Rediscovering Marx

Alan Johnson reviews "The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto" by Hal Draper, 1994, Center for Socialist History

FROM its inception, whether as political movement or political theory, socialism has been dominated by various strains of elitist, bureaucratic and statist 'socialisms from above.' However, since Marx there has also existed a minority tradition of theory and practice which has defined socialism as the 'self-emancipation of the working class' — socialism from below — and in so doing has sought to fuse the democratic idea and the socialist idea.

The American Marxist Hal Draper (1914-1990) produced "as sustained an articulation of socialism from below as exists in English."

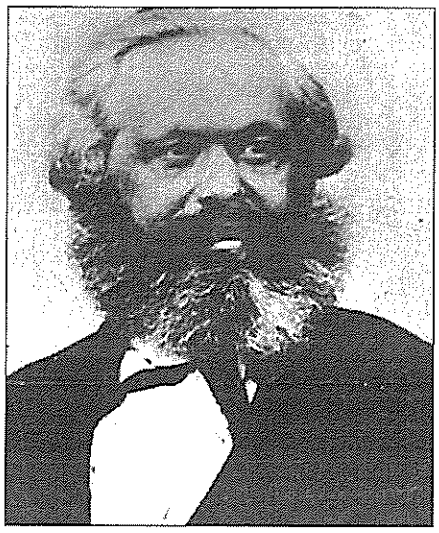
His achievement was two-fold. First, the rediscovery in Marx himself, by rigorous textual and historical analysis, of a theory and practice of socialism from below, set out in the four volume work *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* [*KMTR*] and in other writings. Second, he sought with others, most importantly Max Shachtman, until Shachtman became a right-wing social democrat, to develop this theoretical legacy, in the face of Stalinism and imperialism, into a "revolutionary democratic socialism for our time" known as "third camp" socialism.

The book is a spin off from *KMTR*, and contains a publishing history, a new translation, and detailed annotation of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The publishing history

THE *Manifesto* is without doubt the most important political pamphlet in human history. Marx wrote it as a militant in a socialist organisation (the Communist League). His political ideas had been decisively influenced by his practical experience with socialist workers in Paris. As Draper puts it: "Page for page, no other publication in our time has rivalled the historical impact of the *Manifesto.*" Draper traces the way the *Manifesto*'s fortunes followed the ups and downs of the class struggle over the next half century. It appeared at the same time, 1848, as the first international revolution in world history. Engels wrote:

> 'The *Manifesto* has had a history of its own... it was soon forced into the background that began with the reaction that began with the defeat of the Paris workers in June 1848, and was finally excommunicated 'according to law' by the conviction of the Cologne Communists in November 1852. With the disappearance from the public scene of the workers' movement that had begun with the February Revolution, the *Manifesto* passed into the background."



But with the growth of social democracy in Germany and the founding in 1864 of the First International the *Manifesto* revived with new publications. In the late 1860s the beginnings of reformist tendencies were reflected in demands — Draper cites Liebknecht in Germany — that Marx revise the *Manifesto* to cut the revolutionary content. After the Paris Commune of 1871, "The *Manifesto* started gaining its status as a necessary part of any cultured person's stock of knowledge on sociopolitical matters."

There are times when the sheer weight of detail overwhelms the reader. Few will feel they need to know the size of paper of the original manuscript (215x134, apparently) or the significance of the comma after Marx's name but before Engels' name in the 1888 Translation, and so on. Did Draper really need to discuss whether the manuscript arrived in London in late January 1848 or early February? But various myths and legends are dealt with, such as Bernstein's attack on the *Manifesto* as 'Blanquist' i.e. putschist, and the many glaring errors of Harold Laski's much reprinted introduction.

The annotations

THE annotations stretch across over one hundred pages and are "intended solely to explain what the *Manifesto* said... [not] to provide an exposition or commentary." This is probably the most useful section of the book, invaluable for anyone engaged in using the *Manifesto* with other socialists in educational work. Words, phrases, names, historical allusions are all explained, line by line, sometimes word by word, in great detail.

The new translation

SINCE 1888 the translation overseen by Engels has been authoritative, so why a new one? Draper's translation is offered as a supplement to the Engels translation not a replacement. Engels was in a hurry in 1888, devoting only one week to the job. More importantly, Draper tells us, Engels engaged in "a kind of limited revision or updating of the language, telling himself that it was all in aid of better communicating the 1848 document to contemporary Anglo-Saxon noggins." These revisions have been hardened "as if they had been engraved on the brazen tablets *in 1848.*" It is time, says Draper, to "provide a way of getting behind" the Engels translation. Draper's qualifications for the job can not be doubted. Not only was he a revolutionary socialist, *and* one of the most meticulous Marx scholars of the post war world, but he was *also* an acclaimed translator from German to English. His *Collected Poems of Heinrich Heine* (1982) was praised as "one of the century's great translation achievements", in the *Times Higher Education Supplement.*

One example of the great value of Draper's 'New English version': the *Manifesto* talks, famously, of "the idiocy of rural life." Draper reveals this is a mistranslation. The two versions (as well as the Macfarlane version of 1850 which appeared in the left-Chartist *Red Republican* of George Harney, and the original German text) can be read alongside each other:

> "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life."
> Engels 1888

> "The bourgeoisie has subjected the countryside to the rule of the town. It has created enormous cities; it has increased the size of the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a significant part of the population from the privatised isolation of rural life."
> Draper, 1994

Draper goes on in the annotations to prove that: "The German word *idiotismus* did not and does not mean 'idiocy'... What the rural population had to be saved from, then, was the privatised apartness of a lifestyle isolated from the larger society: the classic stasis of peasant life. To inject the English 'idiocy' into this thought is to muddle everything."

This is a valuable book which all libraries should possess. It can be ordered from The Center For Socialist History, 1250 Addison Street. Suite 101, Berkeley, CA 94702, United States of America.