

populism must be unpacked and exposed and a politics advanced that focuses on the development of an alternative, progressive bloc.

The struggle for justice for migrant workers is directly connected to the struggle against neoliberal globalization. The destruction of Earth's resources and the massive accumulation of wealth by a minority of the planet to the disadvantage of the majority means that billions find themselves in a struggle for survival. One option has become migration, but rather than migration being accepted as the reality of a modern economy, it has brought with it demonization of those who migrate, covert exploitation of the migrant, and the use of the migrant in fundamentally

racist ways to serve as scapegoat for the economic injustice being felt by so many.

The struggle for justice for the migrant worker is inextricably connected to the fight for racial justice, and, indeed, the fight for broader social justice. This struggle must be integrated into our various battles and not placed to one side as one additional issue on a long list of issues.

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## Socialism or Barbarism

by R. Burke

***Why Marx Was Right*, by Terry Eagleton, Yale University Press, 2011, ISBN 978-0-300-16943-0, 258 pages, \$25.00.**

Along with Slavoj Zizek and Antonio Negri, Terry Eagleton is one of the better known figures of the Marxist left. In some ways this is ironic, considering that his 2008 book *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* is a devastating critique of the "new atheists" Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. His latest work, *Why Marx Was Right*, is an insightful, humorous, and informative defense of Marxism. Eagleton has produced what may be the best argument for socialism to be offered in recent years.

Eagleton, a Distinguished Professor of English Literature at the University of Lancaster and Notre Dame, has undertaken to clear the record regarding the continued relevance of Marx's work. Considering the recent financial crisis, as well as the fact that we see an increasing reversion to the style of capitalism practiced in his day, there is indeed a strong case for Marx.

The book is divided into 10 chapters, each of which takes on a popular misconception of Marx's work. Eagleton does not defend Marx in a fundamentalist sense. "No Freudian imagines Freud never blundered, just as no fan of Alfred Hitchcock defends the master's every shot and line of screenplay. I am out to present Marx's ideas not as perfect but as plausible."

Beginning with the question of why Marxism is considered to be outdated, Eagleton demonstrates that this cannot be because capitalism has improved or advanced in some revolutionary way. The answer, he concludes, has something to do with the recognition of just how hard it is, and how long it will take, to abolish capitalism and replace it with socialism. In some ways the problem is connected with a collective disappointment in the wake of the heady utopian hopes roused in the 60s. The irony is that Marx is "accused of being outdated by the champions of a capitalism rapidly reverting to Victorian levels of inequality."

Eagleton is masterful in his critique of claims that Marxism is inherently tyrannical and murder-

ous. He reminds us that "[m]odern capitalist nations are the fruit of a history of slavery, genocide, violence, and exploitation every bit as abhorrent as Mao's China or Stalin's Soviet Union. Capitalism too, was forged in blood and tears; it is just that it has survived long enough to forget about much of this horror."

Capitalism was responsible for "the tens of millions of Indians, Africans, Chinese, Brazilians, Koreans, Russians and others who died as a result of entirely preventable famine, drought and disease in the late nineteenth century." These horrors remain with us today.

While Marx was a fierce critic of capitalism, he was not one-dimensional, and admired the legacy of

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democracy, liberty, and civil rights which capitalist societies engendered. Socialism in his conception was about expanding this heritage into an economic democracy as well.

As for the history of 20th century communism, Eagleton points out that often it is Marxists themselves who have criticized these societies and explained how to avoid repeating their mistakes.

One of the aspects of the book that is most encouraging is Eagleton's open-minded discussion of alternative economic models. Beginning with the Market Socialist model which has dominated the western left

since the 70s, he goes on to discuss the Participatory Economics of Albert and Hahnel, and the Participatory Planning of Pat Devine, arguably the two best proposals put forth for an alternative economic system. Eagleton deftly describes these different approaches fairly, and with an admirable economy, in which these ideas are explored without allowing too much space to be monopolized by this subject.

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**"Progress" often goes hand in hand with monumental injustice.**

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While he takes the "parecon" model seriously, the details of the discussion would suggest that he favors Devine's Participatory Planning model.

Eagleton reminds us of some things about Marx that are worth being borne in mind. While some writings might seem to suggest that he took a deterministic view of society and its development, a closer and wider reading would show that a more subtle understanding is at the heart of the Marxist understanding of human societies. This is more properly a dialectical view in which human beings make their own history, but do so under conditions not of their own making.

Especially interesting is the degree to which Marx's thinking on matters such as progress actually differs from the naive optimism of Enlightenment thinkers, who held that the world was improving and advancing automatically. Marx takes a more Romantic approach. He makes us aware of the double-edged nature of history, and that "progress" often goes hand in hand with monumental injustice. In his early writings Marx spoke of all of human history as the "prehistory" of humanity. This implies that "real history" has not yet happened. Does this not perhaps also imply that "real progress" has *not yet happened either?*

One of Eagleton's most useful insights is in his witty encapsulation of the viewpoints of Marxists, Conservatives and Liberals. The Marx-

ist is the one who, while telling you that things are worse than you realize, also says that they can be immeasurably better than you would think. Eagleton reminds us that in feudal days there were certain apologists and supporters of the established order who asserted that such an "unnatural" form of society as capitalism was "impossible." Aristotle, after all, had rejected the idea on the grounds that human nature was limited, and that capitalism itself implied a form of boundlessness in pursuit of profit.

Eagleton sidesteps the issue of Marx's atheism and materialism. He gives us an acceptable working definition of Marxist materialism as "not a set of statements about the cosmos such as 'Everything is made of atoms' or 'There is no God.'" It is a theory of how historical animals function." He reminds us that there have been Jewish Marxists, Christian Marxists, and Islamic Marxists.

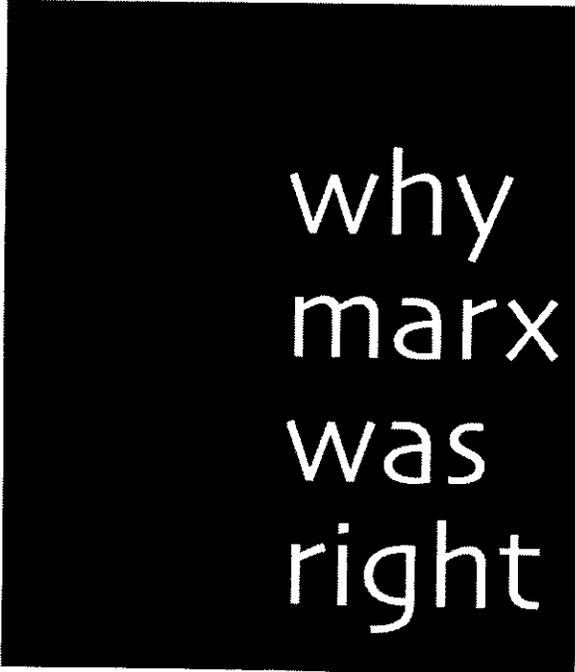
A Buddhist might offer the comments of Claude Levi-Strauss in *Triste Tropiques*: "Between the Marxist critique, which frees man from his initial bondage — by teaching him that the apparent meaning of his condition evaporates as soon as he agrees to see things in a wider context — and the Buddhist critique which completes his liberation, there is neither opposition nor contradiction. Each is doing the same thing as the other, but on a different level." In *Marx's Concept of Man* Eric Fromm pointed out the parallels between Zen and the early writings of Marx in which he regards nature as our greater "inorganic" body, considers the way in which capitalism alien-

ates human beings not only from themselves and their fellow human beings but from nature as well, and conceives of communism as the overcoming of this split.

This brings us to an important aspect of Eagleton's book: his ecological reading of Marx's work. Marx was aware of the fact that capitalism's quest for profit was damaging to the natural environment. Environmentalism is, properly speaking, a Marxist priority. Eagleton provides a reading of Marx which is green, feminist, and anti-colonialist.

Eagleton's work is as close to encyclopedic as a small book possibly could be. One could offer some criticism that in *Why Marx was Right* Eagleton mentions the recent financial crisis as an example of Marx's relevance, but does not clearly explain why. A reader not well versed in Marxism would be unaware of the role that economic cri-

## Terry Eagleton



why  
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ses played in his thinking. This is a fairly minor oversight given the book's many virtues. Terry Eagleton has written a book that is at one and the same time the perfect introduction to recommend to someone who wants to know about Marxism and Socialism but knows little of these subjects, as well

as a potent reminder of some basics for those of us who have been studying Marxism for decades.

R. Burke is a member of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Surrealist Movement in the US. He also practices Soto Zen Buddhism.

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## Look to Congress for Supreme Court Fix

by Jane Anne Morris

How is it unconstitutional for a state to require place-of-origin labels on meat? Regulate sale of its water? Establish worker protections stricter than federal standards? Where does the US Constitution say that states cannot require that toxic waste be sorted and labeled? Cannot include labor standards in state purchasing policy? Cannot make companies disclose what chemicals they use in products and facilities?

The Constitution is silent on these matters, but the Supreme Court has interpreted the Constitution all the way to next Tuesday in order to declare these measures unconstitutional. Supreme Court interpretation devised concepts like free speech rights for corporations, and that workhorse, money equals speech, to hobble election reform. Judicial interpretation enables corporations to use the Civil Rights Act to claim damages for being "discriminated" against. Supreme Court interpretation dished out rights, powers, and protections for corporations while repeatedly denying same to minorities, women, and workers.

Constitutional scholars routinely describe the Court as the most powerful court in the history of the world. In addition to its untrammelled interpretive latitude, that singular institution wields a bundle of powers. It decides cases, rules on the constitutionality of acts of the executive branch, determines the distribution of powers between state and federal government, and judges the constitutionality of any law passed at any level of government. It can "call

power center. Special constitutional courts rule on the constitutionality of laws. A separate court decides cases between parties. Yet another court handles human rights violations, and by "human," they mean, uh, human, and not corporate persons. Sometimes, legislative bodies can overrule court decisions.

Within the US, state legislatures and members of Congress have offered correctives to the existing "Godzilla" Supreme Court. Those include requiring a supermajority or unanimity of Supreme Court Justices to declare a law unconstitutional; allowing Congress (or another legislative body) to overrule a decision on constitutionality; and removing the Congress-granted power of the Court to second-guess state courts on constitutional questions. A national referendum has also been suggested.

Congress need not retain two centuries of Congressional Acts uploading legislative powers into the judicial bailiwick. Perhaps Congress likes it this way, confident that any serious and effective reforms will be declared unconstitutional by the "branch" next door.

The ball is in our court, the people's court: the US Congress.

Corporate anthropologist Jane Anne Morris's *Gaveling Down the Rabble* (Apex Press, 2008) is cited in an amicus brief filed in *Citizens United v. FEC*. She is currently writing a book about the Supreme Court.

### Notes

1. Art. III, Sec. 1: The judicial power of the United States, shall be vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish.
2. Jane Anne Morris, *Why a Green Future is Unconstitutional*, *Synthesis/Regeneration*, Spring, 2009.

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### Judicial interpretation enables corporations to use the Civil Rights Act to claim damages for being "discriminated" against.

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up" any court's ruling if it disagrees. Justices scan the nation's laws and, using easily rigged "test" cases, void any law not to their liking.

This power does not come from the Constitution, which, apart from a few matters (like ambassadors and Indian tribes), specifies very little about the Supreme Court. [1] The vast powers and maxed-out discretion exercised by the Court come from the US Congress. A series of Judiciary Acts (1790, 1875, 1925, and 1988) sketches (and stretches) the dimensions of its power.

So if you are concerned that corporations have most of the constitutional rights of human persons, or that numerous "green" state and local laws are thrown out as unconstitutional, [2] then the true object of your discontent is neither the Constitution, nor the Supreme Court, but Congress.

Congress could borrow from other countries' systems that not only tolerate less poetic license in judicial interpretation but spread around what the current Supreme Court concentrates into one big-box