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Creator(s)

Title
Review of Marxism today, i. 89

Date
1989

Description
Item: 2014.0046.00200

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Preferred Citation
University of Melbourne Archives, Review of Marxism today, i. 89, 2014.0046.00200
Review of 88

Our look back over 1988 takes a thematic form, to capture some of the moments and movements of particular significance during the past year, and, in some cases, to look ahead to prospects for 1989.

To begin with, Marxism Today asked a selection of familiar faces to search their own personal recollections of '88 and tell us about a person or an event of which held special meaning for them

- The only people who influence my life, in any deep sense, are my husband and children. I'm at a stage in my life when I pretty much decide the course it should take. I generally find the inspiration I need within myself. I have, I must add, been inspired this year by political figures, such as Jesse Jackson, who has struggled to give dignity and meaning to the aspirations of minorities in America; and by Benazir Bhutto, a fellow Asian woman, who, in spite of the discouraging barriers that were put in her way, has managed to hold doggedly on and seems to be achieving what she has long striven for.

Madhur Jaffrey (actress, author and TV presenter)

- This year, for the first time, I took part in the celebrations for Diwali Day, the Hindu Festival of Lights. This is a very significant spiritual festival, an opportunity for Hindus to reaffirm inner beliefs and values. It is also an extremely warm family event. I found it very enjoyable to be welcomed into the Hindu community and to join in celebrations taking place in the same spirit, here in Britain, in India and in many other parts of the world. For me personally Diwali illustrated yet again how much Britain benefits from the enormous richness of the various cultures and traditions of its citizens.

John Major MP (Chief Secretary to the Treasury)

- The flood and famine in Sudan had a special painful significance for me. This time, there was no centralised government organisation with direct responsibility for relieving the misery of the populace, no Band Aid, no bullshit, just the silent agony of the suffering poor and their children. No bitterer testimony of the necessity of socialism for emergent nations could be demanded.

Rudy Narayan (barrister)

- The event and the personality of '88 combined for me on the occasion of my visit in September to the 20th National Conference of Black Lawyers of the USA in Washington DC.

At that conference I had the privilege of meeting with and listening to someone I had always thought of as a friend: Professor Julius Chambers, Director-Counsel of the Legal Aid Defense Fund, which was born of the NAACP's civil rights struggles. Julius' former clients have included Martin Luther King, the Little Rock Seven case, and Muhammad Ali's anti-Vietnam legal battles.

Julius Chambers was transformed for me in this latest meeting. Living and moving around with him, and watching the way he directs a nationwide civil rights struggle through the courts, drew for me and my Asian-born wife immediate parallels with the simple and effective lifestyle of the late Mahatma Gandhi. It was as though the cloak of my longstanding friendship had inhibited a clear perception that this is a very great man indeed!

John Peel (disc jockey)

- When Sheila and I flew to Zimbabwe in March, we expected - bearing in mind the grisly part the British play and have played in Africa - to encounter if not hostility, a certain coolness. We found exactly the reverse.

From nights listening to stupendous music in clubs and hotels where we were usually the only white customers, we returned to our room awestruck by the generosity of the Zimbabweans. There is, I know, what amounts to a need among some Europeans to find good in countries we have looted and I think I understand the dangers inherent in this need. But nine months later and aware that Zimbabwe still has many problems to overcome, we both derive as much consolation from the optimism and commitment to building a fair society we found there, as we do from the candour of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, contrasting these qualities with a shortage of them at home.

Germaine Greer (author and broadcaster)
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