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Reviews

MEHRING ON MARX.

"Karl Marx. Geschichte seines Lebens" von Franz Mehring. Vierte Auflage. Leipzig, 1923. xvi plus 544 p.

By AVROM LANDY.

THE biography of Karl Marx is the biography of a scientist and revolutionary, a man, as Kurt Eisner said, who thought in order to fight. "The philosophers," he once wrote, "have merely variously interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it." That was the essential lesson of dialectics and the principle underlying the greater part of Marx's life. And therein lies the grandeur of the Marxian world-view, which, resting on the basis of scientific analysis, is a revolutionary theory for the purpose of revolutionary action.

Marx was the first of a type, iterated in Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, that has become the present representative of the historical future, namely, the Marxian revolutionary. And to the Marxian viewing the dynamics of society with the aid of Marxism, the dialectic process—and consequently the revolution—embodies the highest poetry of life. It is not hard to understand the comrade who said that to read a page of Capital was, for him, to experience a real esthetic emotion.

Irrespective of Marx's evergrowing historical significance, there is still no scientific Marx biography. Volume one of the Marx-Engels Archive, which devotes sixty pages to a bibliography of Marxism during and after the war, not including material published in Russian, mentions only about six larger biographies, one of which only, Franz Mehring's "Karl Marx," approximates an actual scientific biography. It is undoubtedly the best biography of Marx at present, but it is not yet the Marx biography. Kurt Eisner, it is true, claimed that in Franz Mehring's work "the world now has the first scientific biography of Karl Marx." But, in spite of the fact that Mehring knew Marx as few did, the basis for a scientific biography can only be a scientific edition of Marx's complete works, an edition which Mehring never lived to see and which we may not expect completed for almost another decade. In addition, Mehring's volume is deficient in many important respects.

Franz Mehring was the historian of the German Social Democracy, editor of the Marx-Engels Nachlass, co-editor of the Neue Zeit, author of many important studies, and a socialist of international repute. He died not long after the news of one of the most shameful crimes of world history, as he called the murder of his friends, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. His nerves were shattered and his health was undermined by the fact "that the greatest and most dauntless revolutionary energy of Germany, and the keenest woman's head together with the most gifted brain of the International, two of the noblest people, had fallen a prey to the unscrupulous blood orgies of a so-called socialist government."

Mehring's "Marx" is being translated or has already been translated into Dutch, Danish, Swedish, and Rus-



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Marx be allowed to work, Marx's life work would never have been accomplished.

In addition, the profoundest genius of the nineteenth century has the greatest difficulty in finding publishers for his work. What Marx said of science on the whole is certainly true of his own scientific efforts. "The product of intellectual labor—science—" he wrote in his "Theories of Surplus Value," "is, in fact, always greatly beneath its value, because the labor-time necessary to reproduce it is entirely out of proportion to the labor-time necessary for its original production; for example, the binomial theorem can be learned by a school-boy in an hour." Furthermore, so little of what is published is sold that it brings him but little financial remuneration. His work is ignored by the insignificant nonentities in the universities, only to be met by an avalanche of confused refutation and misrepresentation when these bourgeois mediocrities are finally forced to take notice of him. A glance at Werner Sombart's bibliography of Marxism, covering three hundred titles, reveals the quantity of anti-Marxian literature before the beginning of the present century. Persistent night work proves too much for Marx's health, and not long after the death of his wife, he passes away, only to live anew in every Marxian revolutionist. As Engels wrote to Sorge the day after Marx's death: "Humanity has been reduced a head and indeed, by the most significant head it has had today."

WE in America would do well to render Mehring's book into English. The few biographies of Marx we do possess are all short, aside from a translation of Max Beer's "Life and Teachings of Karl Marx," which, like the other biographies, is based on Mehring's earlier biographical introductions to the manuscripts published in his edition of Marx's Nachlass, as well as upon the work of other Marx investigators. Spargo's Marx, which was published in 1910, was called by Mehring "a worthless compilation," having taken his material from Mehring in such a manner as to make it even unreliable. The International Publishers have taken the praiseworthy step of having D. Riazanov's volume, "Marx and Engels" translated from the Russian, and it will probably appear in the Fall.

But Mehring's Marx should be in the possession of every comrade in the country. For not only is the biography of Marx of immense historical interest, but it also possesses a definite revolutionary value. Biography belongs to the youth, whether in age or spirit. And the biography of Marx will communicate the fire and the energy, the intensity and perseverance without which we cannot carry on the struggle to which he has given its scientific weapon. Marx was the greatest genius of the nineteenth century and to come in contact with an intellect and spirit of his magnitude, is not only to come in contact with the driving force of modern history, but to experience the meaning of human life.

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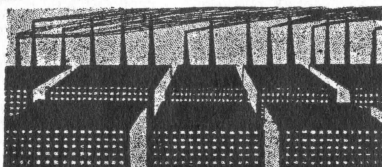
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