

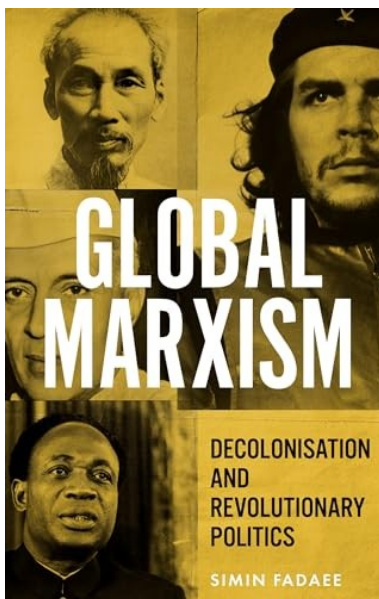
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Marxism

# The Revolutionary Development of Global Marxism

- Reviews section -



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## **Global Marxism: Decolonisation and Revolutionary Politics**

**By Simin Fadaee**

**Manchester University Press, 2024**

## **The Late Marx's Revolutionary Roads: Colonialism, Gender, and Indigenous Communism**

**By Kevin B. Anderson**

**Verso, 2025**

For those wanting to understand our world and help change it for the better, the theoretical system and political orientation developed by Karl Marx and his co-thinkers have been essential. But many critics still denounce Marxism's supposed limitations as stuck in the bygone industrial capitalism of the 19th century and irredeemably Eurocentric.

The two volumes under review help readers not only to understand flaws in such criticisms, but especially to facilitate an advance in understanding and practical action.

Simin Fadaee's contribution, *Global Marxism*, is a valuable starting point. Her achievement is to identify and briefly describe nine relatively diverse and incredibly important political activists, theorists and leaders who arose within and powerfully impacted upon the history of the Global South (Asia, Africa, Latin America). For each, Fadaee also offers a straightforward précis of their ideas, connecting them to Marxist ideology.

Fadaee's selection is limited, but those she draws together in this concise volume have unquestionably been important in the history of their countries and of the world: Jawaharlal Nehru (India); Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam); Mao Zedong (China); Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana); Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands); Frantz Fanon (African Diaspora; France; Martinique, Algeria); Ernesto Che Guevara (Argentina, Cuba); Ali Shariati (Iran); and Rafael Sebastián Guillén Vicente – more widely known as Subcomandante Marcos (Mexico). There are surveys of what they said and did, with reference also to some of the important secondary studies on each of the nine, enabling readers to continue with further explorations.

Fadaee is intent on showing "how Marxism is a living tradition that has been the cornerstone of revolutionary practice and theory for leaders and revolutionaries of the global South for the collective struggles they led or inspired." She insists that "for an honest and accurate evaluation of Marxist theory and practice, we need to know what Marxism means in different contexts and how it has been adapted in local and national struggles." The contributions of these nine figures, she adds, represent a "creative engagement [that] not only localized and indigenized Marxism, but also globalized it" (Fadaee, pp. 216, 217).

A significant limitation, however, is that Fadaee's account of the theory and practice of the nine is uncritical – the ideas are summarized rather than analyzed. As one progresses through the various summaries, it is apparent that the views of some of the nine are inconsistent with each other. Rather than providing an integrated analytical discussion, the volume presents us with nine silos of theory and practice. But it might be that more would be learned if the different conceptions were brought into contact and confrontation with each other.

In a critical study *Mao Zedong Thought*, for example, Mao's countryman Wang Fanxi comments that "Mao had only a smattering of Marxist knowledge, a few general principles and organizational or executive methods, made in the

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Stalinist factory of ideas and given a Lenin varnish,” concluding that “Mao’s thinking occupies a tiny space on the spectrum of revolutionary thinking, or, by comparison with Marx, no place at all” (Fanxi, p. 267). It may be that Wang’s point is overstated or entirely wrong – but such a critique is simply beyond the scope of what Fadaee offers us.

If one wants to comprehend the reality of the Marxism that is integral to the Global South, one should be aware of – and ultimately engage with the contributions of – not only Fadaee’s nine, but at least some of the other Marxists from the same time and place. One could compile a list of thirty additional individuals about whom one could say – as Fadaee says about the nine – that these revolutionaries “faced very different challenges and Marxism offered a methodology that enabled them to link the local and national to the global in a way that engendered different forms of political engagement.” They found in Marxism, as she puts it, “a powerful framework that helped understand and change the world” – helping as well to create “a dynamic and diverse Marxism that is rooted in the lessons of various sites of historical and cultural struggles” (Fadaee, pp. 219, 223, 226).

Here is a list of such people worth engaging with: Anouar Abdel-Malek (Egypt; France); Neville Alexander (South Africa); Samir Amin (Egypt; France); Walden Bello (Philippines); Chen Duxiu (China); Chen Pilan (China); Ding Ling (China); W.E.B. Du Bois (African Diaspora; U.S.); Carlos Fonseca (Nicaragua); Kumar Ghoshal (India); Chris Hani (South Africa); C.L.R. James (African Diaspora; West Indies; U.S.; Britain); Claudia Jones (African Diaspora; West Indies; U.S.; Britain); Leila Khaled (Palestine); D.D. Kosambi (India); Liu Shaoqi (China); Lu Xun (China); Nelson Mandela (South Africa); José Carlos Mariátegui (Peru); Farabundo Marti (El Salvador); Claude McKay (African Diaspora; West Indies; U.S.); Julio Antonio Mella (Cuba); George Padmore (African Diaspora; West Indies; Britain); Walter Rodney (African Diaspora; West Indies); M.N. Roy (India); Tan Malaka (Indonesia); Dora Maria Tellez (Nicaragua); Peng Shuzhi (China); Ta Thu Thau (Vietnam); Wang Fanxi (China); Zheng Chaolin (China). In fact, this list could be expanded 10 times and still not be complete.

Yet to a significant degree, this criticism is unfair and foolish. If Fadaee did for all these what she has done for the nine, the result would be many thick volumes that would be quite unreadable for most human beings. Instead, she has produced a readable and informative volume which advances the project of developing a genuinely global Marxism. The nine are employed to highlight the relevance of Marxism to Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as the fact that revolutionaries from these continents have had an impact upon Marxism itself. The fact is that Fadaee’s book is useful as a starting point.

We continue to be faced, nonetheless, with the dilemma of determining precisely what is the globalized Marxism that can advance human liberation? One is reminded of a snippet of dialogue between two characters in Ernest Hemingway’s novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (p. 244) – Robert Jordan, an American intellectual and munitions expert in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War, is talking with a highly-placed Soviet journalist and operative named Karlov (based on Mikhail Koltsov, whom Hemingway befriended in Spain):

Karlov: ... How much dialectics have you read?

Jordon: I have read the Handbook of Marxism that Emil Burns edited. That is all.

Karlov: If you read it all that is quite a little. ...

*The Handbook of Marxism* (1935) – with over 1000 pages that included substantial selections from Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin – published by Random House and also by International Publishers in the United States, and by

Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club in Britain, essentially constitutes what represented Marxism for most 20th century adherents from the 1930s onward.

Yet such Stalin-inflected Marxism was only one variant of that ideology. Isaac Deutscher's 1949 classic, *Stalin* (p. 118) comments that the Marxist outlook "science, philosophy, sociology, politics, and tactics were closely knit into a single system of ideas," and yet, as Deutscher noted, "the interest of practitioners of Stalin's type in matters of philosophy and theory was strictly limited." He elaborates: "They accepted certain basic formulas of Marxist philosophy, handed down to them by the popularizers of the doctrine, as a matter of intellectual and political convenience. These formulas seemed to offer wonderful clues to the most complex problems — and nothing can be as reassuring to the half-educated as the possession of such clues." He adds that while many adherents "enjoyed Marxism as a mental labor-saving device, easy to handle and fabulously effective," they had little sense of immense research behind this "labor-saving gadget" with which they engaged in a "narrowly utilitarian fashion." Deutscher explains that Lenin was different: "Unlike many of his followers, Lenin was the critical student in the laboratory of thought." While "he always turned his findings to some political use," and his findings "never shook him in his Marxist convictions," his research and analysis was pursued "with an open and disinterested mind."

Lenin's approach is suggested by three pieces of commentary (shared in my *Lenin: Responding to Catastrophe, Forging Revolution*, pp. 72, 149, 163):

1. Discussing Hegel's approach to the dialectics of reality and of research, Lenin emphasized "living, many-sided knowledge (with the number of sides eternally increasing), with an infinite number of shades of every approach and approximation to reality (with a philosophical growing into a whole out of each shade) — here we have an immeasurably rich content as compared with 'metaphysical' materialism."
2. Discussing the limitations of many Social Democratic adherents of Marxism, he complained of "their slavish imitation of the past" with an understanding of Marxism that was "impossibly pedantic" and failing to understand Marx's "revolutionary dialectics" which understood that "in times of revolution the utmost flexibility is demanded." Instead they "walk around and about ... like a cat around a bowl of hot porridge." Inclined to see how things developed in Western Europe as a universal model for all places and all times, they failed to comprehend an essential point: "While the development of world history as a whole follows general laws, it is by no means precluded, but on the contrary presumed, that certain periods of development may display peculiarities in either the form or the sequence of this development."
3. Discussing the limitations of many Communist adherents of Marxism, Lenin was especially exasperated by pseudo-revolutionary pretentiousness, insisting that "we must at all costs set out, first, to learn, secondly, to learn, and thirdly, to learn, and then to see to it that learning shall not remain a dead letter, or a fashionable catch-phrase (and we should admit in all frankness that this happens very often with us), that learning shall really become part of our very being, that it shall actually and fully become a constituent element of our social life."

The approach suggested by these comments is the focus of the new book by Kevin Anderson — the final installment of an invaluable trilogy: *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism, A Critical Study* (1995), *Marx at the Margins* (2010), and now *The Late Marx's Revolutionary Roads*.

Anderson — along with his mentor Raya Dunayevskya, plus Marx scholars Lawrence Krader, Teodor Shanin, and Michael Löwy — has been in the forefront of Marx scholars stressing the importance of the research and writing of "the late Marx" (from 1869 to 1882). These writings are often minimized by earlier scholars and activists — definitely Joseph Stalin, but sometimes even including Marx's theoretical co-thinker Frederick Engels. Anderson acknowledges that at "a very general level, Engels and Marx are mostly in accord." But there are also significant nuances of difference, which flowed from Marx's greater engagement with Hegelian dialectics and from his unceasing and intensive new researches into historical and socio-cultural realities: of indigenous peoples of North America and elsewhere; of ancient Rome; of Russia (for which he taught himself Russian); of Ireland; of India; of differences in socio-economic and cultural developments between Western European and other parts of the world.

Among Marx scholars there has long been a debate over who represents the “real” or “best” Karl Marx – the philosophical and militantly humanistic “young Marx” or the “mature Marx” of later years, grounded in rigorous economic and sociological studies. And now we have a “late Marx” who seems to overturn much of what Marx produced from the late 1840s to the late 1860s. Anderson embraces all three – young, mature, and late – insisting on an underlying continuity but also perceiving changes, growth, and development in Marx’s thought. This was beautifully expressed decades earlier by pioneering Marx scholar Teodor Shanin, who insisted “there was neither ‘epistemological rupture’ in Marx’s thought nor decline or retreat, but constant transformation, uneven as such processes are. His last decade was a conceptual leap, cut short by his death” (Shanin, p. 33). Anderson’s *Late Marx’s Revolutionary Roads* further documents and celebrates the changes and development that culminated in an approach richer, more dialectical, more vibrant (and far more adequate for our own time) than can be found in Emile Burns’ Handbook of Marxism.

In *The Communist Manifesto* and other writings from the late 1840s to 1859, Anderson suggests, there definitely is a Eurocentric dimension in the perspective that Marx and Engels lay out – indicating that “undeveloped” countries can see their future by looking at the industrially developed capitalist countries, and that human society across the face of the planet invariably evolves, as was the case in Western Europe, from “primitive” tribal communism to slave civilizations, then to feudalism, followed by capitalism, which is destined to give way to socialist revolution. This unilinear conceptualization of the “mature Marx” is superseded by a multilinear approach of the “late Marx,” who perceives different pathways of development in the world, alongside Western Europe’s historical evolution described (and overgeneralized) in *The Communist Manifesto*.

Anderson documents that even Engels did not fully comprehend all that Marx was developing before his final year. Lenin was able to grasp much (but not all) that eluded what Anderson refers to as “post-Marx Marxists,” and Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution captured much but hardly all of its complexity. One is reminded of Rosa Luxemburg’s 1903 comment that Marx’s “detailed and comprehensive analysis ... and ... method of historical research with its immeasurable field of application ... offered much more than was directly essential for the practical conduct of the class war.” She added that “as our movement progresses and demands the solution of new practical problems ... we dip once more into the treasury of Marx’s thought,” going on to lament that the inclination to “go on working in old ruts of thought” was causing “the theoretical utilization of the Marxist system [to] proceed very slowly” (Luxemburg, p. 111).

One is struck, in much of what Marx was doing in his final years, by the profoundly revolutionary qualities of his thought, consistent with his youthful admonition of 1843 – “the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being.” And as Sidney Hook more than once noted, the aging reformist Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein (certainly in a position to know) long ago put his finger on this quality with the comment that “Marx had a strong Bolshevik streak in him!” (Quoted in Hook, p. 43).

From explorations in the history of ancient Rome to developments in India (both ancient and modern) and Ireland, to commentary on current realities in the vast expanses of Russia and the United States, Marx invariably focuses on class dynamics and revolutionary possibilities. Often these possibilities involve a convergence of multiple developments and struggles and – according to Anderson (p. 237) – with a “theoretical originality ... which not only breaks new ground but still speaks to us today on issues often considered under the term ‘intersectionality,’” that is, the dynamic interplay with class of other forms of experience and struggle grounded in race and ethnicity, gender, and other forms of identity.

Along with attention Marx gives to class struggle infused with intersectionality, we find a revolutionary internationalism which explodes Eurocentric paradigms – an increasingly interactive globalism related to the interplay of the so-called periphery and core of global capitalism. Where he once envisioned the highly industrialized regions of Western Europe leading the way to socialist revolution, the late Marx, as Anderson puts it, “now sees revolutionary change in Western Europe emanating from the periphery – in the cases of Ireland and Russia – and moving to the

core” (p. 233).

What also comes through in Anderson’s study is Marx’s increasing attention to revolutionary possibilities in Russia and the United States.

Regarding Russia, this is convincingly argued and well documented in Teodor Shanin’s 1983 classic *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism*, republished by Verso in 2018. But of course the point is also beautifully and succinctly made in the preface Marx and Engels wrote for the 1882 Russian translation of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Regarding the United States, the massive and explosive working-class upsurge of 1877, ignited by rebellious railroad workers, caused Marx to note (in a letter to Engels dated July 25, 1877): “This first eruption against the oligarchy of associated capital which has arisen since the Civil War will of course be put down, but it could quite well form the starting point for the establishment of a serious labor party in the United States.” He also noted two additional “favorable circumstances.” One resulted from the terrible betrayal of the democratic promise represented by Reconstruction: “The policy of the new President will turn the Negroes into allies of the workers ...” The second involved “the large expropriations of land (especially fertile land) in favor of railway, mining, etc., companies,” which Marx believed “will convert the farmers of the West, who are already very disenchanted, into allies of the workers.” This and much else can be found in Robin Blackburn’s study of the U.S. Civil War and Reconstruction Era and rapid spread of capitalist industrialization in *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (2011), also published by Verso.

Kevin Anderson’s *The Late Marx’s Revolutionary Roads* is an important contribution for those wishing to comprehend both past and present, and especially to those who seek to help shape the future.

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