not unlike that of the old leftists or Wobblies who cultivated illusions concerning mass industry or migrant workers. There is no serious awareness that modest gains for the Negro and poor may make far-reaching successes, the prerequisite of permanent social change, impossible. A society that is poisoned produces poisoned responses and men, and those who do not succumb to these pressures may find themselves a very small minority of the white and black community—a rare minority of principled radicals with a commitment that is not likely to gain followers in the milieu of aborted movements of progress.

The new left has had the political courage to challenge the politics of the status quo, though it too frequently hopes that the existing political mechanism may somehow be applied to serve its own radical ends. But it has not asked sharp or relevant questions concerning the intellectual premises of the old left, and has merely rejected its chronic anti-communism and myopia concerning the liberals in the Democratic Party. To succeed intellectually where the old left failed, the new left will have to find fundamentally new and far-reaching premises, premises that are not obsequious in the presence of the ghosts of the 18th and 19th centuries. And to succeed politically it must find dynamic possibilities and forces of movement in a social order in crisis, forces it must frankly acknowledge may not exist as permanent or decisive factors for social change. Having rejected the conservative, futile politics of the old left, the new left has yet to define a solid alternative, much less begin to create it.

Given the consensual basis of American politics and society in the 20th century, and the will of the beneficiaries of consensus to apply sufficient force and power at home and abroad when resistance to consensus and its hegemony arises, the new left must confront the prospect of failure as an option for radical, democratic politics in America. Rational hopes for the 20th century now rest outside America and in spite of it, and the least the American political and intellectual resistance may do is to encourage the efforts of those elsewhere who have more options than we to build a new democracy and society. At best a new left may only be able to define a new intellectual creed at home which permits honest men to save their consciences and integrity even when they cannot save or transform politics. This little cannot be gainsaid, for we have yet to win even this, and once this much is obtained perhaps there will be a realistic basis for a new politics that may yet eventually emerge.

RADICAL CHAINS: THE MARXIAN CONCEPT OF PROLETARIAN MISSION

Oscar Berland

IN THE HALF-CENTURY that followed the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* socialist thinking was transformed. "At that time," Engels wrote in 1895, recalling the years before the revolutions of 1848, "the many obscure evangels of the sects, with their panaceas; today the *one* generally recognized, transparently clear theory of Marx, sharply formulating the final aims of the struggle."[1] His observation was essentially valid, even though it is now easy, with hindsight, to trace major cracks in the "one clear theory" back to the final decade of the 19th Century. Revisionism was emerging in Germany, Fabianism in England. William Morris, also in England, had already planted a seed that was to nurture in a poet's underground and bloom into political sense one technological revolution later. In Russia Lenin was beginning to work an apparently new relationship of proletarian revolution and social backwardness into shape. But in 1895 these proto-fissures barely marred the hegemony Marxism had achieved in the realm of socialist thought.

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One concept was the primary cause of this hegemony: the concept of proletarian mission. Prior to Marx, Engels noted, socialism (or communism) seemed "to evolve out of the human brain," presenting itself as a "new and more perfect system of social order" which might be imposed "upon society from without by propaganda, and . . . the example of model experiments." As a consequence of Marx's work socialism now meant the understanding of the nature and general aims of "the struggle waged by the proletariat."[2] Coinciding in time with the growing self-awareness of the European and American working classes, the concept of proletarian mission gained Marxism this historic victory over the earlier "utopian" movements, and by the last decades of the 19th Century enabled it to attain hegemony. Then, as workingmen adjusted in one way or another to the facts of capitalist existence, it became the unresiliant point from which new schisms spread.

Today the concept of proletarian mission lies in tatters. At best it is a source of humor—as it was at Berkeley during the recent "free speech" movement, when a socialist student group distributed pins on which a photograph of the grey-bearded seer was surrounded by his exhortation: Workers of the World, Unite! More commonly it serves as the simple handle by which the most unknowledgeable pedants find it possible to "grasp" Marxism and "scientifically" discard it. At the very worst, for those who cannot distinguish a commitment to Marxism from a commitment to the world Marx knew (it is not simple), it has become a source of unimaginable doctrinal blindness.

Today the working class sleeps soundly in most industrial countries. Yet a sense of revolutionary possibility fills the world, perhaps as never before. To it Marxism seems somehow still relevant. But how?

The following discussion begins from this premise: although the concept of proletarian mission was central to Marx's political doctrine, it was and remains but a specific concept within the larger body of Marxian thought. One may therefore ask how it came to be there, how its arguments were developed, what role it played. Once the predication of revolutionary change upon proletarian activity is placed within Marxism, rather than simply equated to it, the changing relationship of revolutionary Marxism and the proletariat may become amenable to discussion.

II

Marx did not invent socialism, as he took great pains to make clear. Neither was he the first to link it to the proletariat. In rudimentary form both socialism and its relationship to working class action were already implicit in the Babouvist conspiracy of 1796. Based in the industrial faubourg Saint-Antoine, the Baubouvists directed their polemic against "the rich [who] absorb all wealth and rule exclusively, while the poor work like veritable slaves, languishing in poverty and counting for nothing in the State." Very much like Marxists later, they saw the French Revolution as "only the forerunner of another revolution far greater, far more solemn, which will be the last," its culmination a "Republic of Equals." Half a century later, in *The Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels cited "the writings of Babeuf and others" as examples of "that literature which, in every great modern revolution, has always given voice to the demands of the proletariat."[3]

The socialist parties that emerged from the Revolution, E. H. Carr has noted, were "firmly based on the conception of an oppressed labouring class waiting to be emancipated."[4] Firmly or not, an awareness of a link between socialist program and working class activity was explicit in the State Socialism of Louis Blanc; from Blanqui's neo-Babeuvism the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" came into the socialist language.[5]

In England Jacobin radicalism, Luddism, Owenism and Chartism gave rise to proletarian-based socialist concepts. "An entire change in society," the radical publicist, Bronterre O'Brien, wrote in 1833, ". . . a change amounting to a complete subversion of the existing 'order of the world'—is contemplated by the working classes. They aspire to be at the top instead of at the bottom of society—or rather that there should be no bottom or top at all."[6] In the United States radical groupings in the Workingmen's Party of New York saw an egalitarian social reorganization resulting from "worky" action, while from the South Carolina backwash John C. Calhoun warned of the imminence of "the contest . . . between the capitalists and operatives"—this in 1828.[7]

In the wake of the revolutions of 1830 the concept of a

special social mission accruing to the working class began to find echoes even in Germany. "The spirit of freedom breathed by our classical literature," Heine declared in 1834 (when Marx was 16), "is less active amongst our scholars, poets and literary men than amongst the great mass of our artisans and workers."[8] This is somewhat tame; but communistic notions were in fact becoming popular among the German artisans, many of whom regularly wandered from one European capital to another. Engels, who met some of these artisan-communists in London in 1843, shortly before he and Marx began their collaboration, remembered them later as "the first revolutionary proletarians whom I had met."[9]

Engels was apparently impressed. For the first time since the Peasant Wars, he remarked, "social reform has again become a topic for discussion [in Germany], only this time within the German working class." But Engels, in 1843, still felt that the major vehicle of social change for Germany would be philosophical illumination, not class struggle. "The Germans," he explained to the English, "are a very un-self-interested nation; when in Germany principles come into conflict with interests, principles nearly always bring expressions of interest to nought."[10]

III

Marx's earliest recorded reference to communism was in an article in the *Rheinische Zeitung,* October 16, 1842. A radical Young Hegelian, "embarrassed when I had to take part in discussions concerning so-called material interests,"[11] Marx was at the time editor of the *Zeitung,* the organ of Rheinland's liberal bourgeoisie. The *Allemeine Zeitung,* a rival liberal journal published in Augsburg, had recently accused his weekly of communistic tendencies. In Marx's paper the following "incriminating passage" had appeared:

> The middle class is today where the aristocracy was in 1789; then the middle class laid claim to the position of the aristocracy and captured it, *today the class that possesses nothing demands to share in the prosperity of the middle classes, which are now at the helm.* But nowadays the middle class has better prepared itself against surprise assault than the aristocracy had in '89, and it may be expected that the problem will be resolved in a peaceful manner.

To the *Allgemeine Zeitung*'s discovery of communistic tendencies in this passage, Marx rejoined, in part:

> That the class that today possesses nothing *demands* to share in the prosperity of the middle class is a fact which without Strassburger talk and despite Augsburger silence fills the streets of Manchester, Paris and Lyons.[12]

Marx begged off from further discussion of communism at the time by pleading ignorance; he repeated this explanation years later in the relative freedom of London.[13] It is not clear to what extent the belief in peaceful resolution expressed in the "incriminating" article reflected Marx's attitude, and to what extent it reflected the needs imposed by Prussian censorship—though it might be noted that, like Engels, Marx then believed communism could become "dangerous" only as a philosophical movement.[14] But whatever his other attitudes, Marx already identified communism with the class "*der nichts besitzt.*"

The logic of the relationship was obvious. As *prima facie* protests against the maldistribution of wealth, the various communistic ideologies of post-Revolutionary Europe and America were implicitly "for" those "at the bottom."

This, of course, is not to say that all socialists appealed directly to workingmen. Other considerations, such as the fact that the poor could exert social power only by forceful means, if at all, caused some to doubt and some to fear the efficacy of an appeal to the lower classes. But even for those who pointedly sought other vehicles of change, the logic of the link between the socialist vision and the propertyless remained, as a dire prophecy of what a failure of the rich to heed the new teaching would bring. In this sense even the rationalistic capitalism of Saint-Simon was related to proletarian activity.[15]

Those with revolutionary predilections could give the obvious logic a romantic expansion, invoking for the emancipation of the toilers their self-realization. Shelley put it best: "Who would be free, himself must strike the blow." In 1864, when he undertook to draw up the "Rules" of the International Workingmen's Association—in which radical groups of diverse ideologies were represented—Marx himself fell back on this simple formulation. "The emancipation of the working classes," he put it in

Germanic form, "must be conquered by the working classes themselves."[16]

But Marx went further. He developed more sophisticated concepts than those in which, as he put it, the proletariat existed "only from the point of view of being the most suffering class."[17] To demonstrate the link between socialism and the proletariat he created an entire theory of historical change. But to evaluate his demonstration properly one must keep in mind that Marx, in the sometime manner of the mathematician, proved a relationship which he already believed to exist.

IV

In April 1843, a few months after its encounter with the *Allgemeine Zeitung,* the *Rheinische Zeitung* was suppressed by the Prussian censor: less for its vague communist leanings than for its fiery anti-Russian propaganda. In the article of October 16 Marx had promised to investigate communism further. Now that he had the leisure he read Fourier, Proudhon, Cabet and Leroux, gaining, not quite incidently, a reading knowledge of French. "This system of acquisition and commercialism, of possession and of exploitation of mankind," Marx wrote a friend at about the time his studies began, "is leading even more swiftly than the increase of population, to a breach within the present society.[18] And when he received an offer from Arnold Ruge, a fellow radical journalist, to help edit the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher,* which were to be published in Paris, Marx jumped at it.

Those who see Marxism as a fixed "blueprint for action" like to set the date at which Marx became a "Marxist" somewhat later—perhaps in 1846 when Marx jotted down the eleven "Theses on Feuerbach." By then most of the often sophomoric Hegelian turns of language are gone from his writing; his thought is more systematized and more amenable to the needs of doctrinal validation. But the historical methodology to which Marx himself contributed—a methodology which fixes upon change and focuses upon critical turning points—demands that the date be set forward to coincide with Marx's self-exile: specifically to January 1844, when the essay "Introduction to a Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right" appeared in the single number of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher.* The "In-

troduction to a Critique" was Marx's first distinctly revolutionary pronouncement; it contains his first invocation of a proletarian revolutionary mission. It is the leap from which the other steps followed, but its argument is somewhat surprising.

"Marx began his 'Introduction to a Critique' at the point where Young Hegelian radicalism had ended: the attack upon religion. Arguing that the criticism of religion implies a criticism of the 'vale of tears' from which religion rises, he demonstrated, in the style of Young Hegelian philosophy, that 'criticism of the heavens transforms itself into criticism of earth.' Then, looking back in anger, the 25 year old exile turned his attention to Germany."

The German *"status quo"* is an anachronism. Compared to conditions in other nations even its negation is already outmoded. "If I negate powdered wigs, I still have unpowdered wigs. If I negate the German situation of 1843, I am, by French chronology, barely in the year 1789." Were Germany's total situation identical with its political situation, "a German would at best have as much a part in the present as a *Russian* has." But happily it is not. The Germans are a philosophical people. "As ancient nations experienced their pre-histories in the imagination, in *mythology,* so we Germans have experienced our future history in thought, in *philosophy.* We are the *philosophical* contemporaries of the present, without being its *historical* contemporaries." Philosophy, then, links the German to his age. But it is an anachronistic link. For "if Germany has accompanied the development of the modern nations only in the activity of its thought, without taking part in the actual conflicts of this development, it has on the other hand shared in the *suffering* of this development without sharing in its profits, its partial gains." If it does not match its practice to its theory, "Germany will find itself one morning on the level of European decay without ever having attained the level of European emancipation." This outcome (unfortunately, one of Marx's better prophecies) can be avoided only through revolution: "a *revolution* that will raise Germany not merely to the *official level* of a modern nation, but to the *human height* which will be the immediate future of these nations" (that is, to socialism—but Marx does not use the word). And in this revolution that will resolve the dichotomy between German philosophy and German social conditions, German phi-

losophy will itself become a force. "The weapon of criticism can . . . not replace the criticism of weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force, but theory too becomes a material force so soon as it grips the masses."[20] But to grip the masses it must be radical; it must be for the masses. By its "decidedly positive annulment of religion"[21] German philosophy has demonstrated its capacity for the revolutionary role which its incongruity to German social conditions imposes on it.

To this point Marx remains a radical Young Hegelian; from this point he enters new realms. In the "Introduction to a Critique" the transition is implicit. Revolution, though forced by the dichotomy between national philosophy and social condition (later it would become social condition and technology), takes place within society; its commission requires a human instrument, a social class. The availability and adequacy of any instrument is in turn determined by the social condition. Marx, in the respite that followed the suppression of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, had not only studied French communism but also French and German history—seeking to demonstrate the accordance of their patterns with Hegelian categories. Against a model of bourgeois revolution abstracted from French history he examined the social conditions of the anticipated German revolution:

"The utopian dream for Germany is not *radical* revolution, not *general human* emancipation, but rather partial, *simply* political revolution," wherein one class seeks to free itself from its own predicament, from its particular political liabilities, apart from a general social emancipation. For no class can play a revolutionary role "without calling forth in itself and in the masses a momentum of enthusiasm: a momentum in which it intermingles and moves together with society in general, confused with it, perceived and acknowledged as its *universal head;* a momentum in which its pretensions and judgements in truth are the judgements and pretensions of society itself." A particular estate, that is to say, to secure its special emancipation must be able to appear as the embodiment of general emancipation. Obversely, "in order for the *revolution of a people* and the *emancipation of a special class* of civil society to coincide . . . all the defects of society must concentrate in another class," which must appear as "the embodiment of the general ob-

stacle."[22] But "no particular class in Germany has the consistency, the penetration, the courage, or the ruthlessness that could mark it out as the negative representative of society. No more has any estate the breadth of soul that identifies itself, even for a moment, with the soul of the nation, the geniality that inspires material might to political violence, or that revolutionary daring which flings at the adversary the defiant words: *I am nothing, but I must be everything.*" In Germany classes just rub against one another; their relationship is not "dramatic," but "epic." "Each of them begins to be aware of itself . . . not as soon as it is oppressed, but as soon as the circumstances . . . create a social substratum on which it in turn can exert pressure. Even the *moral self-feeling of the German middle class* rests only on the consciousness that it is the common representative of the Philistine mediocrity of all the other classes." The bourgeois struggles against those above him, "while the proletariat is already beginning to find itself struggling against the bourgeoisie. The middle class hardly dares to grasp the thought of emancipation from its own standpoint when the development of the social conditions and the progress of political theory already declare that standpoint antiquated, or at least problematic. . . ."

Here, in its peculiar German form, Marx states the problem of belated bourgeois revolution. How can Germany solve it? "Where," Marx asks, ". . . is the *positive* possibility of a German emancipation?" The proletariat is the answer.

> *Answer*: In the formation of a class with *radical chains,* a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong* but *wrong generally* is perpetrated against it; which can invoke no *historical* but only its *human* title, which does not stand in any one-sided opposition to the consequences but in all-round opposition to the presuppositions of the German political system; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society, and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man, and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning* of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat.*

One must pause for breath. "The youthful Marx," his most loving biographer noted, "sometimes exalted in the mere swish of his sword through the air."[23] This is true. And the Hegelian dialectic, which consumates as it negates, makes a mighty foil for a strong-minded youth. If on the one hand its focus upon anachronism facilitates revolutionary insight—Herzen called it "an algebra of revolution"—its argument by opposites may as easily facilitate illusionary motion. Thus universal suffering is resolved in universal emancipation, general wrong in general upheaval, the complete loss of man in his complete regain. By a swish the romantic-poetic concept of "radical chains" rises dialectically to social dissolution. But the swish is historically important, for by it two of the major intellectual movements of post-Revolutionary Europe were united: French communism and German Hegelianism.

The proletariat in the passage cited above is simply an abstract-romantic class of universal suffering; but in two other places in this essay Marx is somewhat more specific. In one he refers to the proletariat as "demanding the *negation of private property*"—a reference, in its context, to the proletarian parties of France. The essay ends, in fact, with the statement—which was to prove briefly prophetic—that "the *day of German resurrection* will be proclaimed by the *crowing of the Gallic cock.*"[24] To link German philosophy and French politics was a common desire of Young Hegelians obsessed by the political backwardness of Germany; it was the reason, in fact, for the *Deutsch-Fransösische Jahrbücher*. That this link implied some sort of revolution—wherein philosophy would become political and politics philosophical—also appears to have been part of the undercurrent of German radical thought. Marx's new departure was to find this link in a concept of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat.

But the *"Answer"* of Marx's *Jahrbücher* essay is a declaration of proletarian revolutionary potential invoked to meet the needs of a larger argument; it is not itself an argument for the imminence of proletarian revolution. The closest it comes to being such an argument is in its characterization of the working class as the "sphere . . . which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society, and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society." This idea, in some-

what less abstract language, appears again in *The Communist Manifesto*, where it is argued that proletarians "cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation."[25] In either case Marx assumes a proletarian striving for self-emancipation, for mastery of the productive forces, and argues that it must result in a more thorough and general emancipation than that which results from analogous strivings of the bourgeoisie.

This is the point. Marx not only came upon the proletariat with Hegelian sword in hand—this would hardly constitute a surprising discovery—but he came upon it backward, as it were, his attention fixed upon the failings of the German bourgeoisie, his concern not so much with the resolution of the proletarian condition as with the social requirements for German revolution. Marx turned to the proletariat as the answer to Germany's revolutionary needs, and then found revolution to be the answer to the needs of the proletariat.

This apparent defect in logic was Marx's most important contribution to political theory. That proletarians demanded the "negation" of private property, Marx could simply have taken on French authority. The truly new idea was that they were uniquely qualified to carry through the revolution which a particular middle class, for historical reasons, had become incapable of conducting. Heine had invoked proletarian activity to shame the middle classes. Marx transformed this rhetorical device into a political program which invoked proletarian revolution to redress the revolutionary failings of the German bourgeoisie.

With respect to Germany Marx continued to see the proletarian mission in terms of the special needs and conditions of belated bourgeois revolution until the collapse, in 1850, of the revolution upon the anticipation of which his argument had been predicated. "The Communists turn their attention chiefly to Germany," one of the concluding paragraphs of *The Communist Manifesto* declared, "because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution that is bound to be carried out under more advanced conditions of European civilization and with a much more developed proletariat that that of England was in the seventeenth, and of France in the eighteenth century."

Communists in Germany will "fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way"—not simply to consumate bourgeois hegemony, however, but to make "the bourgeois revolution in Germany . . . the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution."[26]

This declaration, actually made on the eve of revolution, has a Babouvist ring. There is a note of confidence in the ability of the bourgeoisie to carry their own part of the conflict with "feudal reaction" that distinguishes it somewhat from what Marx wrote in disgust at the moment of his exile. The focus of Marx's concern had by 1848 shifted fully to the proletarian revolution, for which the German semi-feudal anachronism seemed merely to provide the choicest opportunity. Yet the continuity is clear: proletarian revolution would develop from bourgeois revolution conducted "under more advanced conditions of European civilization."

Returning to Germany during the unhappy revolution he had waited for, the revolution triggered by the *"Gallic cock,"* Marx attempted to implement this program. Here his disgust with the inability of the bourgeoisie to conduct their own revolution returned—in fact, it became continental. Marx's expressions reassumed their earlier tone. "Every revolutionary upheaval," he wrote in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* early in 1849, "however remote from the class struggle its goal may appear to be, must fail until the revolutionary working class is victorious, . . . every social reform remains a utopia until the proletarian revolution and the feudalist counter-revolution take arms against one another in a *world war*."[27] The following year, in his "Address of the Central Council to the Communist League"—his one work specifically devoted to the question of revolutionary tactics—Marx spelled out the measures whereby bourgeois revolution was to be transformed into proletarian revolution, and gave this concept the name, "the permanent revolution," which Trotsky was later to popularize.[28] Then, a few months later, he dropped it.

In the fall of 1850 Marx abandoned the line of thought through which the revolutionary mission of the proletariat had first been revealed to him. "We too," Engels later explained, "have been shown to have been wrong by history."[29] Actually, Marx did not declare the concept wrong; rather, he decided that

the period of bourgeois revolution had passed. He turned his attention fully to another line of argument, which he had been developing along with the first, and in which proletarian revolution was to emerge from the workings of capitalism itself as *"modern productive forces* and the *bourgeois production forms* come in *collision* with one another. . . . *A new revolution,"* he announced in 1850, *"is only possible in consequence of a new crisis. It is . . . also just as certain as this."*[30]

V

The issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in which the "Introduction to a Critique" appeared carried as well two communications from a dapper young socialist, Frederick Engels, then living in England. In the more important of the two, the "Outline for a Critique of National Economy," Engels set the terms of English political economy into the categories of German philosophy in order to demonstrate "the deep degradation to which people have been brought by private property"—a condition in which the fruit of man's labor stands hostile to the laborer.[31] With this article the famous life-long collaboration began. Marx immediately sensed in it the third leg of a revolutionary theory which would rest upon the very peaks of the thought of three nations.

Marx and Engels met that summer in Paris, the "revolutionary Babylon." News had recently arrived of weavers' riots in Silesia, and Marx was caught up in the excitement. This revolt, he had just written, began where others had ended. "None of the French and English worker revolts possessed so theoretical and conscious a character as the Silesian weavers' rebellion." It appears that the weavers had burned some ledger books and legal titles: they had attacked, Marx explained, "not only the machines, those rivals of the workers," but the abstract concept of property itself; not only the industrialist, "the visible enemy," but the banker, "the hidden enemy."

That was in July. In August Engels arrived and brought with him the manuscript of his first book, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844.* An essentially empirical study, based in part upon the English "Blue Books," it detailed the human costs of English industrialism, described working class resistance, and suggested as well a simple and even prosaic

logic of proletarian revolt. "If the present conditions remain the same," Engels wrote—and one should notice the qualifier—as mechanization increases "the majority of the proletariat must become forever superfluous, and has no other choice than to starve or to rebel." Even aside from this prospect, simply in terms of the present, rebellion was the only alternative to total self-loss. Having made needle-points all day, Engels asked, "how much human feeling . . . can a man retain? . . . The worker must choose, must either surrender himself to his fate, become a 'good' workman . . . in which case he most certainly becomes a brute, or else he must rebel, fight for his manhood to the last, and this he can only do in the fight against the bourgeoisie." There is no prediction here, but a statement of alternatives: "The worker must choose." English experience suggested, however, that the workers would choose rebellion. "There is no better means of inducing stupefaction than a period of factory work, and if the operatives have, nevertheless, not only rescued their intelligence, but cultivated and sharpened it more than other workingmen [menials? agricultural laborers?], they have found this possible only in rebellion against their fate and against the bourgeoisie."[32]

Marx, who had by this time turned to the study of political economy, took a somewhat different tack. In his notebooks of 1844—manuscripts which are beginning to receive their deserved attention—Marx moved two Hegelian concepts, alienation and antithesis, onto the apparently substantial ground of English economic theory; that is to say, he transposed classical economics into Hegelian terms.

Alienation was for Hegel largely an epistemological concept. Transformed by the Young Hegelians into self-alienation, or self-estrangement, it became a philosophical code word for the social limitations upon human fulfillment. In this form it had been an important personal concept for the young Marx, as he drove himself towards his own fulfillment.[33] "The *complete loss* of man," one recalls, was the "universal suffering" in the light of which Marx first approached the working class.

Now, working over Smith and Ricardo, and the information supplied by his new friend from Manchester, Marx developed the concept further. "The laws of political economy," he wrote, "express the estrangement of the worker in his object thus: the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless . . . he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed the worker," and so forth. This was more swordsmanship. But occasionally his translations were brilliantly epigramatic. "Capital," he restated the droll labor theory of value (even better than Engels had done), "is man wholly lost to himself." And, as in his union of German philosophy and French politics, Marx introduced a historical dimension into this union of Hegel and Smith. In the modern laws of economic competition, he wrote, "the medieval proverb *nulle terre sans seigneur* [there is no land without its master] . . . is replaced by that other proverb, *l'argent n'a pas de maitre* [money knows no master] wherein is expressed the complete domination of dead matter over men."[34]

The concept of alienation related the world of economics, of "so-called material interests," to the world of Marx's concern; it revealed mundane inhumanity, as Eric Fromm has noted, in a manner analagous to that in which the Hegelian radicals had just exposed religious fantasy.[35] But it provided little new underpinning for expectations of proletarian revolution. In fact it contained a curious twist. To derive revolution from proletarian alienation one must assume rebellious self-assertion;[36] but the consequence of proletarian alienation, as Engels suggested, is brutishness. It should therefore follow that proletarian revolution would be more likely during the incipiency of capitalism, as men are first being thrust into the condition of self-loss, than in its maturity, when self-estrangement has become normal. This problem, obviously central to a historical examination of Marx's concept of proletarian mission, shall be discussed more fully later.

The best known of Marx's arguments for the anticipation of proletarian revolution came from his application of the other Hegelian concept, antithesis, to classical economics. Sometimes these applications were so direct as to be grotesque. "Proletariat and Wealth are opposites," he wrote in 1845. "As such they form a whole. . . . Private property as private property . . . is forced to maintain its own existence and thereby the existence of its opposite, the proletariat. . . . *Vice versa,* the proletariat is, as proletariat, forced to abolish itself and, with this, the opposite which determines it, . . . private property." And so on.[37] But even by then Marx had come upon the formulation that was to remain central to the theory of proletarian revolution with which

he is most closely associated. Political economy "in its own words," he had written in 1844, shows that "the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands," which thereby restores mercantile monopoly "in a more terrible form" and obliterates "the distinction between capitalist and land-rentier, like that between the tiller of the soil and the factory-worker . . . [so that] all of society must fall apart into the two classes—the property *owners* and the propertyless *workers*."[38] Thus, by essentially valid deductions from the premises of classical economics, Marx made his most audacious leap from epistemology to ontology: thesis and antithesis became social polarization.

Around this argument others were clustered: the increasing pauperization of the working class, which Engels had found to be a fact of life in the England of 1844, the association of working men in the process of production. In *The Communist Manifesto* all three lines of argument—polarization, pauperization, association—were employed, though at one point, in a remarkable display of his old Young Hegelian style, Marx appeared to deduce revolution from the latter alone:[39]

> The essential condition for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.

Up to 1848 revolution could almost be assumed; after 1850, on pain of admitting that one's commitment had become outmoded, revolution had to be carefully documented. In this sense Marx's retirement to the British Museum was an act of rebellion. As capitalism entered the period of its steady growth Marx undertook the formal development of the premises of its economics into a demonstration of its doom. The three volumes of

Capital were his final statement. They describe the revolutions through which industrialism emerged and explicate the crises to which its processes must lead. But as a prophecy of proletarian revolution—one must compare it in this respect to *The Communist Manifesto*—it is strangely dissapointing.

In *Capital* the concept of increasing pauperization is somewhat muted. Marx is now ready to admit conditions under which wages might increase. Even then, because of his increasing alienation from the process of production, the worker is still enslaved —but with a "golden chain." The argument rests, then, upon increasing "misery"—identified as of old with alienation—polarization and association:[40]

> Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital . . . grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour [that is, of the process of labor] at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

In the three volumes of *Capital* this is the single distinctly revolutionary postulation. And even here the specific prediction of proletarian revolution is supported largely by a more general concept of revolutionary social change.

VI

When "Marx" is refuted it is generally the concept of proletarian revolution resulting from the polarization of wealth on one side and poverty on the other that is toppled and re-toppled. It is an easy concept to criticize. Capitalist society has not polarized in the manner Marx anticipated; the proletariats of industrial nations have not become more revolutionary. But the usual criticism of this concept—which is essentially a criticism of the classical economics upon which Marx built with unimpeachable consistency—misses more than it hits.[41]

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In *Capital,* his final work, Marx made an important observation. "The advance of capitalist production," he noted, "develops a working-class which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of nature. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once fully developed, breaks down all resistance. . . . The dull compulsion of economic relations completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist. Direct force, outside economic conditions, is of course still used, but only exceptionally. . . . It is otherwise during the historic genesis of capitalist production."[42] Marx made this observation in the context of a discussion of the legal norms of early capitalist accumulation; he never related it to the problem of proletarian revolution. To have expected him to do so would have been to expect too much: it is seldom given to one man to both develop a revolutionary insight and define its limitations. This observation contains the key to the limitations of the Marxian anticipation of proletarian revolution—an anticipation which, though Marx maintained it until his death, belongs to the period of the "historic genesis" of capitalism.

Consider the "proletarians" whose revolutionary potential first revealed itself to Marx. Marx describes them, in the second of the two somewhat more specific references in the *Jahrbücher* essay, as those, "mainly of the middle estate," who are being *"artificially impoverished"* by the "rising *industrial* movement"; he distinguished them from "the *naturally arising* poor . . . the Christian Germanic serfs."[43] The particular distinction, which one might question, does not matter here. Whether "Germanic serfs" or impoverished middle class—either or both—Marx was talking of a proletariat in the process of formation; and for such a proletariat revolutionary anticipations made sense.

The threat of alienation, not the self-estrangement which capitalist production relations (as Marx and Engels understood them) ultimately produce, may create a climate of rebellion. Not when capitalist relations in their maturity seem ensconsed as laws of nature, but when, in their "historic genesis" they forcefully replace the values and traditions of earlier social relationships by the "domination of dead matter over men" do these relationships appear like hateful, alien impositions subject to revolutionary assault. And to this assault, not a bourgeoisie which

softly holds state power by golden chains, but a bourgeoisie still fighting older social classes for control, and for this contest necessarily calling the "masses" to its aid, is most vulnerable. All this Marx, at one time or another, seemed to know. But in the latter half of the 19th Century he could have accepted its implications only by denying his own revolutionary commitment.

Now another evaluation is possible. As the concept of proletarian revolution became outmoded in Western Europe and America, conditions analogous to those of Germany in 1844—conditions of belated bourgeois revolution—came into being in other parts of the world; there the concept assumed new vitality. One might notice, in this respect, that whereas the final, economic form of Marx's argument, which saw proletarian revolution as the culmination of capitalist development, has become a source of humor, petty pedantry or blindness, the initial argument, which saw proletarian revolution in terms of the political conditions of emerging capitalism, remains to be taken seriously. That the proletariat—and again a young proletariat—is "the only consistently revolutionary class" in a condition of belated bourgeois revolution, when the "instability, half-heartedness, and treachery of the democratic bourgeoisie" in its own defense is both caused and revealed by the pre-existence of more far-reaching ideologies, was rediscovered by Lenin in 1905.[44] And later in China. "It is quite evident," Mao wrote in 1940, "that whoever in China can lead the people to overthrow imperialism and the feudal forces will win the people's confidence." But the Chinese bourgeoisie, though it "retains . . . a certain degree of revolutionary quality . . . is extremely flabby politically and economically. . . ." Therefore "this responsibility," the completion of the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, ". . . cannot but fall on the shoulders of the proletariat."[45] Which is just about how Marx saw it when he first approached the problem of the *"positive* possibility of a German emancipation" almost a hundred years earlier. Tactics, which differed from those which had failed in mid-century Germany primarily in the greater role they assigned the "naturally arising . . . serfs," succeeded in Russia in 1917 and in China some three decades later.

It would be a Marxism truncated beyond recognition which had relevance only to conditions of belated (post-1793) bour-

geois revolution. For one thing, the success of tactics based on Marx's initial conceptions of proletarian revolution did not bring "the *complete re-winning of man.*" For another, Marx's concern with the revolutionary transformation of matured capitalist society was so overwhelming that all his concepts (including that of "the *complete re-winning of man*") are necessarily distorted in any other frame of reference. In fact, Marxian thinking remains relevant to the problems of industrial society—even if the specific concept of proletarian mission does not.

It was suggested at the start that the fruit of Marx's work was not so much his demonstration of a link between socialism and proletarian action as the calculus, the methodology, developed for the task: historical materialism, a general theory of social change. In order to single out those of Marx's arguments which are specific to the proletarian mission, discussion of its development has so far been avoided—though concepts derived from this general theory of revolutionary change actually carry the bulk of the argument for proletarian revolution in all of Marx's later writings.

Marx summarized this general theory in 1859:[46]

> The general conclusion at which I arrived and which . . . continued to serve as the leading thread in my studies may be briefly summed up as follows: [Here only that portion which relates directly to the logic of revolution will be included.] . . . At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution.

This is the plum. And while Hegelian predilections obviously facilitated such a formulation, it does not necessarily require a Hegelian cast of mind for its support. It consists of the rather straight-forward propositions that social structure normally tends to remain fixed while productive forces—in a broad sense, man's relationship to nature—tend, whether slowly or rapidly, to advance; the two being somehow related, a strain is created which puts a certain pressure upon, and tension within, the social

structure. This concept of social change is so prevalent today that few of Marx's refuters could get along without it.

Through this concept Marxism retains relevancy, as well as possible revolutionary applicability, even in those industrial nations where the proletariat slumbers most profoundly. Not because it bolsters die-hard hopes—as any theory of social crisis would—of sleeping toilers suddenly shaken awake, springing wide-eyed to their long neglected, pre-ordained tasks, but rather because this concept, though employed by Marx to support his anticipation of proletarian revolution, does not require a revolutionary proletariat for its own support.

Marxian political theory does require some human agency, some social class (defined in terms of the social tension itself), as the instrument of change. Here a careful line must be drawn. There is, especially in the United States, an old radical tradition which emphasizes the revolutionary force of economic and technological developments, but conceives of it as acting without the intermediacy of class conflict. Henry George, for example, argued that capitalism would itself lead to a truly human (essentially socialist) society if only it was unfettered of the outmoded feudal concept of land rent. Edward Bellamy, a decade later, argued that monopoly would itself lead to a truly human society if freed of the fetters of the outmoded capitalist concept of competition. Thorstein Veblen, in his theory of "cultural lag," gave this line of thought its generalized form. Today it continues to find expression in the argument of such groups as the Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution, which argues that automation could itself lead to a truly human society if unfettered of those outmoded concepts, belonging to a condition of scarcity, which predicate earnings upon employment. In each case the revolutionary leap requires a general enlightenment which is itself fostered by the critical economic or technological development. Employing a model of bourgeois revolution, especially its French and English forms, as its basic paradigm, the Marxian tradition sees social change in terms of class confrontation and requires a revolutionary class as the agency of a revolutionary transformation. To take issue at this point is to argue, most profoundly, *with* Marxism. To take issue at the assignment of a revolutionary role to some particular class or classes is to argue *within* Marxism.

It is not necessary, in the Marxian scheme of things, that the critical conflicts in a given society be between the exploiters and the exploited, between the uppermost and the least. In fact in this respect, as he was aware, the proletarian revolution Marx anticipated was to be peculiar. "The class-struggles of the ancient world," he once observed, "took the form chiefly of a contest between debtors and creditors."[47] Feudal society was not toppled by its serfs, but by the bourgeoisie. It may be suggested that in selecting the subject class of a social relationship, the class of "universal suffering," as the instrument of general, of final emancipation, Marx stretched his own paradigm to its breaking point.

FOOTNOTES

1. Fredrick Engels, "Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*," *Karl Marx: Selected Works*, ed. V. Adoratsky (New York: International Publishers, n.d.), II, p. 177.
2. "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis Feuer (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1959), pp. 73-74; Engels, "History of the Communist League" (1885), *Marx: Selected Works*, II, p. 12.
3. *Analyse de la doctrine de Babeuf* and the "Manifesto of Equals," in David Thomson, *The Babeuf Plot: The Making of a Republican Legend* (London: Kegan, Paus, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1947), pp. 29-34, also p. 42; *Basic Writings*, ed. Feuer, p. 37. If one is not too concerned with niceties of doctrine, this concept can be traced back even further. E. Harris Harbison ("Socialism in European History to 1848," in Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons, eds., *Socialism and American Life*, [Princeton, 1952], I, p. 40) notes that Winstanley saw the poor as the instrument of social regeneration in the 17th century.
4. Edward Hallett Carr, *Karl Marx: A Study in Fanaticism* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1934), p. 71.
5. Sir Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 14.
6. In E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 803.
7. Lewis S. Feuer, "The North American Origin of Marx's Socialism," *Western Political Quarterly*, XVI (March 1963); pp. 60-61; in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, Vintage ed. (New York, n.d.), p. 81.

8. In Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of his Life*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1936), p. 79.
9. "History of the Communist League," *Marx: Selected Works*, II, p. 7.
10. "Fortschritte der Sozialreform auf dem Kontinent," *The New Moral World*, Nov. 18, 1843, in *Karl Marx—Friedrich Engels: Werke*. (Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, 1961), I, pp. 490, 495. Retranslation from the German mine.
11. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Preface, 1859), trans. N. I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1904), p. 10.
12. "Der Kommunismus und die Augsburger 'Allgemeine Zeitung,'" *Werke*, I, p. 106.
13. *Critique of Political Economy* (Preface), p. 10.
14. "Der Kommunismus . . . ," *Werke*, I. 108.
15. See Frank E. Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 246, 249-50. For the usual functionalistic interpretation of the logic of the relationship between socialism and the working class ("After a comparatively short and necessarily futile attempt to persuade the privileged that they should support socialism for ethical reasons . . . the socialists naturally turned to the underprivileged." As for the workers, "socialism provided . . . the ideal which labor needed to become a force in society.") see Carl Landauer, *European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements From the Industrial Revolution to Hitler's Seizure of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 28.
16. *Marx: Selected Works*, II, 442.
17. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *Selected Works*, I, 238.
18. In Harry W. Laidler, *A History of Socialist Thought* (New York, 1927), p. 154.
19. "Zur Kritik der Hegelischen Rechtsphilosophie: Einleitung," *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1884 (January), *Werke*, I, 378-391. I began to work from the German before I realized that some English translations were available. The first few and last few paragraphs are in Feuer (ed.) *Basic Writings*, pp. 262-67. According to a general acknowledgement in the preface they are taken from a Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, translation—but I have been so far unable to locate it. The only complete translation I was able to find, in H.J. Stenning (trans.), *Selected Essays by Karl Marx* (New York: International Publishers, 1926), is too poor to be useable. Footnote 22 shall mark where I leave my own translation and pick up that in Feuer.
20. This is a pun on the word *"Massen,"* which means both "means" (measures) and "masses." Marx plays with it happily.
21. I have translated *"Aufhebung"* as "annulment" because of its conjunction with "positive." This word is central to Hegelian thinking. Even in ordinary useages it means both the raising and the destroying, the preservation and the abolition. Hegel said "we should recognize in it the speculative spirit of our language rising above the mere 'Either-or' of understanding." (*The Logic of Hegel*, trans. William Wallace, 2nd ed. [London: Oxford University Press, (1892) 1959], p. 180.) Its only equivalent in English is the starchy technical word "sublation."

22. From here I pick up the translation in Feuer.
23. Mehring, p. 68.
24. Feuer (ed.), p. 267.
25. *Selected Works,* I, 217.
26. *Ibid.,* p. 241.
27. "Wage-Labour and Capital," *Selected Works,* I, 253. The articles collected under this title first appeared in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in the spring of 1849.
28. *Selected Works,* II, 154-68.
29. "Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*" (1895), *Selected Works,* II, 174.
30. *Class Struggles in France, Selected Works,* II, 299. The articles collected under this title were published in the *Neu Rheinische Zeitung* in 1850. The last, from which the quotation was taken, appeared in October.
31. "Umrisse zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie," *Werke,* I, pp. 499-524.
32. Trans. Florence Kelley Wischenwetzky (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1892), pp. 295, 119, 177.
33. See Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1940), p. 111.
34. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, c.1959), pp. 71, 84, 63.
35. *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1964), pp. 46-48.
36. In what is perhaps Marx's fullest exposition of the revolutionary potential of the alienated condition—in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1846), ed. R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 78—a somewhat exaggerated description of social stratification is employed as well, so that only the assumption that workers will "assert themselves as individuals" is required. This particular exposition is also interesting in that it suggests the anarchistic implications of revolutionary argument predicated upon alienation:

    "For the proletarians . . . the condition of their existence, labour, and with it all the conditions of existence governing modern society, have become something accidental, something over which they, as separate individuals, have no control, and over which no *social* organization can give them control. . . . The worker is sacrificed from youth upwards and, within his own class, has no chance of arriving at the conditions which would place him in the other class. Thus, while the refugee serfs only wished to be free to develop and assert those conditions of existence which were already there, and hence, in the end, only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto . . . namely, labour. Thus, they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, individuals have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State. In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State."

37. Taken from an excerpt from *The Holy Family* in the introduction to *The German Ideology,* pp. xii-xiii.
38. *Manuscripts of 1844,* p. 67.
39. *Selected Works,* I, 218.
40. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol. I, Ed. F. Engels, trans. from 3rd German ed. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), pp. 677 (see also pp. 671-81), 836-37.
41. See Carr, pp. 258-78.
42. Vol. I, p. 809. At least once Marx's prophesy of proletarian revolution became so conditional as to express profound doubt. In 1872, returning from the Hague Congress at which the International was virtually demolished, Marx told an audience in Amsterdam: "Some day, the workers must conquer political supremacy, in order to establish the new organization of labour; they must overthrow the old political system whereby the old institutions are sustained. If they fail to do this, they will suffer the fate of the early Christians, who neglected to overthrow the old system, and who for that reason, never had a kindom in this world." (In Samuel Bernstein, *The First International in America* [New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1962], p. 160.)
43. Feuer (ed.), *Basic Writings,* p. 265.
44. V. I. Lenin, "The Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution," *Lenin: Selected Works,* trans. Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute (New York: International Publishers, n.d.), III, p. 40.
45. Mao Tse-tung, "On New Democracy," *Mao: Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1954) III, pp. 117-18.
46. Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy,* pp. 11-12.
47. *Capital,* I, 152.

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REPLY

Ronald Aronson

FOR A LONG TIME it has been all too obvious that the key sectors of the American working class are integrated into the capitalist system. This is a fact: proletarian class-consciousness does not exist in the United States. For radicals commited to socialism there have been several ways of meeting this situation—most of them dishonest. One way is to deny the fact: to argue, for example, that the workers are merely being deceived by their leaders, or that this is a highly unstable and temporary situation, or that most of the workers remain outside of the unions and the system. This makes it possible to believe still that a socialist commitment has an objective historical basis in the United States. Those who thus distort the reality to suit their commitment at least sense that to admit the reality is to undermine the very basis of the commitment. They know that being a socialist is hollow, a pure theoretical stance, a personal belief, outside of the real possibility of socialist politics.

Oscar Berland, on the other hand, frankly admits the changed reality. He argues, in effect, that Marxian analysis and a commitment to socialism need not be abandoned in spite of

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the absence of a revolutionary proletariat, if one only ceases to regard Marxism as a set of finished conclusions. That is, we must distinguish between Marxian theory as a method of radical social analysis and the established doctrines usually regarded as Marxism. Marxism, he says, has many components, some of which—the methodological ones—remain relevant today, and some of which—the concept of the proletariat—were faulty at their origins and have no meaning today. As if to shock us into agreeing, Berland spends most of his discussion showing the devious process by which Marx himself arrived at his concept of proletarian revolution. Berland insinuates–although he refuses to state it—that this concept was a dialectical *tour de force*, pasted together without solid theoretical and historical footing, evoked for political reasons, and is hardly central to Marxian theory.

Certainly one can only applaud the implied distinction between Marxian doctrine and Marxian analysis, and the call to abandon the dead wood of dogma to return to today's real world. Only with somesuch irreverance toward codified theory can we hope to understand this revolutionary world which yet lacks a revolutionary proletariat. Thus Berland's article begins as an honest confrontation with reality, as a flexible, a dialectical approach to Marxian theory. Unfortunately it becomes a caricature of Marxian theory, which plucks out the outmoded concepts, abstracts the useful ones, and returns to reality with the commitment to socialism and revolution unquestioned.

Berland's method is central to this process of evasion and distortion: he substitutes a biographical study of how the idea of proletarian revolution occurred to Marx for a study of what it means. It is a thorough, well-documented essay—and for that reason all the more dangerous. Berland seeks to lure us into rejecting ideas because of what he views as their slipshod formation-process, to reject them without judging their internal coherence, their place within the body of Marxian concepts, or their historical validity.

Now in depicting the origins of Marx's main concepts he never criticizes directly. He does not say, "This is wrong," and explain why. He approaches the offending ideas sideways, attempting to discredit by associating them with habits he assumes we all reject. He accepts it as given that an argument loses

validity if it was formulated to prove connections that we already believe to exist or in order to meet the needs of a larger argument. He takes Hegelian dialectic to be a substitute for analysis which likewise leads to suspicious formulations. Thus the idea of proletarian revolution arose from an "apparent defect in logic" in which the proletariat was invoked to meet Germany's revolutionary needs, and in which revolution was invoked to meet the proletariat's needs. Marx's connection of proletarian emancipation to universal emancipation is mere "swordsmanship," as is his statement that the "more the worker produces the less he has to consume." The dialectic of capitalist society whereby a property-owning and propertyless class polarize and confront each other, is Marx's "most audacious leap from epistemology to ontology."

Such formulations make it painfully clear that Berland is not really interested in the structure, coherence and validity of Marxian theory. He seems to prefer the Lockean "plain historical method" which would pass off a chronological account of an idea's genesis as an explanation of its meaning. To understand Marxian theory we would need an entirely different approach. We would have to go beyond the specific biographical process in which Marx arrived at his ideas and instead study Marxian theory itself. We would be only marginally interested in abstracting from the body of Marxian ideas to view their birth-process. We would rather confront them head-on, asking "What does Marx say?" and "What does he mean?" and "How do these notions hang together?" and, above all, "Were they and are they historically correct?"

But the most disturbing trait of Berland's analysis is that it remains external. It stays comfortably outside of the issues discussed, never entering them, grappling with them, or taking a direct stand. Thus, although his essay often becomes anti-philosophical Hegel-baiting, although it is often a biographical critique of ideas, it hardly appears as grotesque as I make it seem. It appears to be much softer, much milder. Berland attempts to discredit the concept of proletarian revolution by insinuation, indirectly. While, for example, he pretends to be placing proletarian revolution within the body of Marxian thought, the essay's real but unstated thrust is to wipe out the

notion altogether. This is characteristic: it is an argument which is not conscious of itself.

II

And so by the time we arrive at Berland's statement of the "plum," we may feel vaguely that something is missing. Certainly we applaud the attempt to make Marxism relevant, and we know that proletarian revolution is nonsense today. But in all this Marxism has somehow become abstract. A single analytical principle has been detached from the revolutionary social theory *par excellence,* and the concrete revolutionary meaning of that theory has been lost.

Now Berland agrees that the hallmark of Marxian theory lies in its unique conjoining of theory and practice. As Berland says, the goal for any radical social theory must be to comprehend the social dynamic. And it must also identify the trends and forces which lead to change, and indicate the agency—the class—capable of transforming society. Linked to the actual revolutionary activity of the class, theory helps to radicalize—to educate—the potential revolutionary class. It explains the experience of the class—illuminating actual suffering by pointing to its causes. In showing the causes and implying the alternative, social theory helps to focus and guide the revolutionary class toward overthrowing those causes. Without this orientation towards practice, historical materialism becomes a fruitful hypothesis for social study—but only that.

In isolating this concept Berland is attempting to take the first, necessarily destructive steps in liberating radical social theory from those of its conclusions which were relevant to an earlier form of capitalist society. He recognizes clearly that a new and, in a sense, post-Marxian analysis is needed, which focuses on American capitalism's current and emerging opponents. The conclusions and prescriptions of earlier social theory must be changed as the society itself changes, and so Marxism can hardly be passed as doctrine from generation to generation.

Berland's goal gives his essay a stimulating, irreverent and exploratory current. But in spite of his eminently practical intentions, he makes Marxism abstract in the process of liberating radical theory from finished doctrines. We are holding the

plum but the tree has been cut away. Although his purpose is a new connection of historical materialism with revolutionary activity, most of Berland's article, in fact, seeks to convince us of the very artificiality of the connection when it occurs in Marx. In fact Berland's analysis of the process by which Marx arrived at the concept of proletarian revolution attempts to persuade us that it is implausible, hasty and separable from the real and valid body of Marxian thought.

But the proletariat is the only class that Marx designated as revolutionary in a capitalist society, as capable of transforming the theoretical, philosophical and economic critiques of bourgeois society into an historical event. Without centering itself on the actual historical existence of the proletariat, Marxian theory would have had no more connection with revolutionary politics than Keynesian economics or Mills' *Power Elite*. The most exploited class, the producers of the society's means of existence, the most numerous class: without the revolutionary action of this class, socialism as we have come to know it would cease to have any meaning. To eliminate exploitation and to establish democracy is for the proletariat to directly control the machinery it already operates. Workers' control—this is the concrete immediate meaning of socialism in Marxian theory. Because of its strategic position the proletariat's act in ending its own exploitation is at once the structural transformation of the whole society.

Now it is certainly possible to consider Marxism as we know it without the proletariat. But at that point it ceases to be a revolutionary theory. Viewed as revolutionary theory, Marxism is not a set of detachable analyses and concepts, but a general theory of capitalist society whose ultimate validation can only be the transformation of that society by the workers themselves. We would then see that the analyses in *Capital*—of the labor theory of value, which details the exploitation of worker by capitalist, or of the necessity of the system which the worker produces to grow out of his control, and to fall into constant contradiction with itself—require no spoken revolutionary pronouncements to be revolutionary. We would then see that Hegelian dialectic has a vital role in Marx's historical analysis, as well as in *Capital*—not as the source of intellectual "leaps" but as an aid to grasping the actual social dialectic. We would then see that the union in Marx of French socialism, English political

economy and German philosophy is not mere "sword-swishing" but a genuine synthesis which must be appreciated and criticized on its own merits. In short, to lift the concept of revolutionary proletariat out of Marxian theory, as Berland has done, is to disembowel it, to sever it from its meaning as revolutionary theory, to caricature the structural analysis of capitalism as exploitation, and to reject the view of history as economic development amid class struggle on which it is based.

But this may appear odd. I began by applauding Berland's desire to make Marxian theory relevant to today, and now I demand that it be viewed as a single coherent theory from which we should avoid detaching useful concepts. Isn't this a return to the dogmas of Marxism?

In fact I disagree with Berland over *how* we can develop a contemporary social theory on the base of Marxian theory, not over our need to do this. Berland's approach is to deny the no-longer-relevant concepts and extract what remains useful. In this case we adopt the method but reject its results. I have insisted, on the contrary, that we begin squarely in Marxian theory and the society it described. We must appreciate its peculiar coherence, see its relevance and validity for the historical period for which it was written. Then we must face the disturbing fact: events have invalidated Marxian theory. Berland and I agree that it is sheer romanticism to deny that fact, to claim that the proletariat is still somehow revolutionary. But if we admit that fact, it is equally evasive to account for it by arguing that Marx was wrong on this portion of his theory. We have seen that this scuttles the whole theory. There is another way to account for it. In fact, however valid and historically relevant Marxian theory may have been at one time, events have passed it by. While much of its methods and analysis remain pertinent, it has, as revolutionary social theory, become irrelevant.

Whether we seek to develop a contemporary radical theory or to make Marxian theory itself relevant, the process is the same. If we agree that Marxian theory was once generally true of capitalist society, we must trace the process whereby the development of the society diverged from the tendencies outlined in the theory. This means reappraising the possible revolutionary role of the proletariat. It means questioning the objective

historical basis for socialism. We must ask what are the conditions and possibilities for revolutionary action in an advanced capitalist society. Is material need the only possible radical need? What are the current economic tendencies, as compared with those of the past? What social dynamic has made possible the rise of the new left? Is the nature of American society still determined by its underlying socio-economic structure? Or, unlike earlier capitalism, has the control of consciousness become itself necessary to sustain production?

No doubt many other such lists of pressing and relevant questions could be drawn up. They would all be characterized, I think, by this basic fact: they are formulated in terms of Marxian theory. They implicitly accept Marxian theory as valid for an earlier stage of capitalist society and seek, after admitting its present irrelevance, to build a theoretical structure from it which would parallel and account for the key changes capitalism has undergone since Marx's time. As the society has added new layers to its original basic structure, so must the theory. And as the society has transformed itself in the process, so must the theory. The "Marxism" corresponding to this society may well be radically new, but it too would be a coherent and unified revolutionary theory. Its construction will be impossible, however, if we try to solve the irrelevance of Marxism as Berland does by detaching the relevant concepts from the irrelevant ones, by trying to refute as originally invalid those which are no longer relevant. A new theory will be impossible if we do not see the earlier theory as a whole, as a revolutionary analysis of a society as a whole. In a sense, then, we must bring the whole of Marxian theory forward into contemporary society, rather than detaching and refuting it piecemeal.

III

Can we then simply go ahead with this task, ask the questions, do the research? Not yet. Not as long as Marxists doggedly assume that their commitments and their analysis remain politically relevant for radicals today. Not as long as they smugly explain away the indifference of much of the new left to socialism as mere anti-intellectualism. A new revolutionary theory will never be built without first facing the consequences

of the historical changes in American capitalism and the American working class. That is, Marxists must begin by facing themselves and their own irrelevance. This would mean, for example, taking seriously the fact that current radical politics has virtually nothing to do with the working class, and less to do with socialism. Socialists or Marxists may be active, even in key leadership positions, but hardly because they are working for socialism. However they may understand the workings of the American economy and the general movements of current history, Marxists can hardly claim to be engaged in socialist activity. The objective economic and political conditions for such activity do not exist.

No doubt it is possible to admit the apparent internal stability of the capitalist system and the quiescence of the American working class and yet continue to call oneself a Marxist. This is precisely what most of us do. But what does it mean? Certainly it reflects our intellectual orientation, our analysis of American society, and our personal desire for socialism. But being a Marxist today in the United States has little more objective political meaning than being an existentialist. It is not a political identity, but a personal one. With the decline of a working class movement, Marxists have lost their connection with the only historical force that can give political meaning to their commitments. Socialism in America has become a question of personal conviction, a belief in what is good and right, identification with the revolutionary forces overseas, but no more than this.

The mistake is to make it more, to identify personal commitment with historical necessity. If one wishes to remain a Marxist in America, and presumes this to be more than an act of personal faith or commitment to a set of analytical principles, it is necessary to separate theory from practice, to minimize the now-meaningless concepts of Marxism and so distort its meaning. Thus the Marxist can continue to write and read articles, to give and listen to talks, to criticize and claim to guide political activity—without facing for a moment the nature of his abstract and unhistorical commitment to a socialism without a proletariat, without seeing that he represents only a theory and not an objective historical force.

By mistaking his personal commitment to socialism for a real

historical trend, the Marxist can view his role as making Americans "see the relevance" of socialism, as working to bring about "socialist consciousness"—whatever that might mean at a time when proletarian class consciousness no longer exists. Although the class whose exploitation and strategic relationship to the means of production made it the agency for revolutionary change is solidly "in" the system, socialism is still taken for granted as the "right" and "necessary" goal of radical political activity. To thus assume socialism, to confuse one's personal commitment with historical necessity is, after all, to be unhistorical. It is to regress to a Platonic conception of a political vision formulated apart from present historical currents and then applied to reality. If we have read Marx, we should know better.

Now to face these facts is to admit we are at zero. It is to realize our political irrelevance. We may understand a great deal, but little of it is related to the actual prospect for a movement. Only by seeing this can we ask the questions which matter most today. Not, "How do we spread our view?" and "How do we create socialist consciousness?", but rather, "Is socialism historically relevant any more?" and "How does the concept of socialism make sense without being rooted in the producing classes?" If our theory is commited to practice, if we are, after all, revolutionary historical materialists, we must face the long-range tendencies, contradictions and possibilities of *this* society—and not one corresponding to the categories of classical Marxism.

No doubt this appears to be a flat and uninspiring conclusion. It offers no insight into how socialism might be relevant, not even the hint of a new theory for a new movement. I have argued for Marxism's irrelevance and said that we have no objective political basis for a commitment to socialism. This is a negative analysis, but being positive in this situation is to be dishonest. It is to perpetuate illusions. It is to avoid entering the uncertain process of reconstituting our identity.

Books

MONOPOLY CAPITAL

Michael Lebowitz

Baran, Paul, and Sweezy, Paul. *Monopoly Capital*. Monthly Review Press. New York. 1966. $8.95. Pp. 402.

Unlike Paul Baran's *The Political Economy of Growth*, Paul Sweezy's *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, and for that matter, Karl Marx's *Capital*, *Monopoly Capital* is meant to be widely read. The book is oriented neither to the economist nor to the rabbinical Marxist, but rather to a non-specialized general reader who wishes to understand monopoly capitalism. In their preface to *Monopoly Capital* Baran and Sweezy state that the book is addressed to people both in the United States and in underdeveloped countries who are "in a state of genuine ignorance" about monopoly capitalism.

In their earlier works both of the authors individually demonstrated their ability to work with and to handle abstract theoretical arguments in a manner which won respect from academics and Marxists. This joint effort, however, is oriented differently, and it is crucial to keep this in mind when examining the book. Orientation to the general reader explains the

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