

WILEY



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

**The Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines  
London School of Economics**

---

Saint-Simon and His Influence on Karl Marx

Author(s): Alice M. MacIver

Source: *Economica*, No. 6 (Oct., 1922), pp. 238-245

Published by: Wiley on behalf of The London School of Economics and Political Science and  
The Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2548317>

Accessed: 21-06-2016 10:34 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*The Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines, Wiley, London School of Economics, The London School of Economics and Political Science* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Economica*

# Saint-Simon and his Influence on Karl Marx

By ALICE M. MACIVER,  
*Research Student.*

HENRI CLAUDE, Comte de Saint-Simon, whom history has dubbed "The Father of Socialism," was a descendant of that famous family of Saint-Simon which traced its origin back to Charlemagne and which gave us the inimitable chronicler of the court of Louis the Fourteenth. Such a lineage must have included a curious assortment of ancestors, and the Saint-Simon with whom we are concerned truly can be said to have lived up to the traditions of his ancestors. The individuality of his character soon asserted itself, for at the age of thirteen he refused to be confirmed, which enraged his father to such an extent that he had him imprisoned for several months. Two years later we find him instructing his valet to wake him in the morning with the following formula: "*Levez-vous, Monsieur le Comte, vous avez de grandes choses à faire.*"

Much might be expected from a boy with such opinions, and all through life Saint-Simon fulfils these expectations to the utmost. Having served with Lafayette in the American War of Independence, the outbreak of the French Revolution found Saint-Simon full of enthusiasm for the cause of liberty. He gave up his title of Count and was elected by his tenants as their representative in the local Assembly. By this time he was already dreaming of one great system which should synthesize into one, science, industry, art, politics, and religion, and, finding the lack of money a drawback, he speculated very successfully in the sale of confiscated lands, being, in the venture, financed by the Prussian Ambassador to England. This partnership was only temporary, and as far as can be ascertained, the Prussian Minister got very much the better of the bargain, still Saint-Simon gained enough with which to marry, rent a large house in Paris, and for two years live a life of luxury and extravagance. He kept open house for all comers and attracted many men of science and literature, many of them being professors whom he engaged to teach him privately, he being at the time particularly interested in physiology and biology.

At the end of two years he had exhausted his fortune, and hearing that Madame de Staël had just been left a widow he promptly divorced his wife in order to make the former lady an offer of marriage. He justified this proceeding by pointing out that as Madame de Staël was the most remarkable woman of the age and as he was

the most remarkable man, their offspring would be more remarkable still. Unfortunately for posterity the offer was declined, but as Madame de Staël was then living in Switzerland, it is to be presumed that the incident is in some ways connected with the *Letters of an Inhabitant of Geneva*, Saint-Simon's first published work, and from the point of view of socialistic theory his most interesting.

After this Saint-Simon's life is a record of poverty and suffering, terminated by his death in 1825. During this period when he rarely had enough to eat, had no fire in winter, and worked long hours as a copying clerk, he turned out the most amazing collection of pamphlets, discourses, sketches of projected works, and unfinished fragments of all kinds. He made, as a rule, no attempt to co-ordinate his ideas into a completed whole, but insisted on considering his writings more in the nature of a correspondence with his readers, who were expected to criticize and reply. In this way he made friends with many of the leading men of the day and gathered round him a small band of devoted disciples, which at one time included Augustin Thierry and Auguste Comte. At the time of his death Rolinde Rodrigues was his favourite pupil and was entrusted with the carrying on of the master's work.

Saint-Simon's aim was to formulate a system to include every branch of life and synthesize it into one harmonious whole. He wanted to found a science of progress which by studying the past would give men a sure guide for working out the future. Every branch of human knowledge had some bearing on the problem and each had to be studied and assigned its proper place in the system. We can divide Saint-Simon's intellectual life into three divisions: the early period when he was particularly interested in the different branches of positive science; the second period when, profoundly impressed by the political events of 1814-15, he turned his attention to social and political questions; and thirdly, the last two years of his life when he occupied himself particularly with the bringing of Christianity up to date in the *New Christianity*.

The second period is the important one from our point of view, and the one to be studied when considering Saint-Simon's claim to be considered the "Father of Socialism." We have to remember that although most of Saint-Simon's works were published between 1815 and 1825, yet he himself belongs to the eighteenth century by education, tradition and social position. He is a direct descendant of the Encyclopædists, yet he lived through the Revolution, saw its good as well as its bad points, and was tremendously influenced by Condorcet, Adam Smith, and J. B. Say, so that he is a unique link between the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. These facts have to be remembered in tracing his ideas through his chaotic writings. In regard to social and political questions his fundamental propositions are fairly obvious. A true disciple of Adam Smith and J. B. Say, he longed to abolish the then existing state and confine its activities to a few necessary functions. He

thought in industry lay the future of man and that the only productive work to be done was to increase the nation's wealth by trade, commerce and industry. To this end he advocated an industrial form of government carried on by selected experts. He divided the nation into two classes, the producers and the idlers, and predicted that as the latter class was non-essential and a drag upon the rest it would have to disappear.

In his desire to promote material wealth he points out the disutility of competition between town and town, province and province, and country and country, and he advocates a scheme for a league of nations, surprisingly like the League now in existence, by which Europe should be governed by a General Parliament in which France and Britain were to have the preponderating influence.

Saint-Simon is not a socialist in the sense of being a social-democrat. He believes that the majority of the people are a lazy, supine mass whom a good industrial government must direct and guide. It is true that in the *New Christianity* he says: "Society should be organized in such a fashion as to secure the greatest advantage for the greatest number. The object of all its labours and activities should be the most prompt and complete amelioration possible of the moral and physical condition of the most numerous class." But in discussing how this is to be done he says: "The problem of social re-organization must be solved for the people. The people themselves are passive and listless and must be excluded in any consideration of the question. The best way is to entrust public administration to the care of the industrial chiefs, who will always directly attempt to give the widest possible scope to their undertakings, with the result that their efforts in this direction will lead to the maximum expansion of the amount of work executed by the mass of the people." (*Système industriel*.)

In his famous *Parable*, published in 1819, he elaborates his attitude towards the State and society still further. He points out that if France lost all her men of genius the loss would be irreparable, but that the loss of all the nobility, and of all the dignitaries of Church and State, could be easily made good. "These facts prove clearly, though in an indirect manner, that the social organization is still very imperfect; that men still allow themselves to be exploited by violence and deception; and that the human species, speaking politically, is still plunged in immorality.

"These suppositions show that actual society is really the world turned upside down.

"Because the nation has admitted as a fundamental principle that the poor should be generous for the sake of the rich, and that in consequence the less comfortably off deprive themselves daily of part of their necessities to add to the superfluities of the great proprietors;

"Because the great criminals, the general thieves, those who squeeze the mass of the citizens; and who take from them three to

four millions of francs per annum, find themselves charged with the duty of punishing small crimes against society ;

"Because ignorance, superstition, laziness and the taste for expensive pleasures form the equipment of the chief leaders of society, and men who are capable, economical, and industrious are only employed as subordinates and as instruments ;

"Because, in a word, in all forms of occupation, incapable men find themselves charged with the duty of directing capable men ; in the present condition of society, the most immoral men are appointed to teach the citizens virtue, and in regard to distributive justice, the great criminals are appointed to punish the faults of the small delinquents." (*Parable de Saint-Simon.*)

Here may be discerned the germ of the Marxian Socialism wrapped up in what might almost be called a paternal application of the doctrines underlying *laissez-faire*. Saint-Simon's conception of an industrial State taking the place of the existing political one has much in common with the Marxian idea of the "withering away of the State," although it approximates more closely to the theories of the Syndicalists. Much of his writing on this point has what we would now call a true Marxian ring about it and it becomes obvious where Marx found some, at least, of his inspiration. Further, we could almost say that the idea of a government of experts specially concerned with economic questions could be considered as a forerunner of the present Soviet system such as is aimed at in Russia, with its crude beginnings in the Paris Commune, although Saint-Simon held that the experts should be elected by the nation as a whole.

But there are two other points which we find emphasized in Saint-Simon's writings which are even more definitely associated with Marxian Socialism. In the Genevan Letters, published in 1803, explaining his extraordinary scheme for the advancement of learning, he writes as follows : "Humanity, which I divide into three classes : the first marches under the standard of the progress of the *esprit humain* : it is composed of scientists, artists and all men with liberal ideas. On the banner of the second class is written : 'No change.' All the proprietors who do not belong to the first class belong to the second. The third class, which rallies to the word 'equality,' includes the rest of humanity."

Then he continues : "I should speak thus to the first class : Sirs, in comparison with the non-property owning class you are very few ; how does it come about that they submit to obeying you ? It is because the superiority of your education gives you an advantage over them, and allows you to combine your forces in such a way as to procure for you ordinarily the advantage in the struggle which, by the nature of things, necessarily exists between you and them."

And in addressing the third class he says : "Until now, the rich have had hardly any other occupation than that of commanding you : force them to explain things to you and instruct you ; they

D

make you use your arms for them: make them use their heads for you."

Here we have the "theory of the class-struggle" clearly stated for the first time, and stated in true Marxian phraseology, for not only is the inevitable conflict recognized, but the importance of the part to be played by the bourgeoisie is also pointed out, as in the famous Communist Manifesto itself. It is extraordinarily interesting to find this *ci-devant* Grand Seigneur recognizing and accepting the fact that the struggle is inevitable, and it marks a distinct advance in the development of socialistic theory.

In their conception of history Saint-Simon and Marx have still another point in common. The study of the history of communistic theory during the half-century preceding the publication of the Communistic Manifesto of Marx and Engels, proves that the materialistic conception of history did not spring fully developed from the brain of Marx. We can trace it back in the works of the French Socialists through Considerant (the most distinguished disciple of Fourier) to Saint-Simon, who in reality got it largely from Condorcet, and it is probable that Hegel knew and was influenced by the works of the latter.

But Saint-Simon in his treatment of history approximates very closely to the Marxian position and makes exactly the same mistake that Marx did thirty years later. In his eyes history was a positive science. He believed that if history was properly and thoroughly studied and (so to speak) reduced to its prime factors, it was possible to foretell with certainty the future. The following extract from *La Société Industrielle* gives a very good idea of Saint-Simon's attitude of mind in this respect. "The recapitulation of society's past has proved to us that the industrial class has continually gained in importance, while the other classes have steadily lost; and we must conclude from that that the industrial class will end by constituting itself the most important of all.

"Simple common sense has given to all individuals the following argument: Men having worked for the amelioration of their lot, the end towards which they have always striven has been the establishment of a social order in which the class occupied in the most useful tasks shall be the most honoured, and this is the goal which society shall finally attain.

"Work is the source of all the virtues; work having the greatest utility should be the most respected; therefore human and divine teaching call equally to the industrial class to play the leading rôle in society."

Further, the famous quotation from the end of *De la Réorganisation européenne*, gives a clear view of Saint-Simon's conception of history as a whole. "The imagination of poets has placed the golden age at the cradle of the human race, during the ignorance and brutishness of very early times; it would have been much better to relegate the age of iron to that very distant past. The golden age of the human

race is not behind us, it is in front, it lies in the perfection of the social order ; our fathers did not see it, but our children will arrive there one day ; it is for us to clear the road for them ”—an interesting point of view for a man whose early life was passed in the midst of luxury, and whose later years of intellectual toil were rendered intolerable by lack of food and fire, and the want of money to print his writings.

From the various quotations given we gather that Saint-Simon was an optimist and a believer in that which the future shall bring to mankind. Unlike Fourier, who was a disciple of Rousseau and believed that civilization had corrupted mankind, producing inequality and poverty, Saint-Simon was inspired by the Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century, who believed that man owes to civilization his qualities which distinguish him from the brute creation, and also his possibilities for happiness. He was a great admirer of Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau historique des Progrès de l'Esprit humain*, which displays the same optimistic outlook as that of Saint-Simon and the same belief in the possibility of science bringing about human happiness. When we remember that Condorcet wrote his book hiding in a Parisian garret, and when it was finished calmly took poison to escape the guillotine, even our modern and materialistic minds cannot help being impressed.

Still Saint-Simon had no use for the word “ liberty ” as such, and pointed out that by itself it had no meaning, but he had entire confidence in the good effects of civilization and looked to a society governed by *savants* and *industriels* to bring about heaven on earth. Sometimes he seems almost to believe that two or three statutes passed by Louis XVIII would usher in the millennium. In his general optimistic outlook on life he was also inspired to some extent by Adam Smith and his disciples. Leave men to arrange their own affairs, and all will turn out for the best, said the disciples of *laissez-faire*. In some ways this was also the point of view of Saint-Simon, and his demand for State intervention was not to ameliorate the state of the workers, but merely to hasten as rapidly as possible the inauguration of the new society.

Thus from the French Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century Saint-Simon inherited his optimistic outlook for the future, and the events of the Revolution and his own miseries never moved him from that position. In this optimistic outlook he has very much in common with Marx and Engels. One of the Marxian dogmas which has had the greatest appeal to working men and women has been the inevitability of the coming of the Socialist State. Marx taught and believed that he could construct the future from a detailed study of the past, and described the course which future events would take—such as the increasing misery of the proletariat, the concentration of capital in the hands of the few, etc.—all of which would force the workers to unite and bring about the creation of the Socialist State through revolution and as everyone knows, the Bolsheviks hold that

they are carrying out the true spirit of Marx's teaching. In much the same way did Saint-Simon look on history and above all he believed as Marx did in the final victory of his ideas. He believed in their victory not simply because they were his own, but because he held that history showed his predictions to be infallibly true. His unwavering faith in the coming of what we now call the Socialist State is perhaps his greatest contribution to the history of Socialist thought, and is reflected in the Marxian teaching on the same subject.

In actual method of writing there is much similarity between the two men. Saint-Simon always justifies his proposed reforms by appealing to the history of civilization in much the same way that Marx uses in the opening paragraphs of the Communist Manifesto. Bazard (the most important of Saint-Simon's disciples) says in the *Exposition of the Saint-Simonian Doctrine*: "A new science, a science as positive as all those which merit this name, was conceived by Saint-Simon: this is the science of the human species. His method is the same as employed in astronomy or physics: the facts are classified as a series of homogeneous terms, arranged in order of generalization and particularization, so as to make their tendency stand out—that is to say—demonstrate the law of increase and decrease which they are subject to." This is exactly Saint-Simon's own position which is reflected in practically all his writings.

Thus we see that Saint-Simon does deserve in some respects the title of "Father of Socialism," as he has been called, but more because of the inspiration his works gave to later writers than from the position he himself took up. In many ways his view of the future is anything but socialistic. He believed that in the industrial State the bourgeoisie would be called upon to play the most important part; as the workers are too supine to organize themselves, the Government must legislate for them and the workers themselves were to have no voice in the Government. Also Saint-Simon himself firmly upheld the right of private property, although his disciples did not follow his leading in that respect.

Yet this man with his curious and seemingly confused mind does carry us a long step further in the evolution of socialistic thought. With him we have definitely left the French Revolution behind. The words "liberty and equality" have no meaning for him. Inequality, he stoutly declares, is the basis of all human society. But in other ways he has lost the inspiration of the Revolution—democracy is to him a delusion, and through all the various schemes which he drew up for the organization of the State the note of autocracy is always heard.

To us Saint-Simon's views on the development of society are by far the most interesting and important of his theories. To his own generation this was not so. What made Saint-Simon celebrated were not his writings, which were hardly ever read, but his claim to be the founder of a new Christianity and the new Messiah. He hated clericalism and blamed the clergy for much of the misery in the



world. He considered it a conservative force which had hindered the proper development of science and industry. Therefore he desired to scrap the Church and its theology, and in its place set up a religion based on the real teaching of Christ as set forth in the New Testament. The last two years of his life were occupied in writing *Le Nouveau Christianisme*, in which these two themes predominate: "Love your neighbours as yourself," and "Religion ought to direct Society to the great end of ameliorating, as rapidly as possible, the lot of the poorest class."

In 1825 Saint-Simon died. As he lay there in his garret—his face bearing the obvious traces of poverty and suffering—suddenly and for the last time, the flame of his unquenchable spirit flared up and, turning to the small band of his devoted disciples he said: "Remember always one must be passionate in order to accomplish great things. All my life can be summed up in one thought—the desire to gain for all men the freest development of their faculties."

A few moments later and life was extinct, but the spirit which was Saint-Simon is with us still and has manifested itself in many and unexpected ways. Looking back, his immediate followers seem to have lost completely the true meaning of his teaching, but with that bizarre religious movement known as Saint-Simonism we are not concerned here. We have merely been concerned with the right of Saint-Simon to be called the Father of Socialism and we have tried to show how much justice there is in that claim.