

GARETH STEDMAN JONES INTERVIEW

Where do you work and what do you do there?

I'm Professor of Political Science at the University of Cambridge and under fellow of King's College Cambridge.

I understand you are an author as well, can you tell me a bit about your most recent book?

My most recent book is an edition of *The Communist Manifesto* which has come out in Classics, in which I write a booklet introduction on the *Communist Manifesto* and how it came to be written.

How do you, personally, define socialism?

Well, there are many definitions and most of them I would find difficult to agree with. Well, socialism is a term which came into use in the eighteen thirties and forties and it really means imagining society without classes, without government in the traditional sense. Its origins, I think, go back to the period of the French Revolution.

When did you begin to study socialism?

Well, in the sixties I was, a radical student and then a radical academic. I was attached to New Left Review. I wrote various things on student power. And my own research really was interested in the question of poverty in Victorian England. I studied London, Victorian London, in particular the condition of the casual poor in Victorian London and the ways in which various social theories and political theories grew up around what to do about the problems of poverty in the second half of the nineteenth century. So in a way it was also looking at some of the Victorian origins of the welfare state.

How did you become an expert on socialism?

I was very curious after the seventies as to what socialism was as a theory. I suddenly realized I wasn't quite clear what that committed me to; what the sense of beliefs were; where they'd come from. So this gave me a task as a historian to try to find out the origins, the genealogy of socialist ideas. And I found in particular that because of the particular way in which socialism or the history of socialism had been written, it was much more about movements of workers, political parties and so on, but rather little comparatively about the actual ideas themselves and where they had originated from and how they connected with each other. So that's been my major interest over the last fifteen or twenty years to try to work out what this set of beliefs was and why it came into existence at the time when it did.

How and when did socialism as an idea surface in the mind of leaders and how did that evolve?

I think you have to distinguish quite strongly, particularly these days, between what one might say is an anti-capitalist theory and what socialism was which was a post-capitalist theory. I think socialism as a post-capitalist theory really begins in the decade of the French Revolution, that's to say in the seventeenth-nineties. Three persons I would associate particularly with it. One would be the Marquis of Condorcet in France who writes a history of the human mind and has a whole chapter on the future, in which he declares that human sciences can at last be directed to social and political problems and to the amelioration of the condition of mankind. Scarcity could, therefore, be a thing of the past. This was connected with, I think, the first steps in the development of social security systems. Condorcet himself had been a mathematical prodigy. He had applied calculus to life expectancy, and on that basis he devised a system of old-age pensions and some national systems social security.

Tom Payne in England, who was a close associate of Condorcet during the first years of the French Revolution. In part two of the *Rights of Man*, also suggests, a pension scheme. And what's interesting is that the first history, the first years of socialism right after 1848 at least, socialism belongs to a libertarian tradition. It's about minimizing the conditions of the state. In some ways it owes an awful lot to Adam Smith to the idea that in a commercial society one can trust the instincts of ordinary people, bettering their condition to make a harmonious system work, rather than think that all this has to be done by the state or enjoined very heavily by some established set of religious beliefs.

So socialism is libertarian and I think it remains so, through to the 1840s and certainly when Marx first becomes socialist, or a communist, he sets himself firmly in that libertarian mold. He thinks that the development of a commercial society of capitalism is such that it's going to produce other greater gains in productivity so that the economy itself is going to produce a situation where scarcity will become a receding and vanishing, phenomenon. And what he does is to connect that with a theory which had been prevalent in European, Western European society since the seventeenth century, going back to Grotius, a theory of natural law, that's to say a theory which associated modes of social or political regime, with the development in some sense of human productivity. Grotius in particular had a theory of what was called "primitive communism." But the classical authors who came up with the golden age presented a theory that in the primeval age of mankind, men could treat the land as they now treated the sea. Now of course we can't even treat the sea in this way, but in sav, the 1600s then you could. The sea was full of fish. It was plentiful. It was there for men to catch. So fishermen could claim the fish that they had caught in the sea, but they didn't have any territorial claims over the sea itself. Once upon a time, Grotius argued that this had also been the situation on the land when the earth had been a great primeval forest and people had picked fruit or gathered crops of various kinds without too much effort. Population's very scarce and they were relatively prosperous compared with their obviously very modest needs. And in that situation you didn't need to have an organized system of justice. You didn't need to have property of any kind and you didn't need to have a state. Well, leaping forward, the Scottish theorists had then developed this theory into what they

called “four stages” in the history of society ending up with a theory of commercial society, which Adam Smith wrote about in *The Wealth of Nations*. Marx made a leap beyond that to look forward to a new Golden Age. And in this new Golden Age there would be abundance relative to human needs. And that would mean a situation in which the states, to use Engels’ later term, would wither away in which they’d no longer be needed for justice or rights or all those things which this natural law tradition, which Marx was drawing upon associated with scarcity of various kinds.

What made socialism so appealing to so many people in the 19th and 20th centuries?

I think it was very compelling, still sometimes is very compelling because if you look at it historically when it emerges, it emerges at the end of a period, certainly in France, and to a certain extent in Germany, where traditional belief in Christianity is on the wane. And what I think one sees in the period around the end of the eighteenth century and through to a century after that is a new age of religious faith in the sense. Obviously it’s not the same as the traditional Christian faith. It’s opposed to Christian faith, a faith above all in science and the possibilities that through science man will receive what they’ve been promised as it were in the world religions. There’d be some secular redemption in human society and I think this becomes a very strong faith. It coincides with a period in which because governing classes were frightened by what has happened in the French Revolution, they’re very reluctant to give the votes to ordinary wage-earners, workers and so on. And so socialism fills in a gap for these workers who get very little political representation in the new society which is emerging, which is obviously a society of large towns and factories and so on. Socialists make it their task to organize these places in a way that no other political or religious group had done. And in that sense, certainly in certain countries like Germany would be the best example, but northern France and northern England and so on, these beliefs become firmly embedded in working populations in such a way that democracy and socialism become conjoined, but in ordinary people’s minds. But it always retains this speculative quasi-religious end, I think. It’s never simply a set of beliefs or knowledge about facts. It’s always a certain hope for the history of mankind and I think that’s what remained inspiring about it for so long.

In your opinion, what were some of the factors that led to the decline of socialism?

Well, one of the main ones, I think, was that it never thought out quite what the society following capitalism look like. One of the major problems and weaknesses of socialism, I think, is that you can look in vain to find really rigorous descriptions or coherent descriptions of what the society which would follow capitalism would actually look like, how it would be organized. Now socialists very often say that, “well, there was no need to produce blueprints. This would be a ridiculous thing to do.” But actually this isn’t just a question of trying to specify every single social practice, far from it. But it is a question of

saying how the society could actually operate and reproduce itself managing to sustain the high standard of living which capitalism had created and yet to avoid the pitfalls which capitalist society contained. And I think this was Marx's tragedy. He tried. He thought it was possible to imagine a society no longer organized by capitalists, but what he called "the associated producers" who would produce things according to a rational plan. And then you get the best of both worlds. You would have a society in which there was no need for political organization in the traditional sense, no need for coercion in the traditional sense or justice, but one, nevertheless where production met human needs. But what he found was when he started doing historical research in the eighteen-fifties trying to imagine how the society would operate and when he tried, when he looked into pre-capitalist societies to see how they had organized things, for clues, what he found was that although he had specified a series of modes of production, in fact all these pre-capitalist modes of production were vastly different from the capitalist modes of production itself.

Capitalism was a society that thrived on new needs, on creating new needs. That was what the appetizing industry was and is still about. Only capitalism has a real vested interest in expanding human need all the time. If you look at these traditional societies on the other hand, you find that certain religious, military or political hierarchically-organized groups tend to control production. They have a rather static conception of what needs are going to be. Their idea is to contain and control production rather than to let it expand. And in that sense they create a society that is not going to become more prosperous, let alone possess the dynamism that capitalism itself possesses. So the great weakness, I think, was the attempt to try to imagine an economy which would be as dynamic as capitalism but would do so in conjunction with some form of human control over the production process.

Was human nature taken into account in all of this?

I think that is embedded in the problems I have been describing. I think the libertarian forms of socialism and communism which I've described definitely put liberty first. They definitely thought if you look at all the utopian socialists and Marx, you find that they think that equality is vastly overrated and an inaccurate way of describing how human societies are and how they operate because it takes no account of the quality of differences between the human beings, human individuals, how their needs are going to differ and how they legitimately differ. If you look at the alternative which puts the great stress on equality, it usually means curbing economic growth rushing in certain senses. When you look at, back to the beginning of the eighteenth century, it includes sumptuary laws. I mean laws about what people can wear and how they should behave in public and so on. It very often retains differences and when you look at those sets of beliefs either in the French Revolution with the *sans-culottes* and the Jacobins or again if you look at them in post-1945 communist societies you find that what they produce is societies which could be called more equal than their western counterparts, but always with a heavy dose of political authority, repression of

various kinds and a situation which simply doesn't meet the desires of the people themselves.

Has there always been an antagonistic relationship between socialism and democracy?

Yes, and I think socialism has a different genealogy from democracy. Socialism in the nineteenth and twentieth century has generally been about the discovery or the attempt to discover new forms of authority, new forms of authority to follow the Christian church. This was most clear in the decade of the French Revolution itself when by the mid-seventeen-nineties it was clear that the majority of the population of France was not really in favor of what had happened during the revolution. The revolution regime possessed very little popularity. In that situation, a number of the intellectuals of France in the second half of the nineties, decided that what they have to discover is a new spiritual part to replace that of the Catholic Church. So they invent all these new religions which the whole world is going to worship. Because the whole world can acknowledge the progress of science as being of universal interest has an idea that it ought to be based on what is called "libertinism" and the "expression of desire." Robert Owen tries one called "rational religion." But these are all attempts to wed authority in the form of the persuasions of science with the buttressing of traditional forms of religious authority. And I think dialectical materialism, which you got proclaimed as the official philosophy of the Soviet Union after nineteen seventeen was another attempt at the state religion and an authoritarian solution to this question. So democracy and socialism have had a very uncomfortable relationship on the whole.

What contribution did Robert Owen make to the development of socialist thinking and/or principles in the late 18th century?

Well, I think Robert Owen is interesting because he directly follows some of these things that I've talked about in the seventeen nineties, notably Godwin and the particular form of non-conformity that Godwin came out of himself. This was a form which goes back into the eighteenth century called, "Unitarianism", which believes that reason should be applied to the bible as to everything else. But interestingly, he believed in the onset of a millennium. They believed in the millennium, but the millennium would only begin with the overthrow of anti-Christ. And in this Protestant tradition, really going back to the sixteenth century, anti-Christ had been associated first, always with the Pope in Rome, of course. But then with the Spaniards in the sixteenth century and then from the end of the seventeenth century raided the French. So the outbreak of the French Revolution meant that everyone expected here at last the beginning of the millennium.

Anti-Christ was about to be overthrown, and what's very interesting in the English tradition of socialism, of which Owen of course is a founding father, is that millennial belief and the belief in the usefulness, transforming character of science go together. So Owen claims to be the inventor of a great new science called "the science of human circumstance." And his great teaching is that the

character of man is made for him and not by him. By this of course he meant to answer the Christian belief in original sin. And he wanted to say that by what followed from this was that any character could be made as it were through educational and social institutions and, therefore, you simply had to set up the right set of institutions and you would have transformed human character. He also said that this, he called this in one of books, the book of the *New Moral World*, was the second coming of the truth.

And I think with Owen you have to be careful of just saying this was all metaphor. I think he really did believe he was the second Messiah that he had come unlike Jesus who could only tell the truth in parables. Owen on the other hand could actually say the literal truth because he had the science. He no longer had to speak in parables. But if you look at the community he built at Queenswood in eighteen forty-three it has the foundation stone CM inscribed on it which is Commencement to the Millennium. So this was the strangeness of Owen. There was the wonderful description of him that said, "Owen is simply Godwin in 1793 revisited. But he now patronized by the tsar of Russia, William Wim, Wilberforce, the Duke of Kent, who was Queen Victoria's father and so on. All these great dignitaries came to see Owen's factories and schemes and so on. One of them says, "this is fine if it's confined to New Lanark, but if it once got out and it became possible through Mister Owen's method to for the country to run in future without the benefits of organized religion or military force or the law, then his scheme would soon be at an end." One of the funnier things about Owen of course was that in his first two decades of the nineteenth century he had an immense fortune and one of the people who was always borrowing money from him was the Duke of Kent, Queen Victoria's father. So he always gave these strangely favorable speeches in the House of Lords about trying out Owen's schemes for this and that.

What were Owen's views on war and conflict resolution? Did he think socialism would put an end to war?

Well, this goes back to these Unitarian, non-conformists that I was talking about. I mean they want to remove all forms of force from society. Owen himself is a great admirer of the Quakers and going back before then the anti-Baptists which is a society which will not use any form of physical force, will not use physical discipline of any kinds, thinks everything could be arranged by persuasion, by rational discussion. And that if you brought up children and Owen was a great educational pioneer, if you brought them up to believe that, to treat them with kindness, to encourage reason with pedagogic exercises, to encourage rational play as he called it, then you would get the society in which conflicts would be over.

But I'd have to add that, there's quite interesting differences within the followers of Robert Owen. Owen himself thought that the change would come as he said "as a thief in the night." It could certainly come and you could have this sudden change in circumstances. There's a sort of belief there that there's some divine help that's going to happen to transform societies. But some of his followers said this is overoptimistic to say the least, and also that some people

are better suited to benevolence than others. And the way you can tell this was to use one of those pseudo sciences of the nineteenth century called “phrenology.” At one or two of the Owen Night communities, the managers selected people because they had benevolence bumps on their heads and they argued that the communities weren’t much better because of this. I should also add that in the two times when he tried to set up communities in New Harmony in Indiana and the other in Queenswood, in both cases it broke down with a lot of acrimony, and a lot of problems about human selfishness and the way in which new social arrangements didn’t transform human character in the way he hoped.

What role did religion play in the development of socialism?

Yes, well, of course in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there have been religious communities mainly who had come over particularly to the United States, but also sometimes set themselves up in Central Europe, too, some of whom had certainly practiced community of goods of various kinds. The anti-Baptist tradition was certainly strongly filled with such people. In the sixteenth century, one historian has estimated that at the height there were about sixty thousand people living in these conditions in sixteenth century Central Europe. So Owen was drawing on what was by then quite an old tradition. The difference was to put it in a post-Christian context rather than as part of a Christian community. And one of the problems as it turned out was that Christian communities did seem to operate much better in practice as is proved by the fact that some of them still exist today. These were markedly different from the socialist communities which barely if ever lasted more than ten or fifteen years.

What did Babeuf contribute to the birth of socialism?

Well, basically nothing. I think again as I said earlier on, you have to distinguish between anti-capitalist and post-capitalist types of theory. I would place Babeuf in the tradition of revolutionary republicanism. It is revolutionary republicanism which lays most emphasis on equality as one of the conditions for the proper functioning of a republic. As long as that virtue exists then people should be neither too rich nor too poor. In a way this was a radicalization of what Russo had said, and there’s been historical controversy about how far Babeuf wanted to push the idea. What he certainly wanted to do was to divide up the land into fairly equal proportions and it’s not clear what he would do in the towns. But in some ways, had his dream come true I think it might have looked more like Cambodia than anything that we would want to live in. That’s to say that he was very against, luxury of any kind. It was based on, as most of these, eighteenth century utopias have been based on austerity, on the idea of the virtues of ancient Sparta or the Roman Republic, and it wasn’t based on the idea which socialism I think was based upon, which was the idea that socialism comes out of human progress. The progress of human knowledge produces a society in which everyone can be comfortable, in which pleasure can be engaged in, providing it’s not anti-social, in which there will be plenty for all. This wasn’t Babeuf’s idea.

He of course is important mainly for the fact that he could be considered an ancestor of Lenin in that he has the idea of a revolutionary takeover of a

committee of the virtuous who will rule until such time as the people can be educated into virtue themselves. So this idea of a dictatorship which is going to bring about virtue which comes after the republican tradition is one which happens again in 1848 when you have Cavaignac being the general called to be dictator and put down the crowds. Marx's is the idea with the dictation of the proletariat and then of course Lenin uses the idea again to justify the revolution of 1917 in the Soviet Union.

Can you describe what got Frederick Engels involved in the development of socialist theory?

Yes, Engels was the son of a major manufacturer who was sent by his father to be a commercial clerk as part of his apprenticeship in running the firm. While there, he met a girlfriend who later became his wife called Lizzie Burns, who was a factory hand. He evidently was very moved by her and her companions. They took him around Manchester. One of the places he went to in Manchester was the Owenite Hall of Science. This was the place where there would be visiting lecturers. One of the lecturers who came, I believe when Engels was there very interestingly, was a man called Lebesgue. And you've no doubt heard of Lebesgue's foods. Well, this was the same Lebesgue who believed that chemistry could increase agriculture, could increase crops and so on. This was very important for the Owenites because what it showed was that all the criticisms which had been made of an idea of society beyond scarcity, notably the criticisms made by Thomas Malthus, the population theorist, that any attempt at society scarcity would always be swamped by population increase.

The Owenites were always on the lookout to find something which would show that agriculture productivity could increase greatly and that's why Lebesgue was there. Engels I think was enthused by these ideas and he writes in various German journals about his visit to England and I think it's through Engels' reports that Marx himself becomes seized by the idea of a society beyond scarcity. And of course Engels is also well known for exposing the appalling conditions of Manchester as a city to live in if you're a worker in 1844. One of the things I think has to be said though is that although the description that Engels gives there, purports to be of the working class as a whole, what he's really describing are the casual laborers of Manchester, the people who very often were Irish immigrants with very little of an urban past who'd come, who'd been driven really from the appalling conditions in Ireland. They lived in very overcrowded unsanitary conditions keeping pigs and various other things which you simply can't do in the center of towns. He's not describing the actual condition of factory workers whose areas of habitation run better. Maybe they weren't great, but they certainly weren't as appalling as the conditions which he describes in that famous account. But the account remains justly I think one of the most memorable accounts of what squalor in a hastily populated city can look like in the mid-nineteenth century.

What did Engels hope to accomplish with his report?

Some historians want to say, “Well, he just came and he saw what was there. He had no idea what he was going to see before and when he saw it, he just wrote down his shocked impressions.” It’s not quite like that. He already came believing from various friends in Germany that there would be a revolution in England. It would be a social revolution and it would happen because mankind was being driven by the new conditions to a semi-animal-like state. And they would almost have to become animals before they could become men again by challenging the conditions which surrounded them. So if you look closely at the text, what he describes are practices that he thinks or wants to associate with animal behavior. For instance he hints that there’s quite a lot of incest going on in these overcrowded habitations. He talks about people living in conditions by this horrible river called “the River Irk” very like pigsties. He wants to draw as close as possible the parallel between how the new conditions throw people back to the most primitive animal-like ways of life.

And then of course the second half of the book he wants to describe that’s the darkness before the dawn. The second part of the book he wants to describe the growth of revolt, you know, starting from crimes against employers, individual violence, becoming then trade unionism, then becoming political parties and eventually the whole of the working class as it were, rising up against the conditions of their subjugation.

What kind of person was Karl Marx and how did he differ from Frederick Engels?

He was clearly someone who’s completely uncompromising, someone who was intellectually very fierce, someone who impressed most of his contemporaries as being quite exceptional in sharpness of his reasoning, but also the mercilessness of it. A famous German poet later said, “I supposed it’s very good to meet someone who is rather like a razor, but very uncomfortable.” At other times, it could be said that, he was quite genial. He loved children. He loved reddish wine and so on. There was a human side to Marx certainly, but fiercely self-righteous if you like. I mean he thought he knew the truth. He gathered together a number of people who also thought he knew the truth. And people who couldn’t take his leadership a hundred-percent really found themselves out in the cold fairly quickly. One of the most obvious examples of that was a famous French socialist called Proudhon and in fact, Marx uses quite a lot of Proudhon’s theories. But Proudhon wasn’t very keen on this idea for banding communist together in the mid-eighteen forties and anathematizing those who don’t follow the party line. So I think the sectarianism if you like of Marxism is really there from near the beginning.

I think Engels is a much more genial figure. He’s much more bourgeois in a conventional sense in that he likes bourgeois pleasures. He likes his wines. He likes horse riding. He likes rifle shooting. He likes living in comfortable surroundings. Perhaps this goes strangely with a very Bohemian idea of living with a mistress, taking a mistress from the working class, although he did, as I said, eventually marry her. Marx and Mrs. Marx on the other hand strongly disapproved of this Bohemian side of Engels. And another interesting thing is

that very often in the histories of Marx and Engels, they're treated as more or less thinking the same thing, being very close. In fact, Engels is much closer to the Robert Owen I've described. He writes a whole article a year or two after he's met Marx, saying that these communities in America that the socialists have set up are a very good idea and tries to prove that they work. And even in his draft, the *Communist Manifesto*, he wants to suggest that communities could be set up of communists, whereas Marx makes not a single mention of this as being a possible idea, he's absolutely against any idea of what's called, "positive community." His idea was called at one point "negative community of goods. People don't need to live in communal ways." And he was quite contemptuous of the idea. But Engels was much closer I think to the earlier socialists in this respect.

How did the work of Frederick Engels compliment that of Karl Marx?

Well interestingly, nearly all the first of the ideas comes from Engels. What Engels didn't have was the academic training. He was unaware of natural law. His knowledge of the classics was skimpy, whereas Marx was a real classical scholar. He'd been a law student so he knew about theories of the law quite professionally at a certain level. So Engels is the first person to write what he calls a critique of political economy which again he draws heavily on the ideas of Robert Owen and the followers of Owen. Marx makes that his life's work later on. The subtitle of his big work called, *Capital* is a critique of political economy. And that's what he's engaged on from 1844 through to 1883 when he dies. So Engels is very often the first to see the possibilities of something, but it's Marx who as it were develops it in a far more professional, academic, respectable way, insofar as that's possible, to connect it with traditions of political, legal and philosophical theory in a way that Engels couldn't.

What do you think of the *Communist Manifesto*?

I think the first two sections, the description of capitalist expansion in the world, which you find at the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto* is still an amazingly eloquent description, not just of what the world looked like in eighteen forty-eight, but even more what the world looks like now, or has looked like in the last ten years, what we now call, "globalization." It's all there described in the *Communist Manifesto*. And that's what I think makes it a lasting, memorable work and one which still has something to say to us today.

What was so profound about the theories presented in the *Communist Manifesto*?

The theory was that instead of despising or hating the bourgeoisie like other radicals and republicans and socialists and communists, one should admire them because they have transformed the world in a way which now makes possible, a sort of self-destruction on their part. They've created conditions of their own death. They've created a situation in which the forces that they've produced are so productive now that they don't actually need to be owned by individual bourgeois in the way that they once were, that society could take them

over. But if society did take them over, we would have a society in which these huge divisions between rich and poor would no longer exist, in which you wouldn't need the oppressions of the state or the law or justice or any of these things because you could create a society of plenty and that that is going to happen. The other thing that's very distinctive about the Communist Manifesto, it tries or pretends not to preach communism. It simply says it's describing what is going to happen. It's a prediction. It produces itself as a prediction of what is happening and what will happen, because of the tendencies as Marx saw it within the system, a system in which the economy now becomes over productive, in which it produces too many goods in which you have as they kept describing it in the eighteen-forties, poverty in the midst of plenty. And that poverty rises not from famine or traditional forms of scarcity, but from heaps of unsold goods, which couldn't be dumped on the markets. And this is a new situation in the history of mankind.

What was the progression that took place in Marx's thinking from *Das Kapital* to the *Communist Manifesto*?

In the *Communist Manifesto* really, his economic theory is fairly rudimentary still and he relies heavily on Ricardo and one or two other economists for his description of the economics of capitalism. In *Capital* he's trying to explain how it will happen that capitalism or the tendencies within capitalism will bring capitalism to some form of ending. Marx's experts are much divided about where he places the ultimate emphasis. There's famous peroration towards the end of *Capital*, volume one, in which Marx says, the expropriators will be expropriated, that society will, as it were, take over what the capitalists had taken over from society. After a long description about how capitalists had turned everything into a commodity, they created a set of institutions which now could operate on their own without private ownership with the means of production. In fact they don't work much more efficiently if they were public ownership of the means of production. And so capitalism is an attempt to explain how and why the capitalist's mode of production will lead to this conclusion.

Having said that in the first volumes, he never actually explains how that's going to happen. The promise is that the explanation is going to happen in the succeeding volumes. In fact he never publishes the succeeding volumes. There's a mass of notes Engels tries to make what he can out of and publishes volume two or three, so called of *Capital*. And even after that, there's a mass of notes which Bernstein tried to put together and call it, "the theories of surplus value." In fact this is all the same work. And what also has to be said I think is that Marx doesn't solve the basic problem, that's to say, how do you create a post-capitalist society which is going to work? And indeed even before you get there is there any proof that capitalism is going to come to an end? Is there really going to be cataclysmic crises which bring it down as he had thought in 1848? Or is it just going to endlessly reproduce itself with upturns and downturns, which is more like what has actually happened ever since. Marx I think gets more doubtful about this as time goes on, but his followers of course try to suggest that this was a finished work, that there was a complete theory

there. The people simply had to apply it and it would work. And I think one of the tragedies in the twentieth century is not that they forgot about what Marx had said, but they tried as best they could to apply it. And the theory wasn't there or it was radically incomplete and what they create is something very authoritarian, although that was not Marx's original intention.

What role does the French revolution play in the development of socialism?

Perhaps I could say one thing if you were to ask me a question about how do we get from Marx to Lenin or something about where the authoritarian moment ends is in Marx. I think you have to distinguish between what Marx writes in the eighteen-forties and what he writes thereafter. I think 1848 and the experience of the revolutions of 1848 is much more traumatic than most commentators have allowed. And if you read the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* where Marx is describing events in France in the aftermath of the revolution in 1848 and the way in which Napoleon Bonaparte becomes emperor of the French, what he's describing there is a situation which he sees that this semi-automatic way in which capitalism is going to come to conclusion, which is there in the *Communist Manifesto*, isn't going to happen without a lot of thought. He ends that in a very gloomy note saying, "well, it's created an enemy now." And in response to that, the communist will have to form a party. And after that, you get the idea of dictatorship of the proletariat and all the set of ideas which become associated with Marx and Marxism which Lenin of course picks up in 1917.

Does Marx believe that war will be an inevitable byproduct of the transition from a capitalist to a communist system?

Yes, I mean he thinks that there will have to be this forceful period of civil war in which the proletarians form a state which will be a more dictatorial state than any other state. And they will supervise the transition to a classless and stateless society, which in a way is an absurd idea as if those who construct the strongest possible state are somehow going to be those who abolish the state. But he was forced into that position I think by what had happened in 1848.

How did the ideas of Marx become so widely known and how did his following grow so large?

Well, I think the person most responsible for turning Marx into an international figure is Engels. Engels started writing in the Social Democratic Press. He wrote a famous book called, *Anti-During*, which is combating various other theories of socialism among the German socialist democrats. This in turn becomes a sort of handbook for all German socialists, socialist activists throughout France, Germany, England and so on. It turns Marx into being a leading theorist of history, parallel to Darwin in biology. And what you get in the second half of the period before 1914 are a lot of attempts to align Marx and Darwin, that there's an evolution which is moving from a sort of competitive individualism towards collectivism. Some of the major followers who take up

Engels lead were Darwinians before they were Marxists. So this is the way in which I think Marx gets understood by the generation who spread Marx across the road between 1880 and 1914.

Do you think that the ideas of Karl Marx are still important today?

Yes, I think it's, immensely important. The idea that history in some sense is a history of class struggles and class struggles can be specified in relation to modes of production is something which has been an immensely influential idea among historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists and so on. And even today, although Marxism as a political program is by and large discredited, there are a lot of practicing academics and writers who would still stand by some or other of these beliefs. And it seems to me, that they've really lost any sense of where these beliefs came from, what they were once attached to and the fact that I don't think Marx was trying to construct a new science of history. I think what he was trying to do was to construct a theory about the viability of communism and in that he failed.

He does a lot of pioneering historical research some of which is very good and still valid today. I don't think there is a valid Marxist theory of history in as far as there's a theory which relates modes of production, modes of subsistence to forms of politics and culture, that is not the invention of Marx. Marx himself was building on something which had already been there from the seventeenth century, gets built upon by Scots like Adam Smith and David Hume and various other writers in the eighteenth century. Marx builds on that and builds very substantially on it, but he doesn't originate it. So the idea that people might still want to say that they believe in historical materialism doesn't have to specify that they're Marxists.

How did Eduard Bernstein contribute to the socialist dialogue?

Well, I think when, Bernstein was exiled during the years of the exceptional laws in Bismarck's, Germany, while he was in London, he got to know various Fabian socialists. Fabian socialists themselves had read Marx, or some of them had, and they had their own Marx reading groups in the early eighteen-eighties. One of the strengths they had was an alternative theory of profit from that found in *Capital*. The other thing was, which was quite clear if you looked in Britain at that time, that capitalism was far from grinding to a halt even though the eighteen-eighties had years of depression and that it was far from a revolutionary situation. If anything, workers were getting better off. That meant that a number of the predictions which Marxism seemed to contain and which Bernstein was the first to as it were to ask whether they were actually happening or had they actually happened, English evidence and the empirical research conducted by society like the Fabians helped him I think to the conclusion that these things weren't happening.

Also more intriguingly, he was very close to Engels while he was in England as a fellow German and so on. I think he thought that Engels rather shared his own views on some of these matters. Engels never put his pen to paper in quite that way. But Bernstein eventually produces his criticism in his

book on socialism in the mid-eighteen-nineties which is just after Engels has died. He strongly wanted to imply that what he's doing is continuing the argument in a way Engels might well have continued himself had he still be around.

Was the theory of socialism more attractive than the practice of socialism to people of Europe?

Yes, I mean one of the leaders of right wing German social democracy at the time, said, "you might do these things, but you don't say them." I think that was the attitude of a lot of the trade union side of the representatives and the Reichstag, the SPD leadership and the social democratic leadership. It was very convenient that this set of beliefs existed because what could they actually do to change the situation in Germany? They certainly didn't have the stomach to make a revolution or attempt to make a revolution. And I think they were probably quite right. They'd have been crushed very heavily had they tried to do so. The mood of the workers was not revolutionary in Germany. Indeed it was very patriotic. They all did their military service and so on, so they were patriots as well as socialists. The idea that Marx was right in theory, but there was very little you could do in practice except wait was really something which suited the majority of the party leadership. And that's why many really didn't allow the Bernstein argument to develop.

Did the writings of Lenin change people's ideas about Socialism?

Well, it absolutely moves the center of gravity from the idea that socialism is something which is going to come through the development of capitalism at its highest point, something which all socialists have believed before 1914 to the idea that building socialism in the primitive country, ninety-percent of whose population were peasants and so on, the point from which he had to redefine socialism.

Lenin tries to do so by his famous arguments that capitalism is as strong as its weakest link, and pre-revolutionary Russia has presented it as being the weakest link. So really he cuts through this whole argument about whether there are enough workers as a proportion of the population to produce a viable socialist society. Clearly, there weren't and the Soviets learned to their costs. I mean, the forces of real socialism were thin in the country and much, therefore, was done by brute force. And of course it changed the image of socialism ever afterwards to that of being a very top-heavy, authoritarian, ruthless state machine, which was if anything, the opposite of what people would have thought socialism was meant to be in the mid-nineteenth century.

Did people view the writing of Marx and Lenin as ambiguous?

Yes, I mean until 1914 certainly in Western Europe and the United States, people would have heated disagreements about what some of these writings meant. But, there was no question about trying to suppress facts or produce doctored versions of the various texts. But after 1917 and particularly from the late twenties onwards, any pretense at the scholarly approach to the

understanding of various pieces of doctrine or the idea that there might have been ambivalence or ambiguity or that more than one view was possible. All these things are sort of ironed out. What was presented instead of dialectical materialism or communism or Bolshevism or historical materialism and different versions was the idea of a monolithic doctrine and a virtue that all communists were meant to believe the same thing and to practice the same thing and if they didn't agree to keep quiet.

What was different about the way Atlee perceived Socialism?

Well, I think Atlee was one of those who in a way come out of late Victorian philanthropy. He's one of those whose idea of socialism had originally been associated with various missions in the East End. It was about curing unemployment, about alleviating poverty, about producing good, clean housing where there had once been slums, all very admirable. I don't think he was a strong thinker of what socialism might be in a political sense. He was in some ways quite traditional. He sent his children to private education. He clearly believed there was a sort of difference between the labor leadership on the one side and the trade unionist, the working class on the other. The one actually led and the others also had a strong voice but there was no question that they were in any sense the same.

The other thing which was more circumstantial regarding his character is that the Second World War meant that a great deal of the changes which were brought about by the 1945 government were into party changes, almost agreed during the war. Or certainly they were produced as much by liberals, Kantian liberals. So a lot of the measures of the 1945 government, whether they go under the name of socialism, are in fact as much liberal socialist in their inspiration.

Were the socialist thinkers honest about the potential they saw for socialism to succeed as a social and political model?

Originally I think they were. They did believe that some form of large-scale socialism was possible, but it was possible, if not on bipartisan means at least a lot of the changes were fairly uncontentious coming after the Second World War. And the fact that the Second World War had produced a much more egalitarian spirit and the idea that whatever else was going to happen, we weren't going back to the situation before the war again.

So full employment had to be accepted, although Churchill didn't like it. A promise of a new health system, which in fact was the one really distinctively socialist part of the Labor Party Program after 1945 to be implemented that is still in existence. These were meant to create a society in which the control of the economy would be in the hands of the state, and in which there would be a very strong birth-to-grave social security system in which there'd be more educational opportunity than there had been before the war.

I think part of the problem that they faced was that by about nineteen forty-seven, it became clear that Britain had been much impoverished by the war, by the various loans and so on they'd taken out from the United States that they

were going to be forced to pay back. There was no cushion as it were. And this meant they had to resort to many more measures of austerity and control, rationing and so on. There were one or two who rather liked this for its own sake, but most of them were profoundly disappointed. And it sets the scene for the population getting very tired of the rationing and the continuation of wartime conditions and in 1951 going for back to conservatives. And thereafter, there's a belief that there's a new definition of a socialism that's to base it on the expectation that full employment is here to stay, that a manipulation of demand in the economy can operate, that we can have a fully-fetched welfare state and that we can have a society in which you can get rid of some of the puritan constraints, with which socialism is associated. And again that gets on the mind of sabotage by the fact that the economy is too weak to sustain it.

I think that's been the history of British socialism since the nineteen-fifties again and again, is that they try to have some ideas and then the economy won't quite allow them to do it.

Would you say that the adoption of socialist principles helped or hurt England in the long run?

I think you have to say that it helped it in as far as any government could. That's to say that the National Health Service, although it's in quite large trouble now, has commanded the loyalty of the great majority of the population. No other political party has felt it could really do anything against it and it continues to be a government which is looked back with great affection, certainly by Labor Party supporters.

I do think it probably is right to say it is the end of something rather than the beginning of something. I think it belonged to a situation in which the working population, on the whole, had lived in very different areas from middle class. There'd been sort of segregation. There was a lot of deference in society. The constitution, the monarchy, the political system was very much unquestioned, and people as it were, were much more prepared to act within their particular social space. Whereas I think part of the situation they created is, to their credit, a situation where people were no longer satisfied with that. The idea of the working class being a separate, physically segregated unit with limited horizons and so on became something which the children of the 1944 education would no longer accept.

What caused support for socialism to diminish?

I think one popular approach is to say that the working class was disappearing. That's to say that heavy industry was on the decline and that the new jobs would be created in services and therefore, the natural constituency for socialism was a declining force. I think that's only very partially true. For one thing, there are more industrial wage earners in the world today than there were then. It's just that they're distributed in different countries.

I think more important was the way in which certain inherited forms of deference, the ways in which the whole rise to the socialist movement had coincided with the situation in which the majority of the population, not just in

Britain, but in Europe and elsewhere, was disenfranchised, or unenfranchised I should say, this situation was finally being surpassed. That's to say the sort of very defensive institutions which had been set up to protect the interest of wage earners during that period, they're dependence on, as it were, politicians from the governing classes to do things for them. All this was changing.

Also I think there was individualization of society. I'll give you one very small example. In the 1945 election, in Coventry, a new industrial town producing cars, you actually get the workers from the car factory marching as a body to the electoral booth to vote. By 1955, all that's completely disappeared. People feel themselves much more as were individualized in their households. They've got new ways of life. They've got more space in which to live their own private lives and I think they appreciate doing that. So I think that's one large change which is occurring throughout this period.

Similarly, I think in the middle class there's much less sense of cost exclusiveness if you like than there had been, certainly before the Second World War or even before the nineteen sixties. So there's a popular culture which crosses classes. The media tends to cross classes and so on.

And another thing which I think is very important is the various forms of anti-authoritarian movement which had occurred in the nineteen-sixties, the student movement, the women's movement, blacks, gays and so on and so on. All these refused to accept traditional and hierarchical forms of authority or even professional authority.

Another big nail I think in the coffin is that science itself no longer has the unquestionable authority that they once had. After Hiroshima, people no longer associated with the inherent good in the way that nineteenth-century persons might have done. Scientists say that human weaknesses of scientists, the fact that they're on the beck and call to government, the fact of nuclear weapons, all these sorts of things meant that you get a population much more suspicious of the pretensions of science. That was bound to hurt socialists.

And then I think lastly, perhaps the way in which cultural change meant that the sort of thing you get described as a socialist utopian in the nineteen-thirties or forties. I mean most people would run a mile if they were confronted with the fact they'd have to live like that by the time of the 1990's. The emphasis on individuality, diversity, richness of cultural goods and so on are all people talk about wanting in communities. They also want all these other things in life and so I think it's much more difficult to put all these pieces of a jigsaw together again.

I don't think it's impossible to think of ways in which certain forms of democratic control over the world of work, traditionally associated with socialism, will have a future. But I think lots of the more simple-minded communitarian ideas of socialism would be very hard to put back into today's world.

There are a number of different reasons why socialism declined in the second half of the twentieth-century, but one crucial one is the change in the way people regard its economics. If you go back to the nineteen-thirties and forties, socialism was generally regarded as being a more efficient way of managing an economy than capitalism. Of course, this was a period of world depression in the

capitalist world and a period in which if you believed what was written and the five-year plans of the Soviet Union were creating full employment and a new society after peasant backwardness as late as the nineteen-sixties. You find in Britain, Mister Wilson, fighting for labor in the 1964 election proposing a national plan as an answer to Britain's economic problems. Planning was thought to be the great socialist weapon which the capitalist didn't have.

I think there's been a big, big change obviously from sometime in the late-seventies onwards. First of all it was demonstrated that in Eastern Europe these economies were unable to get out of the almost first machine age. Virtually nothing happened in terms of electronics, computerization, miniaturization and so on in these economies. And what they remained dependent upon was traditional heavy, smokestack industries and traditional artisan skills. They were unable to generate the new forms of skills which were necessary to run a modern economy. In the Soviet Union, the same thing. And this was shown by various economists in the nineteen-eighties to be a not-accidental feature of these economies because part of their boast or the cost of their boast of full employment was of course vast over manning in so many sectors.

Did U.S. President Ronald Reagan's strategy to outspend the Soviet Union on defense cause the downfall of communism/socialism?

Well then, I think that had a very tangible effect. This increasing weakness, relative weakness of the socialist economies against the capitalist world had a very tangible impact upon the negotiations between United States and the Soviet Union in the nineteen-eighties. It's hard to credit Reagan with a great deal of wisdom, but whether intuitively or not, he managed to put his finger on the weakness of the whole Soviet world. The issue was that the United States had twice the national income of the Soviet Union, was growing at a much faster rate economically. And so it only had to say that it was going to devote so much percentage of its economy to defense. For the Soviet Union to have to match that in absolute terms became an increasingly crippling burden. I think Gorbachev realized this. And I think that's when they began to see the writing on the wall. Obviously that ends in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the communist world in Europe.

The sad fact is that very few tears were wept for this whole system. I think one of the ways you could characterize this whole period from 1914 through to 1990, is that socialism gets overwhelming. They identify with an idea which originally had nothing to do with socialism. And that is from the time that Lenin writes his pamphlet called, *Imperialism*, which he declares capitalism is no longer a progressive force. He looks at the way the Germans run their war economy in the First World War and he says, "This is the way to do it in the Soviet Union." So, he actually takes ideas of capitalist management from the economy or the management of an economy of a known socialist kind, takes it through into the Soviet Union and makes it the basis of what is called, "war communism."

You've got a similar sort of push in the democratic socialist world. I mean the trade union leaders who'd come in and joined the political leadership in Britain in the First World War become very in favor of state intervention. So, then

in the Second World War of course you get another great push forward of the idea of state control of the economy as being a good thing. This idea I think has always been something which you can push all the way back to the Jacobins in the French Revolution -- an idea of an emergency association of running the state on dictatorial lines with getting the situation back to normal and then allowing the economy to run as it should. And of course, since 1945 in Europe at least you've had fifty years of peace. You had fifty years of peace and in that situation people no longer see why they have to be run as in a wartime situation.

Do you feel that the lack of an end-game for socialism contributed to its demise?

I think that's true. I think through most of the twentieth-century, problems or end-game problems about socialism, what it would actually look like, how it would actually operate, whether it would really be better than capitalism and so on, these problems were always overlain by more immediate questions about was capitalism in crisis? Was it getting worse? What was going to be done about workers unemployment? How was one going to defend workers being persecuted here and in different countries, not to mention the two World Wars and the way in which that obviously occupied people's energies. So I think the questions which one might think would have been discussed more at the very beginning of the career of socialism only emerged with relative clarity after the story is over.

I think some of these problems looking back on it, one can now see were being discussed. The various discussions in the eighteen sixties around the first international, in fact raised a lot of these issues. But of course they all got smothered by a sort of an official history which people read and assumed that all these other theories had been discredited in one way or another. There were these simple apostolic successions of ideas and socialism. People accepted that and thought that was the non-problematic side of socialism. Bernstein incidentally was one of the people who questioned this quite sharply in the eighteen-nineties. He said "people are always talking about the end of socialism, but not saying anything about it. It remains utterly mysterious what it would be."

Do you believe that Prime Minister Tony Blair's labor party is pointing England back in the socialist direction or abolishing the socialist tradition in England completely?

Well, I just said that the period between 1914 and 1989 in some ways could be seen as a specific and slightly barren period in the history of socialism. If you accept that then, in some ways you can see that Blair-ism might be a way of getting back to some of the other emphases which you could pick out of a socialist tradition. Pure thought for instance which he abolished Clause Four was precisely a product of this wartime situation in which trade union leaders became very appreciative of state control and themselves sitting on boards and the rest of it. Strangely enough it was also thought of as something which would greatly attract the middle class vote rather than the working class vote because it would

involve lots of jobs in state administration. So I think in lots of ways abolishing Clause Four is not abolishing everything in the socialist tradition.

Another point you could make is that if you go right back to the eighteenth-century and this idea that commercial society is one which can do with less state control, can put more trust in people bettering themselves, interacting harmoniously, without excessive state or church interference, then some of the ways in which Blair has moved seem to me quite understandable and supportable. I think they're very much feeling their way. I think part of it is also rather timid. I think they're very scared of trying to find the resources in the economy which they really need to accomplish some of the changes they'd like to accomplish. Sometimes they give the sense not simply of thinking commercial society isn't such a bad thing, but actually snuggling up to the rich in a slightly distasteful way. But, in terms of the policies that they've been trying to put forward, I think they have as much right to say that they belong to a social or social democratic tradition as the various labor documents before them.

Do you think that socialism as an economic and political system will rise again?

People on the left tend to have a stylized history of socialism, in which there seems to be certain unquestionable propositions and statements. They don't investigate the providence of these statements very often. They don't examine how well these situations work. Above all, what I find dispiriting at the moment is the way in which they don't seem to be prepared to learn from experience. I mean the experience lasts from everything that's happened since in various socialist countries across the world, and should I think make most socialists feel rather humble before they make very confident pronouncements about what should or should not be done. It should lead them to investigate their own history in a more critical sense in order to see what really ought to be preserved from it, what makes the basis of renewal and what really ought to be discarded and shown to have been a full set of beliefs. And I think until socialists are prepared in greater numbers to do that then the chances of a renewal of a socialist tradition is slightly slim, but I think it will happen sooner or later.

What did mankind gain from its experiments with socialism?

I think over the long term it's important to understand how human society from the end of the eighteenth-century onwards began to think that certain problems which had been ascribed to nature or the will of God, which could not be solved such as forms of an equality which we just thought of as facts of life, all these things could be questioned, that inherited forms of authority did not necessarily have to be true, that reason could be applied to social institutions and social arrangements. That's the permanent gain I think that socialism has represented at its best. Of course, you know, it sometimes tried to substitute its own forms of authority and very often these have been very unhappy in practical effect. But the fact of applying reason to social arrangements and seeing the possibility of a society which doesn't have to have rich and poor, I think this is the great permanent legacy in the socialist tradition.

Do you think there is another system of government that will bring about the downfall of capitalism?

No. I think one of the things that the left ought to give up is the idea that there's some other system waiting in the wings instead of capitalism. I think one has to see instead that exchange is a perfectly natural process among human kind. Of course, it might need controlling in various ways and free exchange is more appropriate in some areas than in others and so on. But the fact is, you've always got some sort of conjunction between the market and the state and it's really for us to work out, what works optimally in any particular situation, rather than believing there's going to be some end of history where there's some magical transformative solution and a completely different system takes over.