

HARI SHARMA MEMORIAL LECTURE

**“WHAT DOES IT MEAN
TO BE A MARXIST?”**

Hari Sharma and the Marxist Tradition

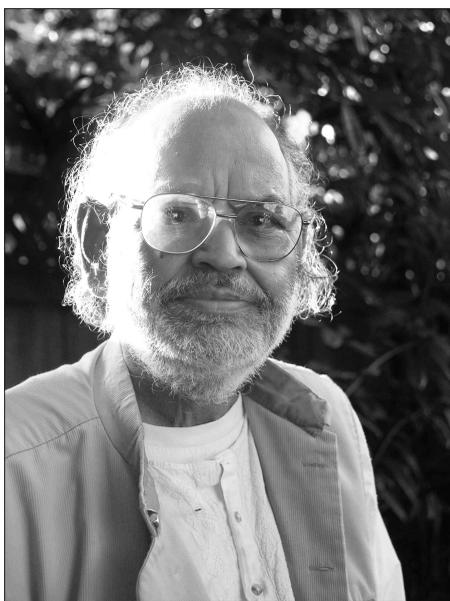
Jan Myrdal

ABSTRACT: The Hari Sharma Memorial Lecture series was instituted by the Dr. Hari Sharma Foundation for South Asian Advancement in memory of Hari Sharma, who left his estate to the Foundation when he passed away in 2010. The purpose of the series is to present scholars and writers who have made a significant contribution to the struggle for emancipation in South Asia. The first lecture in this series was presented by Jan Myrdal, one of the most prominent Swedish writers, a life-long Marxist, and for many years a friend of Hari Sharma. Myrdal wrote his first book on India, *India Waits*, after his visit to the “disturbed areas” of Andhra as a guest of C.P. Reddy in 1980. He visited Dandakaranya in 2010 at the invitation of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and wrote about his conversation with the leadership of the party in *Red Star over India: Impressions, Reflections and Discussions When the Wretched of the Earth Are Rising* (Kolkata, 2012). Following his speaking tour after the book’s release in Kolkata, Myrdal was banned from visiting India by the Government of India.

The 2012 Hari Sharma Memorial Lecture was held at the Vancouver Public Library in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, on 17 November 2012. (Note: Hari Sharma was a long-time member of the editorial board of *Critical Asian Studies*.)

Professor Hari Sharma was to me a personal and dear friend. We met, talked, and discussed during many years in different countries: on the India where he had been born, on China, on developments in the world.

He visited us in our home in Sweden; I and Gun Kessle also stayed with him



Hari Sharma

“a Marxist in the Mehring tradition” —Jan Myrdal

for anything. That we know. It is not a recent phenomenon. Writing to Eduard Bernstein in November 1883 about the so-called “Marxists” in France, Engels referred to what Marx had said to Lafargue about them: “Ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste” (If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist).¹

Hari Sharma took part in the practical—and the ideological—class struggle; all of us in class societies have automatically done so these last 5,000 or so years. That which was important was that when he in practice took sides in the anti-imperialist struggle against the ruling class during the war in Indo-China he thus became politically—socially—conscious: a Marxist.

Does “Marxist” then mean that a Marxist is someone who holds that Karl Marx was right in the way in which he regarded—and thus acted in—the society in which he lived or does it mean that all that Dr. Karl Heinrich Marx (5 May 1818–14 March 1883) did write and say during his lifetime was factually correct?

This is an important point to clarify. Most would agree that what Marx wrote was not inspired in the way the Apostle Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” But many who have styled themselves Marxists have behaved as if.

This has consequences. To take an example. In the 1920s and early 1930s Dr. Karl Wittfogel was a leading Marxist in the German Communist Party. In the Germany of 1931, when the Hitlerite demagoguery was a growing threat, Wittfogel, by citing different quotes were Marx and Engels had used the word “race” (cf. the English lyrics of the “Internationale”: the “human race”) became the first to for-

in his home here in Vancouver. I was deeply shocked on hearing that he had died as I was coming back from the guerrilla zone in Dandakaranya where the Naxalites, the CPI (Maoist), were leading the struggle for a new India. I had hoped to be able to discuss this development with him.

His death made me look back and reflect, politically and personally. Many have talked and written on his qualities as an individual, as a friend. He was a writer, a photographer, a very fine one. But I will, not quite at random, thus discuss some of the principal political and theoretical questions his life and work raise.

Hari Sharma was a Marxist. I could say the same about myself. But what does this mean? As a label it can stand

1. *MEW* 35, 388.

mulate a “Marxist” theory of racism. He did that in the first chapter of his monumental work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Chinas, Versuch der wissenschaftlichen Analyse einer großen asiatischen Agrargesellschaft*.²

Now Wittfogel was a very sectarian communist with a destructive ideological influence also in other fields, and thus not surprisingly he later in the United States became a virulent anticommunist, a McCarthyist. But fortunately his 1931 construction of a Marxist racism never had any real impact; the thirties were a period when not only communist but also socialist and liberal writers for obvious reasons carried out an ideologically necessary struggle against racism and biologism.

But by erecting a Marxist theory of race from different quotes, Wittfogel not only went against the very Marxism he said that he represented. He went against academic tradition. When Lawrence Krader published *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* in 1972, he rightly could point out: “A recurrent theme is Marx’s systematic and uncompromising rejection of race, racism and biologism generally as a determinant without further qualification of social affairs.”³ Yes, Marx was very forthright: “The devil take this ‘Aryan’ cant!” and “The village communities of the Aryan (!again this nonsense!) race....”⁴

To construct a Marxism, the “Thought of Karl Marx,” if you want to put it that way, by adding a quote to a quote to a quote is not possible. You end up with a pile of quotes just like you end up with a pile of potatoes if you add a potato to a potato to a potato. Due to their ideology many bourgeois writers, academic or not, have difficulty in understanding this. Engels explained their difficulty in 1894 in his introduction to the third volume of *The Capital*:

They rest upon the false assumption that Marx wishes to define where he only investigates, and that in general one might expect fixed cut-to-measure, once and for all applicable definitions in Marx’s works. It is self-evident that where things and their interrelations are conceived, not as fixed, but as changing, their mental images, the ideas, are likewise subject to change and transformation; and they are not encapsulated in rigid definitions, but are developed in their historical or logical process of transformation.⁵

To this comes that Marx and Engels, not being inspired, always worked from facts as they knew them. When this knowledge changed, so they changed. To understand this one can read the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto*: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.” Then look to the footnote Engels wrote in 1888 to the English edition after the word “society,” which he then included in the last German edition he edited in 1890: “That is, all *written* history. In 1847, the pre-history of society, the social organisation existing previous to recorded history, was all but unknown. Since then....”⁶

2. Wittfogel 1931, 9.

3. Krader 1972, 37.

4. Ibid., 324 and 335.

5. Available at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/pref.htm/pref.htm. His original German text is in *MEGA* 2, II, 15, p. 16.

6. See on this *MEW* 4, p. 462. Berlin 1964.

In this sense Marx and Engels were always revising their opinions. Revisionism is different. It is a political trend beginning with the Fabian League during the late 1880s and developed in the German labor movement from 1894 onwards; and the best known representative then was Eduard Bernstein (“The movement is everything; the final goal nothing”).

The seemingly abstract discussion at that time from these “revisionists” in the socialist parties about the Marxian mistake in keeping to dialectics and materialism and class struggle was not, as many on the “Left” then believed, just a sort of



Gun Kessle (d. 2007) and Jan Myrdal
Liu Lin, China, 1969 (Courtesy: Jan Myrdal)

“theological” debate but a part of the real internal conflicts. It was an expression of the decay that first led to the collapse of the Second International (1914), and the horrors of that war, and then to the emasculation of the mass labor parties in Europe that paved the way for Hitler. These same ideologies today in the deepening crisis of the capitalist system in our countries serve to keep the very real present class struggle of the masses disorganized and leaderless.

Though it is important to keep in mind that Marx and Engels were not inspired. If the facts were wrong so were their conclusions. I remember how Hari Sharma and I in our house in Sweden discussed what Karl Marx had written on the British Rule in India in the *New-York Daily Tribune* (1853). Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi, who not only was a great mathematician, editor of ancient Sanskrit texts, and activist in the World Peace Movement, but also a Sanskritologist and the first serious Marxist historian in India, had shown that Marx was wrong in his signed, by the *New-York Daily Tribune* not edited, key statements on the unchanging nature of Indian society and its lack of history in 1853. They were simply not historically true: “However changing the political aspect of India’s past must appear, its social condition has remained unaltered since its remotest antiquity, until the first decennium of the nineteenth century.”⁷ [And] “Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What

7. “The British Rule in India. Correspondence of the *N.Y. Tribune*,” *New-York Daily Tribune* 3804, 25 June 1853. See *MEGA* 2, I, 12, p. 170.

we call its history is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society.”⁸

This, his opinion, was a general European “truth” at that time. It was not due to a general lack of reading; Marx held it to be a factual truth. His long manuscript *Chronologische Auszüge über Ostindien* was published in Russian by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow in 1947 and then published in English by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow as *Notes on Indian History (664–1858)*. (I bought my copy in the People’s Publishing House in New Delhi in 1959 or 1960.) Marx had as the “Preface to the Russian Edition” stated, “read an immense number of books to compile his *Notes*.” But that Preface also in reality states that his sources were defective: “With regard to the early period of Indian history—from the seventh to the mid-eighteenth century—he drew chiefly on Elphinstone’s *History of India*.”

Hari Sharma and I at that time talked of how the selection of his reading had formed this, his false view of Indian society and history, and the impact that had had on his theoretical works. But this “lack of history” and “unchanging nature of society” not only in the nineteenth century was, but still is, a vital part of the reactionary class ideology that served imperialism not only in the nineteenth century but still does.

Antoine Roger Lokongo, a PhD candidate from the Democratic Republic of Congo at the Center for African Studies, Peking University, recently pointed this out:

The West in general and France in particular, cannot do without Africa, especially now that the global financial crisis caused by the corruption of the Western financial system is threatening the economic viability of many NATO countries.... To attain these objectives and maintain its power over its former colonies France has to pursue a global policy that is economic, political and cultural.... Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy went as far as insulting Africa, when in a speech in Dakar the capital of Senegal he said, “Africa has no history” and “the African man has not fully entered into history.”⁹

That Marx formulated the same idea about the history of India more than one hundred and fifty years earlier is explainable. His views about what he had called the “Asiatic mode of production” also changed during his lifetime. As the anti-imperialist movements and specifically the Chinese revolution developed during the 1930s the theoretical discussion on the subject became very intense.

But due to an “unmarxian” reading of Marx, those formulations that coincided with the general view of Asian society in the capitalist countries of Western Europe in the nineteenth century (they were backward, static since antiquity, had no inherent capacity for change and development) came to carry grave consequences, in theory as well as in practice for both Marxist theory regarding the situation in what used to be called “dependent and colonial” countries and the

8. “The Future Results of British Rule in India. Correspondence of the *N.Y. Tribune*. *New-York Daily Tribune* 3840, 8 August 1853. See *MEGA* 2, I, 12, p. 248.

9. Lokongo 2012.

practical politics in the liberation struggle against imperialism. With the victory of the Chinese revolution and the development of the popular struggle in national liberation movements the discussion one could say then changed color—it was negated.

There was, though, a notable dichotomy between this traditional European and reactionary view of Indian society that was reflected in Marx's writings and the strong, in Europe at that time, extremely unusual, sympathy for and solidarity with the struggle in India shown by Marx and Engels.

Marx wrote on 1857 as a "Revolt," not as "The Mutiny," and on the Sepoys as the forerunners; implied in what he and Engels wrote was the present expression "The First Indian War of Independence." That stand has been of importance in the imperialist countries for the development of a Marxist line of support for the national liberation movement against their "own" government. The different revisionist and reformist tendencies in the labor movement have supported their "own" imperialism from the late nineteenth century until today in contradistinction to Marx and Engels. Of great importance was also that at a time when the official line was to depict the Sepoys as cruel and barbarian, Marx showed in disgusting detail that the British were the real and sadistic torturers and looters.

What Marx and Engels wrote on "atrocities" in India and China and who were the real culprits is important today when the official media in our countries behave in the same way as the British press in 1857. The real culprits are the imperialists and their agents now as then.

Of course there are textual problems of a different kind that create obstacles. When you read Marx and Engels you will find that both of them in their writings quote from, refer to, allude to, or parody biblical texts more often than they mention English economists or French socialists.¹⁰ The reason for this is in reality self-evident. Such was the social environment in the German Rheinland they had grown up in. It is like the way in which they, specifically Engels, from this wine-growing region writes about wine. The attempt to "explain" their writings by referring to that they were ideologically influenced by the Jewish or German Pietistic traditions of the region has of course been done, but without any usable conclusions. But still these traits in their texts constitute a difficulty for young readers in a mainly secular country like Sweden or for readers outside Europe.

For many in India who have not gone to a school with some kind of Christian or European affiliation most of such biblical quotes and allusions fail to register. Marxism there can become theoretical in the bad sense. The real movement for independence and liberation has a great history in India. The communists had early on not only proved themselves heroic but also had a great influence on the development of a progressive popular culture, though politically the gap between a Marxian and European party language and the verbal Indian popular reality came to have a destructive political influence in the Indian communist

10. Buchbinder 1976.

movement. The inability of the leaders of the movement to understand and link up with the “Quit India” campaign is a typical example. The lack of real understanding among party leaders of the Telangana movement is another.

This becomes evident when you look at the Chinese experience. Mao Zedong not only Sinicized a Marxian political discussion by referring to Chinese classics and experiences and the great Chinese dialectical tradition, he did so by making it directly understandable to the people, “the old hundred names.” Take a sentence that originally was from his speech in Yan’an, 21 December 1939 to commemorate Stalin’s sixtieth birthday, but that has become—and still is—one of the most well-known slogans the world over in social conflicts: “Marxism comprises many principles, but in the final analysis they can all be brought back to a single sentence: it is right to rebel against the reactionaries.”

This is in fact a core truth of what Karl Marx stood for from his early student years in Berlin until his death, i.e., Marxism. It reads as a restatement of what Franz Mehring—a founder member of the German Communist Party on New Year’s Day, 1919 (who died later in the month shortly after the murder of his comrades Luxemburg and Liebknecht)—had stated in March 1918 in the Preface of his classic biography, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*:

There is no doubt that the incomparable stature of Marx is due not a little to the fact that in him the man of ideas was indissolubly bound up with the man of action, and that the two mutually complemented and supported each other. Neither is there any doubt that the fighter in him always took precedence over the thinker. The great pioneers of socialism were all in agreement in this respect; as Lassalle once put it, how gladly would he leave unwritten all he knew if only the time for action would come! And in our own days we have observed with horror how right they were. Lifelong followers of Marx, men who had brooded for three and even four decades over every comma in his writings, failed utterly at the historic moment when for once they might and should have acted like Marx. Instead they swung this way and that, like creaking weather vanes in a blustering wind.¹¹

Hari Sharma was a Marxist in the Mehring tradition. That is to say that he did not just sit writing behind his desk. Class struggle and Marxist politics are not only, or even mainly, a question of refined intellectual analysis. He took direct part in the concrete social and political struggles of his time both in India and in Canada. Not only those who more or less could be described as Marxist.

He was instrumental in forging broad movements, as did Karl Marx, by participating in, and writing on the popular, the lowly—some intellectuals would say then as now—struggle. For instance, against such discriminatory laws as the “Beer Bill,” which shut down all places of entertainment on Sundays for the people while leaving the privileged classes their aristocratic clubs in peace and the “Sunday Bill.” Marx reported to the *Neue Oder-Zeitung* on 28 June 1855:

11. The English version is available at www.marxists.org/archive/mehring/1918/marx/preface.htm.

The last few days of the past week the following poster, put out by the Chartists and affixed to all the walls of London, announced in huge letters: “New Sunday Bill prohibiting newspapers, shaving, smoking, eating and drinking and all kinds of recreation and nourishment, both corporal and spiritual, which the poor people still enjoy at the present time. An open-air meeting of artisans, workers and ‘the lower orders’ generally of the capital will take place in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoon to see how religiously the aristocracy is observing the Sabbath and how anxious it is not to employ its servants and horses on that day, as Lord Robert Grosvenor said in his speech. The meeting is called for three o’clock on the right bank of the Serpentine, [a small river in Hyde Park] on the side towards Kensington Gardens. Come and bring your wives and children in order that they may profit by the example their ‘betters’ set them!”

It should be borne in mind, of course, that what Longchamps [a hippodrome in the outskirts of Paris] means to the Parisians, the road along the Serpentine in Hyde Park means to English high society—the place where of an afternoon, particularly on Sunday, they parade their magnificent horses and carriages with all their trappings, followed by swarms of lackeys. It will be realized from the above placard that the struggle against clericalism assumes the same character in England as every other serious struggle there—the character of a class struggle waged by the poor against the rich, the people against the aristocracy, the “lower orders” against their “betters.”

At three o’clock approximately 50,000 people had gathered at the spot announced on the right bank of the Serpentine in Hyde Park’s immense meadows. Gradually the assembled multitude swelled to a total of at least 200,000 due to additions from the other bank. Milling groups of people could be seen shoved about from place to place.

/.../

But meanwhile, Finlen, a member of the Chartist executive, rushed to a tree some distance away followed by a crowd who in a twinkling formed so close and compact a circle around him that the police abandoned their attempt to get at him.

“Six days a week,” he said, “we are treated like slaves and now Parliament wants to rob us of the bit of freedom we still have on the seventh. These oligarchs and capitalists allied with sanctimonious parsons wish to do penance by mortifying us instead of themselves for the unconscionable murder in the Crimea of the sons of the people.”

/.../

The spectacle lasted three hours. Only English lungs could perform such a feat. During the performance opinions such as, “This is only the beginning!” “That is the first step!” “We hate them!” and the like were voiced by the various groups. While rage was inscribed on the faces of the workers, such smiles of blissful self-satisfaction covered the physiognomies of the middle classes as we had never seen there before. Shortly before the end, the demonstration increased in violence. Canes were raised in menace of

the carriages and through the welter of discordant noises could be heard the cry of “you rascals!” During the three hours zealous Chartists, men and women, ploughed their way through the throng distributing leaflets which stated in big type:

REORGANIZATION OF CHARTISM!

A big public meeting will take place next Tuesday, June 26th, in the Literary and Scientific Institute in Friar Street, Doctors’ Commons, to elect delegates to a conference for the reorganization of Chartism in the capital. Admission free.”

Most of the London papers carry today only a brief account of the events in Hyde Park. No leading articles as yet, except in Lord Palmerston’s *Morning Post*.

It claims that “a spectacle both disgraceful and dangerous in the extreme has taken place in Hyde Park, an open violation of law and decency—an illegal interference by physical force in the free action of the Legislature.” It urges that “this scene must not be allowed to be repeated the following Sunday, as was threatened.”¹²

These two faces: the theoretical work and the practice, often unglamorous and sometimes violent but necessary for the development of the theory, in this case the participation in a popular struggle against an oppressive law, form a logical unity for anyone working in the tradition from Marx. The theory is practical and down to earth.

The “systematic and uncompromising rejection of race, racism and biologism” by Marx, together with how the Chinese revolution and liberation struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America led to the present-day clarification of the view of peoples “without history,” was of decisive importance for Hari Sharma in his work as an activist for rights of oppressed minorities and aboriginal peoples and groups. For Hari Sharma this led him to Naxalbari and to the defense of the Muslims massacred in Gujarat for which he was denied a visa to go to his native India. But he did not neglect his intellectual responsibility.

I want to take another example to illustrate this. What Marx and Engels wrote for the more or less official press on the Crimean War and the political situation in Europe 1855, when Karl Marx was correspondent for *New-York Daily Tribune* and the *Neue Oder-Zeitung* was outstanding. It was reportage on the very highest order. But more than that; these articles serve to uncover political roots of present-day conflicts. The general impact of their words in the public discussion at the time was great. Greater than what is now usually realized. This aspect of their political work is still mainly hidden away. I want to take an example of what this implies.

Both Marx and Engels believed that Plon-Plon, Prince Napoléon Joseph Charles Paul Bonaparte, was the direct author of the pamphlet on the war published in Brussels in February 1855. The article written by Engels—published

12. *Neue Oder-Zeitung* 295, 28 June 1855. (Original German text *MEGA* 2, I, 14, p. 442–47.) The English version is available at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1855/06/25.htm.

(with minor variations) first in *Neue Oder-Zeitung* on 17 March 1855 and then in the *New-York Daily Tribune* on 2 April 1855—states:

We published the other day some interesting extracts from the pamphlet lately issued by Prince Napoleon, which, we doubt not, were duly considered by our readers. That pamphlet reveals the striking and most important fact, that the Crimean Expedition was an original invention of Louis Bonaparte himself; that he elaborated it in all its details, without communicating with anybody; that he sent it in his own handwriting to Constantinople in order to avoid the objections of Marshal Vaillant.”¹³

In fact the authorship seems to be another than they believed. In 1920 David Borisovich Ryazanov edited and published the texts on international politics, 1852 to 1862, by Marx and Engels. He pointed out that the conflicts of that period had shown themselves acute during the recent world war, but that the texts by Marx and Engels analyzing them had remained unknown by most Marxists. In his comments on what Marx and Engels wrote on the *Mémoire* Ryazanov wrote that the author was probably the French journalist, [Jean-Baptiste] Tavernier. But what is truly interesting is his comment in the notes: “In places the pamphlet reads as a résumé of his [Marx’s] and Engels’s articles. The editorial staff of the *Neue Oder-Zeitung* later wrote, ‘the criticism against the previous warfare by the author of the *Mémoire* is essentially that of our London correspondent’.”¹⁴

The role that Marx and Engels played in the general political discussion around the Crimean War by writing in what then could be called “the mainline press” should thus be researched more.

I quoted the Preface of Franz Mehring to his *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*. I did choose Mehring for another reason. In the obituary written for Hari Sharma, his close friends and comrades in Ipana (Indian People’s Association in North America) wrote:

Political ideas remain steadfast. However, there has naturally been, divergence of opinion on the strategy and tactics of achieving these ideals. During the course of long political activity of more than fifty years, Hari made many friends and comrades. It is natural that among these comrades there also arose disagreements on many issues. Nevertheless, Hari remained a comrade or a friend of all of them and they all are deeply saddened by his passing away.

This is very important. Why did I quote Franz Mehring? His biography of Karl Marx is still the most useful and best written introduction to Karl Marx, his life, work, and time. As Engels has pointed out he was a writer who used historical materialism as it should be used. He knew his subject, he had published the Marx-Engels manuscripts, 1841–1850, as well as other documents. He was a Marxist also in the sense of being a revolutionary who at the end of his life not

13. The article by Engels was published (with minor variations) first in *Neue Oder-Zeitung* on 17 March 1855 and then in the *New-York Daily Tribune* 4353, on 2 April 1855 (“Fate of the great adventurer”). (*MEGA* 2, I, 14, p. 195.)

14. Rjassanoff 1920, 514.



Jan Myrdal, Stockholm (Credit: Gun Kessle. Courtesy www.8dagar.com)

only fought against the German imperialism in the First World War but he was also among the founding members of the German Communist Party just before his death.

More important than that is that he was like Marx himself “critical and revolutionary.” He was a Marxist, not a Marxologue. In his biography of Marx he thus also gave those with whom Marx disagreed what he considered their due. In the quote I took he mentions Lassalle. Marx was, as is well known, critical of Lassalle’s policies but he has his given place in the history of the labor movement. This Mehring correctly sees. Mehring did not really know the correspondence between Bismarck and Lassalle as it was only published ten years after his death by Gustav Mayer. After that publication Marx’s arguments have become still more valid and we can better than Mehring see the strong negative influence of Lassalle in the labor movement. But he remains a major figure.

When it comes to our own friends, comrades, and even classics we do not write hagiographies; we see them as Cromwell said when he was to be portrayed: “With warts and all.”

All of us who on any level have had some years and decades of activism in popular and so-called Left movements have experience of individuals either changing color, becoming renegades, or in fact having been placed among us by the ruling class. (Remember that Mussolini was once a well-known socialist.) But that is not so interesting. Above all there always are discussions. Sometimes they tend to be acute. There have been and are many political conflicts among those that have considered themselves as Marxists. How are they to be seen and handled? The relations between Friedrich Engels and Franz Mehring give an answer. Franz Mehring, who was working on his text “On the historical materialism,” had asked Karl Kautsky some questions. Kautsky sent them on to

Friedrich Engels, who then wrote to Franz Mehring from London on 28 September 1892:

Dear Mr Mehring

Kautsky sent me a part of one of your letters with a query addressed to me. If you believe you cannot very well write to me because many years ago I once left two of your letters unanswered, I have no right to complain on that score. At that time, however, we were in different camps, the Anti-Socialist Law was in force and this compelled us to act according to the rule: he who is not for us is against us. Besides, if I remember rightly, you yourself said in one of the letters that you could not expect an answer. But that was a long time ago. Since then we have come to be in the same camp and you have published excellent works in the *Neuen Zeit* and I have been by no means stingy in my appreciation of them, in letters to Bebel for instance. It is therefore with pleasure that I take the opportunity of answering you direct.¹⁵

Engels was able to, on the one hand, point out that he and Mehring had been “in different camps” in a situation where necessarily “he who is not for us is against us” and, at the same time, note “that we have come to be in the same camp.” This an important statement (like when Mao Zedong made the distinction between the different types of contradictions).

In his letter to Karl Kautsky, 16 March 1892, Friedrich Engels discussed the work of Franz Mehring on Prussian history and summed up:

The work is really excellent.... It is a true joy to see how the materialistic view of history after it—usually—has since twenty years had to serve in the work of the younger party people as loud-mouthed phrase, at last begins to be used as that which it really is, a guide to the study of history.¹⁶

Engels thus viewed Franz Mehring and his work comprehensibly. This is important. I have here referred to both Franz Mehring and David Ryazanov. But they engaged in sharp, very sharp, polemics against each other. It is not only possible but necessary both to evaluate these polemics and see what in them was correct and what not and at the same time regard and use both Mehring and Ryazanov as important Marxist scholars.

I will take a personal example. Per Meurling was a prominent Marxist critic in Sweden during the thirties. His articles meant much for me. When I worked in the Swedish party paper *Ny Dag* in 1946 I met him. Later on he became a renegade and wrote some really vicious books. But when he was old and ill and dying I took part in re-editing his texts from the thirties. They were good and should be read. Besides before his passing away he regretted his renegade writings.

To take a different personal example: The book *India Today*, by Rajani Palme Dutt, opened my eyes when I read it as a teenager during World War II. I still find it to be a Marxist work of major importance. This despite his mistakes and his

15. English text available at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1892/letters/92_09_28.htm. German original: *MEW* 38, p. 480. Berlin 1968.

16. *MEW* 38, p. 308. Berlin 1968.

wrong evaluation of 1857. I continued to do so also later on in the sixties and until his death in 1974 at a time when I did not just disagree with him but he was in a politically hostile camp. I still have the same high regard for *India Today*.

It is the same with Franz Mehring. A decade after his death when there were sharp, line struggles in the party that he had been one of the founders of also his writings were criticized. At that stage his collected works were published by his close friend and comrade Eduard Fuchs, who in 1928 had left the Communist Party of Germany during these line struggles, and from 1929 was supporting the Communist Party Opposition of Brandler and August Thalheimer with heavy, monthly subsidies. In the “Soziologische Verlagsanstalt” of the opposition Eduard Fuchs published collected works by Franz Mehring and August Thalheimer wrote the introduction.

Two years later, on 12 May 1933, the Nazi paper *Völkischer Beobachter* could gleefully report what had happened to these volumes. Hitler had been in power for five months and now, in the middle of Berlin, his followers had made a great bonfire of revolutionary, democratic, and liberal books: “The associations then took positions around the bonfire and threw heaps of books into the flames. Students stepped forward, piles of books in their arms, and shouted: ‘Against class warfare and materialism, for the community of the people and an idealistic way of life!’”

Joseph Goebbles then, as the books by Franz Mehring turned to ash, told the book burning students: “You do well, in these midnight hours, to consign the unclean spirit of the past to the flames.”

Twelve years later as Germany and the German people had been freed from the Nazi tyranny—though not by the German people itself but by the Red Army and the Allied forces—it became a prime necessity for the progressive forces in the different parts of occupied Germany to see to it that the works of Franz Mehring were republished. The sharp discussions on him in the pre-Hitler years were relegated to notes and Engels’s view of the importance of his work prevailed.

It is the same with Hari Sharma. Of course we can, and intellectually must, discuss his specific policies in a specific stage. For instance that he, as well known a generation ago, was influenced in his view of Indian reality by Satanarayan Singh, who was—and remains—a controversial figure among Marxists in India.

But if I go back thirty-two years I too met, talked with (and wrote about) Satanarayan Singh though I was in practice more influenced by Chandrapulla Reddy (both of them now dead) whom I did not only clandestinely, as the authorities were at that time searching for him, meet and discuss with, but who then sent me with my wife, Gun Kessle, and my daughter underground to the armed squads of his ML-faction in Andhra Pradesh. Something that I know gave me a better understanding of India.

Hari Sharma was a fascinating and loveable person. For that he is and should be remembered. But on the general level it is above all the work and life of Hari Sharma that remains of importance. In India, in Canada, and for us all.

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