



Demonising Marx

Review of Leopold Schwartzschild, *The Red Prussian*

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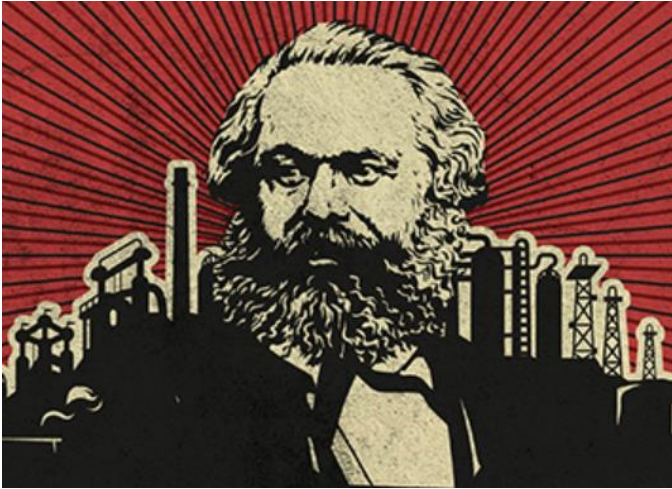
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Review of Leopold Schwartzschild, *The Red Prussian: The Life and Legend of Karl Marx*, trans. Margaret Wing (London, 1949: Hamish Hamilton), *International Affairs* 25 no. 4 (October 1949), 532–3



From the cover of Paul Kengor, The Devil and Karl Marx

MR SCHWARTZSCHILD has written a biography of Karl Marx which is, in at least one respect, unique. He applies to the life of his subject the weapons of harsh and pejorative criticism and marshals facts for the kind of pure vilification which his subject had a major role in introducing into the political literature of his time. Mr Schwartzschild's evidence is, so far as it goes, accurately and even pedantically sifted; his research is minute, his scholarship impressive, his power of organising the case for the prosecution arresting. There is scarcely an evil motive which in the course of the story is not attributed to his hero. Like the Communists of Mr Koestler's tracts he emerges as an almost incredible compound of treachery, envy, sadism, megalomania and paranoia; his natural method is that of the stab in the back, the double cross, the

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destruction of everything that is good or honest or attractive in the world.

This portrait could, of course, have been achieved only by an interpretation of the facts which, while it formally cannot be refuted, is too unpalatable to commend itself without qualification to serious students of the subject. There is a clear historical justice in the spectacle of the nineteenth-century master of vituperation hoist with his own petard; moreover Mr Schwartzschild makes it all most lively and entertaining, and, like the good publicist that he is, tells the story with a kind of savage verve. Nevertheless, the reader is necessarily left bewildered: he cannot explain to himself how so black a monster with a character unrelieved by a single attractive trait could have gained the attachment of the none too gullible Engels, created a movement which has altered the history of our time, and become an object of worship to so many; there is evidently something missing here.

It is true that even the most sympathetic biographers have not begun to succeed in presenting Karl Marx as a humane or attractive figure, so that Mr Schwartzschild's attack is not without adequate moral foundation. Nevertheless the reader will not here find justice done to Marx's qualities of original insight into the facts of, at any rate, contemporary history, nor his power of constructing a bold and coherent theory of sociology, and, to some degree, of politics, of morals, and even of aesthetics. The sorry creature of Mr Schwartzschild's imagination could never have engaged the admiration of such fastidious critics as Heine or Lassalle, let alone have created the most influential secular faith and [533] the most discussed doctrine of society of our century. The history both of Marx's relationship to his wife, his children and his friends, and of the triumphant march of his ideas, are argued out of existence by the hideous nightmare figure drawn by Mr Schwarzschild with such virtuosity and grim delight.