The division of society into classes would have ended. The means of production would be owned by all and operated in the interests of all. Society, being class-free, would be conflict-free. As Engels once expressed it, there would be no more need for the government of people, but only the administration of things. And being no longer coerced by uncontrollable historical forces, or by government, human beings would be free to fulfil themselves.

FALSE PROPHET

The future that lay immediately ahead of the time when Marx was writing did not at all develop in the way he said it was bound to. This is partly because he was mistaken as to the nature of his theory. He believed it to be scientific, in the same sort of way as Newton's physics is scientific. If we have the right information about the current state of any



RUSSIAN DISSIDENTS

Marxists were intolerant of alternative views. Some dissidents were imprisoned and others were executed. This c. 1932 photograph of a Russian labour camp shows detainees being forced to work on the construction of a canal.

physical system of objects in motion, then with the aid of Newton's laws we can predict accurately what the state of that system will be at any future time. Marx believed that he had uncovered the economic laws of motion of society in precisely the same sense – he says so in the Preface to *Das Kapital*. With this knowledge he thinks he is able to predict the inevitable future development of society. It was of enormous importance to him that Marxism should be seen as “scientific,” and he called his brand of socialism “scientific socialism” to distinguish it from the others. Indeed, he despised the others. He thought they were based on mere Utopian dreams, or moral uplift, or wishful thinking; whereas he, by contrast, had carried out a scientific study of society to discover what forces were actually at work within it, and what the laws were that governed the operation of those forces, and then had based his political teachings on these realities.

The notion that Marxism was scientific was to account for an important part of its appeal until quite late in the 20th century. Marxists tended to regard their beliefs not just as personal opinions but as scientific knowledge, and therefore as “known” with absolute certainty. This gave them enormous confidence and made them famously intolerant of all alternative views and opinions; and whenever they got into power they forbade the publication or teaching of any ideas that were incompatible with theirs. Another source of Marxism's appeal was the fact that, since it claimed to predict the future developments of society with

“Religion is the opium of the people”

KARL MARX



READING ROOM OF THE OLD BRITISH LIBRARY

The vast round Reading Room of the British Library was designed by Sydney Smirke (1798–1877) and completed in 1857. It was built to give “all studious and curious persons” access to the collections. Many great intellectuals have used the room, including George Bernard Shaw, Mahatma Gandhi, and Marx himself.



CAPITALIST OPPRESSION

This Russian poster of 1918 shows the Tsar, the priest, and the rich man carried by the working people. Marx believed that capitalism would collapse from its own contradictions, to be followed by a dictatorship of the proletariat. As the capitalists increased their oppression of the workers, so conflict between the classes would lead to a revolution, and the workers would overthrow their oppressors.



THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION
In March 1917 revolution broke out in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) and revolutionary councils (soviets) of soldiers, workers, and peasants were set up all over Russia. The Tsar abdicated and a provisional government was set up. In the summer of that year Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky (1881-1970) became the chief minister, but the Petrograd Soviet was controlled by Lenin's Bolsheviks. On 7-8 November Kerensky was ousted in a coup led by Lenin.

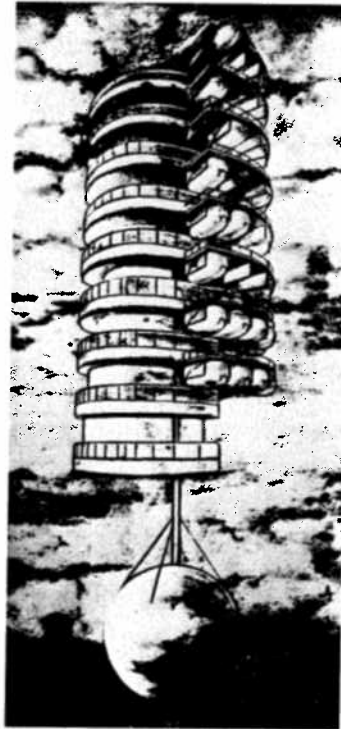


LEON TROTSKY
A leader in Russia's Revolution of 1917 and the raising of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) was also Stalin's chief rival for power following Lenin's death in 1924. Stalin defeated him, and in 1929 Trotsky was deported. He settled in Mexico, where he was assassinated in 1940 by a Stalinist agent.

scientific accuracy, socialism was believed to be "inevitable," and this meant that socialists were, so to speak, on the side of the future. What they believed in and wanted was going to happen regardless of what everybody else did or said. The whole world was going their way. As they liked to put it, "history is on our side," and their opponents were going to be consigned, as Trotsky expressed it, to the dustbin of history. This made them even more modern than "modern," for they were living not just in the present but in the future too, and before anyone else had got there.

POWERFUL APPEAL

This combination of ideas - "science," "modernization," "being on the side of the future" - had almost hypnotic appeal for large numbers of intellectuals in underdeveloped countries. So did the economic side of Marxism, which called for the centralized planning and control of the economy - "the planned solution" seemed to be just what rationality itself called for. Just as in the 18th century Locke's theories had played a crucial role in helping to bring about the American and French revolutions, so in the 20th



RUSSIAN FUTURIST ARCHITECTURE
The poverty and social chaos of the early revolutionary years propelled artists and architects towards ever-more radical solutions - such as Georgy Tikhonovich Krutikov's vision of a flying city (1928).

"THE PROLETARIANS HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT THEIR CHAINS"

KARL MARX

century Marx's theories played a significant role in helping to bring about the largest-scale revolutions of all time, the Communist revolutions in Russia (1917) and China (1948-49). Throughout the period following World War II, Communist movements declaring their allegiance to Marx's

ideas were significant throughout the Third World. In several Third World countries they came to power. At the time these words are written there are still some that govern. It is a spectacular demonstration of the practical importance that ideas do in fact have in the real world.

DECLINE AND FALL

The central emphasis that Marx placed on the claim of his ideas to be "scientific" exposed them nakedly to refutation by events, as all genuinely scientific ideas have to be - that, after all, is the point of experiments. And by the end of the 19th century it was becoming evident that events were not turning out as Marx's theories said they must. Nowhere in the world, in fact, was there a society where changes were happening in accordance with Marx's so-called "scientific laws of historical development."

This gave rise to something that became known as "revisionism." Various Marxist

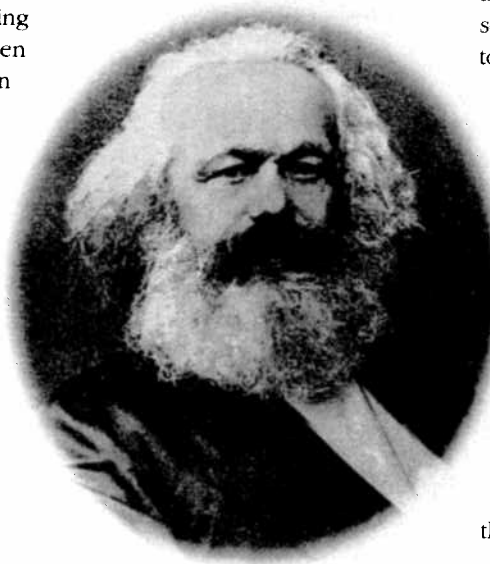
thinkers started trying to revise Marx's theories so as to fit in with the contrary evidence - and also started to reinterpret the evidence to fit in with Marx's theories. Out of this grew a plurality of differing Marxist schools of thought, at odds with one another, sometimes violently so. What led in the end to the withering away of most of them was the fact that wherever Marxist political movements came to power the result was, invariably and without exception, a bureaucratic dictatorship, a society not in the least like the one the theory had claimed was inevitable. Also without exception the economies of such societies failed, so instead of prospering they became impoverished. Marxist government, then, gave people both poverty and tyranny. In the long run this caused all but a handful of people to conclude that there must be something wrong with Marxist theory. But by this time the indirect influence of Marx's ideas had spread throughout modern culture; so although Marxism now retains few wholehearted adherents it nevertheless remains a significant element in the worlds of what are generally thought to be "modern" ideas, including not least literature and the arts.

The POWER of IDEAS

It can seriously be claimed for Karl Marx that his ideas had a greater influence in a shorter time than those of any other thinker in history. During his lifetime he was a little-known, impoverished intellectual, living on the charity of friends and spending his days reading and writing, often in the British Museum. Yet within 70 years of his death in 1883 something like a third of the entire human race was living under governments that called themselves by his name – called themselves “Marxist.”

This included all the countries of Eastern Europe, the whole of Russia, and the former Tsarist land empire, and the whole of China. Nothing like this had ever occurred before, nor (dare one say it?) is likely to happen again. Even the spread of early Christianity or Islam could not match it, nor could the spread of Buddhism during its expansionist phase. It is an utterly amazing phenomenon, more so in view of the fact that on a practical level the record of Marxism was one of persistent failure: the ideas conquered, yet the societies to which they gave rise either collapsed or detached themselves from Marxist policies.

Many leading figures on the stage of recent history have been guided by Marxism. In Russia there was Lenin, followed by Trotsky and Stalin. In Yugoslavia there was Tito; and there was Mao Zedong in



Jean-Paul Sartre (who was also a leading novelist and philosopher) and Bertolt Brecht (who was also a major poet) – or among poets, Pablo Neruda; or, among painters, Pablo Picasso – regarded themselves as Marxists or Communists; and some of their work is almost bound to survive.

More generally, there is a specifically Marxist view of the role of art in society that remains widely held and is powerfully operative in the world of today. It is that the true function of art is social criticism. According to this view, art should get people to understand in a deeper way than they do what is wrong with the society they live in, and with their own relationship to that society, and therefore with their own lives; and it should make them want to change society. Thus Marxists view art as a revolutionary instrument. Bad art is art which upholds the values of

THE TRUE FUNCTION OF ART IS SOCIAL CRITICISM

China, Ho Chi-minh in Viet Nam, Fidel Castro in Cuba. These were people who changed the world.

During its period of ideological triumph Marxism had a global influence on the arts as well as on politics. World-famous figures in the arts such as the playwrights

existing society, and tries to lull or deceive people into accepting those values. This view of the role of art, which was not at all widely held before Marx, comes close to being the prevailing orthodoxy in today's world. It may be the last bastion of Marxism to fall.