

# **Karl Marx: Racist**

*Caminante, no hay camino; se hace camino en andar. (Wayfarer, there is no road. You make the road by going there.)*

SPANISH SAYING

*The revolution devours its children, but unfortunately not all of them.*

BOGDANOV

# **Karl Marx:** --- **Racist**

**NATHANIEL WEYL**



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# Preface

A few words about important sources referred to in this book:

(1) The first effort to publish a complete and authoritative edition of the writings of Marx and Engels was launched in 1927 in Berlin and continued until the Nazis came to power in 1933. Its full title is *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Historisch-Kritische Gesamt-Ausgabe*. Issued by the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow, volumes one and two were edited by David Riazanov and appeared in Berlin in 1927–1930. Riazanov, an editor of scrupulous honesty and scholarship, was expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Volumes three through six were edited by V. Adoratsky and appeared in Berlin in 1931–1932. Adoratsky and several of his assistants were liquidated in the Stalin purges of the 1930s.

The volumes of the *Gesamt-Ausgabe* are divided into parts, and the parts are sometimes divided into halves, each half or part being a separate book. This edition will be referred to here as *MEGA*. A reference of the sort *MEGA*, III, 1 (1), 127 would mean volume III, part 1, first half, page 127.

(2) A later edition is *Marx-Engels Werke* (East Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1964–68, thirty-nine volumes of text plus two supplementary volumes and one index volume). This edition was edited by the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. It will be referred to here as *MEW*. A typical citation would be *MEW*, IX, 384, meaning volume 9, page 384 of the *Werke*.

(3) An official English edition of the complete works of Marx and Engels started publication in 1975. The citation is Karl Marx–Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975—). By mid-1979, about ten volumes had been published, covering the writings of Marx and Engels until about age thirty. This work is the combined product of the Communist parties of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, with the

participation of such politically committed scholars as David McLellan.

(4) In this book, I refer to the Marx-Engels correspondence solely by date and author. The German text will be found in *MEGA* or *MEW*. Similarly, articles by Marx and Engels in the *Rheinische Zeitung* or *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* will generally be designated solely by author and date of publication.

**Part I:**  
**Formative Forces**

# Man of Rage and Envy

When Karl Marx died in 1883, a dispassionate and informed observer might have concluded that here was a genius who had achieved nothing. Marx's philosophical panorama of human society seemed a tissue of logical fallacies and unwarranted assumptions which few people who counted for anything in Victorian Europe took seriously. His historical writings appeared more as exhortations to his handful of followers than as dispassionate and factual analyses of the course of events. Most of Marx's prophecies had been refuted by reality.

Although he had lived in England for more than thirty years, Marx knew scarcely any of the intellectual leaders and creative minds of that country. Whenever he had led small revolutionary organizations, he split and destroyed them when his dogmas and leadership were challenged.

As for his personal life, he caused his loyal wife so much pain and agony that in 1862, by no means the worst year for the Marx family, he wrote Engels: "My wife tells me every day that she wishes she and the children were in their graves. . . ." "A lousy life like this is not worth living," he once said. As he grew older and became increasingly aware of the limitations of his theories and the discrepancies between his theoretical edifice and reality, he abandoned completion of successive volumes of his magnum opus *Das Kapital* in order to take copious notes on a variety of subjects in the British Museum and dabble in mathematics. Fewer than twenty people attended his funeral and the event was unnoticed in the world press.

Our imaginary dispassionate observer might have concluded that Marx was a genius who had spent his energies in titanic intellectual labors and in the end had plowed the seas.



## The Apotheosis of Marx

And yet this hypothetical observer would have been wrong, hopelessly wrong.

Nine decades after his death, the doctrines, theories and visions of Karl Marx exert more influence on society than those of any other figure, living or dead, with the exception of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul. Marxism and Christianity have become the two major surviving serious contenders for the allegiance of that portion of mankind which experiences the need for an integrated philosophy of life offering an unequivocal life-purpose.

Yet the conflict between Marxism, on the one hand, and humanism and scientific thinking, on the other, remains unbridgeable. As Communist societies evolve toward modernity, the contradictions between the theoretical dogmas and the dialectical method of Marxism and the real world that they have had to cope with become more and more evident. A whole class of what might be called "rice Marxists" has developed, people who conform to the established rituals and ideological incantations, but whose actual mental and practical life is lived on entirely different levels.<sup>2</sup>

What has happened to the other contenders? The most serious of the modern challenges which failed was national socialism. Had Nazi Germany won World War II, could Nazism have played the role which communism plays in the contemporary world? This is the sort of question that can never be answered with any degree of certainty. My personal guess is that it could not have done so. Even if every Jew on earth had been consigned to the gas ovens, the Nazi *Weltanschauung* could never have been presented to mankind as a universal secular religion because it was based on racial hierarchy. Universal religions must at least pretend to offer the prospect of salvation to all mankind.

Other former contenders were the non-Christian religions. Some of them—Judaism and the Parsee faith, for example—seem too closely bound up with the history and institutions of small minorities of mankind to play a major world role. Most of the great Oriental religions seem to be moving toward a fossil condition. To be sure, they still inspire the fervent faith of peasant masses. To the extent that industrialization and modernization assume forms that alienate or ignore these masses, religious revival may emerge suddenly as the dominant political force in a nation, as occurred in Iran in the late 1970s. Muslim fundamentalism can coalesce the envy and hatred of masses who have not shared proportionately in prosperity, arouse xenophobia, and create populist movements of frenzied reaction. But can it do anything more positive? Does Islam in

its fundamentalist forms have any positive contribution to make to the modernization process?

The intellectuals and the elites in Third World countries often pay lip service to the established non-Christian religions because these represent tradition, ritual, and nationality. But the great majority of the younger, college-bred generations of these nations are not studying the ancient faiths. They are studying the science, technology, and social institutions of Western civilization in order to transform their own societies in the Western image.

What this implies is either a process of westernization based on totalitarian models, and hence largely Marxist in orientation, or one that is more individualistic, more concerned with freedom and representative government and hence closer to the Christian heritage.

### **The Importance of Warts**

Oliver Cromwell once ordered his portraitist: "Mr. Lely, I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me, and not flatter me at all; but remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me, otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it."

The warts must be in the portrait. But not merely the warts. Biographies of great men by their valets are often singularly unrewarding because they feed envy without providing enlightenment.

But if Marx's theories have been disproved, why do they sway such a large portion of mankind? How does it happen that almost everywhere in the non-Communist world powerful parties exist that march under the banner of Marxism and that the ideas of Marx, however much distorted, shape the national policies and transform the social institutions of free countries?

There are no certain answers to these questions, but Marx seems to have created the theoretical foundations of modern totalitarianism, both in its class-war and in some of its race-war forms, as a rationalization—or pretended justification—for the prodigious destructive drives which distorted his personality.

This involved a radical transformation of the ideas and movements that lay at hand. These transformations were impressive intellectual achievements in that they gave the psychological impetus necessary for the creation of ruthless revolutionary movements oriented toward monolithic power and dictatorship.



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## Rejection of Ethical Humanism

The socialist and social reform movements that the young Marx encountered usually appealed to all classes to do something about the misery in which the European masses lived. Their appeal was to human decency and compassion, to man's sense of justice, often to Christian duty. These ethically motivated social reformist movements brought about such needed changes as a shorter working day, protection of child labor, prison reform, and the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. Breaking with this approach, Marx denounced socialists like Moses Hess who appealed to the compassion and moral sense of all men of good will. He called them sentimentalists, philistines, and, objectively speaking, agents of the capitalist class.

Marx substituted a schematized philosophy of history. All history was the history of class struggle. The level of economic technology and organization of a society determined which classes would inevitably be victorious in these struggles. The final class war was to be between the dominant bourgeoisie and the exploited proletariat. This struggle differed from its predecessors in at least one important respect. Marx claimed to have discovered the economic laws of capitalism and to have proved that every advance in technology and productivity must be accompanied by the increasing impoverishment of the working class and by the grinding of the middle class down into the ranks of the proletariat. It followed that the revolution which would bring the proletariat to power must be the violent explosion of a totally dispossessed class in the sharpest possible contrast to the evolutionary way in which the capitalist class had gradually superseded, displaced, and incidentally married into the previously ruling landed aristocracy.

The "increasing misery" prediction was vital to Marx's cataclysmic concept of historic materialism and proletarian dictatorship. It was psychologically attractive to a man who luxuriated in visions of general destruction, but was based on unsound economic thinking and was controverted by statistical evidence available to Marx at the time that he wrote *Das Kapital*. Marx solved the problem of inconvenient statistical data in a characteristic Marxist way: he suppressed the evidence.<sup>3</sup>

## The Midwives of History

The "increasing misery" theory gave the socialist and Communist movements several new and vitally important ingredients. Of these, undoubtedly the most



important was the assurance of inevitable triumph. This justified every hardship, every sacrifice, every setback. The Marxists saw themselves as a clandestine elite uniquely able to foresee the course of history. To dedicate one's entire life to the revolutionary struggle became the most meaningful decision possible in an era of world revolution.

This belief in inevitable victory also appealed to envy, malice, and spite. The poor, the disinherited, the failed intellectuals, the out-of-work professionals—all of them knew that a day must come when the rich and the powerful would be trampled into the dust. On that day, the last should be first and the first last.

Another vitally important psychological contribution of Marx was to create a new morality standing in opposition to Christianity and all other religions. Every sane person must live by a moral code. He must believe that there is a real difference between good and evil, that ethical standards are not mere subjective delusions. Otherwise, there is no real difference between saint and sadist; laws are mere arbitrary exercises of naked force; civilization is a sham; only the accident of power separates hero from beast.

Until the nineteenth century, religion provided the standards and sanctions for moral conduct. To be good was to obey God's commandments; to be evil was to flout them. But during Marx's youth and young manhood, David Friedrich Strauss and other European scholars cogently challenged the historicity of the Bible. The divine sanction for morality provided by the Old and New Testaments seemed to be crumbling into dust.

A generation before Marx, Hegel had propounded a unified philosophy of law, history, morality, and all social institutions. Writing from the standpoint of a devout Lutheran, Hegel was really saying that history was a progression toward what he called man's achievement of freedom under God. Different civilizations had represented successive thrusts toward that goal; progress was not linear, but the resultant of successive resolutions of conflict. It followed that the morality of the most advanced people of the age—in Hegel's opinion, the Prussians—was superior to that of all rival and preceding moralities because it represented the closest approximation mankind had yet attained toward its goal.

Marx adopted the Hegelian system, but, as he put it, turned it right side up. Ideas did not determine external reality, but rather external reality determined ideas. The culture of an era, its institutions, values, and morals, could be viewed as expressions of the collective interests of whatever class dominated society. The intellectual heritage of nineteenth century Europe was primarily a rationalization or epiphenomenon of either capitalism or the feudal system that capitalism was destroying. But since the proletariat was the class historically destined to inherit the earth, proletarian morality must be superior to that of the moribund capitalist society.

## A Modern Inferno

But what was proletarian morality? The actual morals of the working class tended to be a somewhat blurred reflection of those of their capitalist or feudal masters. Nor did Marx have any illusions that the proletarians were gentler, finer, nobler, or more sensitive than their capitalist oppressors. On the contrary. Since the proletariat was being ground down more and more into the grime of poverty, squalor and subhuman conditions as capitalism advanced, it followed that, at the moment of victory, the working class would be utterly debased from a moral standpoint.

The proletarian dictatorship which Marx envisaged in the only book he ever wrote which touched on the subject was very far from the "humanist" vision of mankind that many people imagine he entertained. Communism in its revolutionary form, he wrote, would express "envy and the desire to reduce all to a common level." It would dehumanize man:

In completely negating the *personality* of man, this type of communism is really nothing but the logical expression of private property. General *envy*, constituting itself as a power, is the disguise in which *greed* re-establishes itself and satisfies itself, only in *another* way. . . . In the approach to *woman*, as the spoil and handmaiden of communal lust is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the long, long tunnel, there would be a utopian socialist commonwealth, the contemplation of which bored Marx so much that he devoted only a few bland and platitudinous pages to its features. The real and exciting prospect was half a century of the most bloody class wars imaginable, devastating the entire industrialized world, after which the proletariat would be steeled and fit to rule, would institute a dictatorship, and would bring man down to a condition of "infinite degradation."

This Marxist morality was expressed succinctly by Lenin when he said that everything that furthers the proletarian revolution is moral and everything that hinders it is immoral. Or, as Berthold Brecht put matters in *Die Massnahme*: "Sink into the mud; embrace the butcher, but change the world. It needs it."

Thus, Marx provided communism with an objective morality of its own. At the same time, he swept aside Christianity and all other religious faiths. Some of these were seen merely as the archaic rationalizations of precapitalist societies. Christianity was a morality imposed on slaves by their masters to keep them quiet. Religion was "the spirit of spiritless conditions" and "the opium of the people."

This new morality might better have been characterized as a new immorality. It refused to recognize the moral problem of means and ends. The revolutionary end justified every means, however ghastly, later supplying the foundation of the theory and conduct of Stalinist Russia and the moral justification for the death camps of Kolyma. After Marx's death, Engels, a man less driven by internal destructive impulses, cast the Marxist doctrine in a milder and more civilized form. Social democratic parties and labor movements had sprouted throughout Western Europe. They sometimes accepted democratic institutions and often favored measures designed to improve the actual conditions of labor.

They did not share, nor did they know about, the master's doomsday vision of proletarian dictatorship. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in which this vision was articulated, remained unpublished and so beyond their ken. How shocked the sexually prudish and conventionally minded socialist workmen of the Victorian and Edwardian eras would have been to read Marx's description of the proletarian dictatorship phase of communism in which "this movement of opposing universal private property finds expression in the brutish form of opposing to marriage (certainly a form of exclusive private property) the community of women, in which a woman becomes a piece of communal and common property" and in which "woman passes from marriage to general prostitution. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

### The Corrupting Force

Wherever the movement followed the vision of its founding father, it tended to become a morally corrupting force in both the Communist and socialist parties. Honorable and decent people were drawn into these movements by revulsion against class and racial oppression, by compassion for the poor, or perhaps by a moral anger against injustices springing from inequality. As they became indoctrinated into the Communist, or Marxist, movement, these motivations were slowly changed. The recruits were subjected to a type of indoctrination tantamount to progressive moral corruption. Those who resisted this process tended either to drop out of the movement or else they never advanced within it to the echelons of real power. Those who were both corruptible and capable emerged as professional revolutionaries, men devoid of compassion for the class they claimed to represent, motivated by anger and envy, and, as recent history has shown, prepared to commit any and every crime in the name of their cause.

But one should not oversimplify. The survivors in this process of moral corruption were also frequently men and women of stronger faith, courage, and will than those who dropped by the wayside. They had the soldierly virtues of



obedience, discipline, and loyalty. Such virtues are Janus-faced, sometimes leading to monstrous crimes. The motto of Himmler's SS was *Meine Ehre ist Treue* ("My Honor Is Loyalty").

Sidney Hook and later scholars have made pioneer studies resuscitating some of Marx's earlier writings to depict him as a sort of pragmatist or instrumentalist and to present Marxism as a philosophy of creative action. Certainly there are eloquent passages in Marx's writings that can be so interpreted. Perhaps the most famous—and perhaps also the most ludicrous from a historical standpoint—is from his *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world; the point is to *change* it."

Was one supposed to imagine that all previous philosophers had lived in ivory towers and that Karl Marx alone was destined to lead philosophy into the arena of political conflict? But what about Plato? How did it happen that Plato trained his aristocratic disciples in politics in the hope that, should they seize power as city tyrants, they would rule as philosopher-kings? And why did Aristotle serve as tutor to Alexander the Great? Was he not determined to shape the mind of the man destined to conquer most of the civilized world so he would govern it in accordance with the precepts of Aristotelian ethics and politics? Marx knew all this. He was not an ignoramus, but a highly competent classics scholar. However, he wrote mainly for a discontented demimonde of pseudointellectuals, people who were easily beguiled by bombastic phrases that distorted history.

The really significant point about the passage I have just quoted lies deeper. The only sort of action which Marx envisaged and endorsed was that needed to accelerate the supposedly inevitable social revolution. The revolutionist was not a creator, but merely a midwife.

(And, incidentally, while there have been many philosophers who yearned to return to the womb, Marx is unique in the frequency with which he writes about bursting out of it. Lewis S. Feuer argues that this is merely further evidence of Marx's hatred of his mother. Other psychiatrists have elaborated on this theory, but true or false, it is largely irrelevant to our area of inquiry.)

Now this midwifery means in essence a prohibition of any sort of creative or positive social action. True Marxists will urge reforms only if they believe that their advocacy will hasten the triumph of communism. If the proposed action is constructive, they will generally condemn it on the grounds that it will prolong the life of capitalism. One of the first things Communists are taught is not to give money to beggars. Christian charity is not only useless, it is evil. Let the poor starve: one hopes their hunger and misery will drive them to revolt.

Thus, people who devote their energies to useful and humane causes and men and women who seek constructive solutions to the pressing economic, social, and political problems of the day are treated by true Marxists with contempt and

harsh condemnation. Their activities are pernicious, merely delaying Armageddon.

Just as the Marx who praised courage, manliness, and love of struggle was characterized as a physical coward by some of his contemporaries, so the Marx who extolled action to revolutionize society in fact created a philosophy which rejects all humane and constructive action.

### **Triumph of the Destructive Personality**

Marx's racial hatreds and his assiduous search for a scientific philosophy that would justify his prejudices, his phobias, and his hierarchic racial system are the main subjects of this book. His quest can best be understood in terms of the psychic needs of a human being nourished by visions of volcanic destruction. The underlying causes of this sort of character deformation are in dispute, but clearly an intellectual, a man who has been taught that he has moral obligations to his fellow human beings, does not vent that sort of destructiveness in the primitive, mindless manner of the psychopathic criminal. If he is a genius—and Karl Marx was unquestionably a genius if that word has any precise meaning—then he creates systems which seem to justify and make rational the expression and acting out of his destructiveness. His philosophy may contain bizarre constructs of false premises and unsound inferences. Its foundations may be the quicksand of suppressed data, falsified evidence, and wrongheaded predictions, but if such a man has the ability to create an imaginary world in which the hate-saturated and envy-driven flotsam and jetsam of modern society feel emotionally secure, if he has dreamt a world for which millions will sacrifice their careers, their freedom and their lives, then he will move history.

### **Marx's Racism**

In succeeding chapters, I propose to show that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were neither internationalists nor believers in the equal rights of all races and peoples. They opposed the struggles for national independence of those races and peoples that they despised. They believed that the "barbaric" and "ahistoric" peoples who comprised the immense majority of mankind had played no significant role in history and were not destined to do so in the foreseeable future. They regarded them as obstacles to the forward sweep of history. They considered them as objects rather than as subjects. They were people who *ought* to be conquered and exploited by the more advanced nations. Some of these inferior



stocks were peoples who *ought* to be eradicated and swept from the surface of the earth.

Some explanation of the word *racism* is in order. I am not using the term merely to denote the belief that some races are innately more able, more vigorous, and more intelligent than others. That was the consensus opinion of educated people in Marx's time. It was a view held by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, and other American statesmen. Philosophers like David Hume and Montesquieu concurred in it.

The sort of racism I have in mind contains two separate, but interrelated, strands. The first is hatred and loathing. Take, for example, Marx's and Engels' private characterization of their great rival for the leadership of the German socialist movement, Ferdinand Lassalle, as a "water-polack Jew," "the little kike," "Jew Braun," "Izzy," "Baron Izzy," "Izzy the Bounder."<sup>6</sup>

Consider the frequency with which Marx used the term *nigger* in his correspondence with Engels instead of the emotionally neutral German word *Neger*. Or that Engels regarded *niggers* and *idiots* as synonyms.<sup>7</sup> Or the charming comment which Engels made when he learned that Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, a physician who had a small amount of Negro blood in his veins, was running as a socialist for the Municipal Council of the Fifth Arrondissement, a district which also contained the Paris Zoo: "Being in his quality as a nigger a degree nearer to the rest of the animal kingdom than the rest of us, he is undoubtedly the most appropriate representative of that district."<sup>8</sup> On a lower level of antipathy, Engels classified the Greeks as one of "the lousy Balkan peoples," adding: "These wretched, ruined fragments of one-time nations, the Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and other robber bands, on behalf of which the liberal Philistine waxes enthusiastic, are unwilling to grant each other the air they breathe and feel obliged to cut each other's greedy throats."<sup>9</sup>

At a time when Prussia was contemplating the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark, Marx rushed into print with a characterization of Scandinavians as inferior. Scandinavianism, he thundered in his newspaper, *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, meant enthusiasm for "the brutal, dirty, piratical old-Norse nationality," which showed its civilizational level in "brutality toward women, permanent drunkenness, and tearful sentimentality that alternates with berserk fury."<sup>10</sup>

One could go on with this sort of thing almost indefinitely.

The second and more important aspect of Marx's and Engels' racism was to justify conquest and domination of the lesser and more "barbaric" breeds of the human family by the peoples of Germanic or West European origin. (It is of some interest in this context that Marx in 1880, toward the end of his life, copied out

this sentence from one of Sir Henry Maine's works: "Modern research conveys a stronger impression than ever of the separation between the Aryan races and races of other stocks."<sup>11</sup>)

On February 15, 1849, Engels echoed Marx in hopefully predicting terror and devastation against the Russian peoples on a scale that would actually be realized by Nazi Germany a century later. The Germans, Poles, and Magyars would "take frightful revenge on Slavic barbarism. The general war that will then begin will . . . *destroy* all these little, bull-headed nations so that *their very name will vanish*. The coming world war will cause not only reactionary classes and dynasties, but entire reactionary peoples, too, to disappear from the face of the earth. And that will also be progress."<sup>12</sup>

Engels added: "To the sentimental slogans offered us in the name of the counterrevolutionary peoples of Europe, we reply that the hatred of Russia was, and still is, the first revolutionary passion of the Germans; and that, since the revolution [of 1848] hatred of the Czechs and Croats has been added. . . . We and the Poles and the Magyars will only be able to safeguard the revolution through the most determined terror against these Slavic peoples."<sup>13</sup>

These genocidal visions were not merely the enthusiasm of youth. Twelve years later, when Marx had passed his fiftieth birthday, he warned that, if Bismarck should annex French territory and thus drive France into the arms of Russia, Germany would "have to arm herself for a new 'defensive' war, not one of those new-fangled 'localized' wars, but a *war of the races*, against the allied races of Slavs and Latins."<sup>14</sup> As early as 1849, Marx characterized Russians and other non-Polish Slavs as *Lumpengesindel*, meaning trash, garbage, rabble or riffraff.<sup>15</sup>

As for the majority of mankind, it lived under "ahistoric" conditions which Marx and Engels generally termed "Asiatic despotism." The practical consequence was that these native peoples stood outside the theatre of history. They were obstacles to the coming revolution. After the victory of the latter, they would have to be ruled by some sort of consortium, composed of the proletarian dictatorships of the advanced countries of Europe, the United States, Canada, and the other white British dominions. This external domination would continue for an indefinite period.<sup>16</sup>

Race hatred and race oppression, the justification of foreign conquest and of white colonialism, the denial of the right of nonwhite peoples to national independence, relentless terror against nations, peoples and races whom Marx and Engels despised, a policy of war and conquest that would ensure that other such peoples "disappear from the face of the earth"—these ideas constitute a generally suppressed portion of the enormous literacy legacy which Marx and Engels left behind them.

## Humanism or Despotism?

Few socialists or Communists take the trouble to read what Marx and Engels actually wrote. They may read the more stirring passages of the *Communist Manifesto*. They may be familiar with some of Marx's eloquent denunciations of child labor in early Victorian English mines and in the "dark, Satanic mills" that tormented William Blake. If they have read these passages, they may conclude that Marx and Engels loved the working class and passionately worked to improve its lot. Yet there is no evidence that Marx cared enough about their condition to ever take the trouble to visit a factory. This would have involved him in little inconvenience since Engels was a Manchester mill owner. Nor have biographers found any evidence that Engels used his position to improve the conditions of his own workers.

Marx learned about the conditions of the working class in England by reading in the British Museum the government reports prepared by inspectors and others who were deeply disturbed about the prevailing conditions of labor exploitation. These reports were potent causes of reform legislation. The great surge of prosperity in England after 1850 also caused major improvement in the living standards and working conditions of labor. But Marx did not love the proletariat. In fact, he referred to them as "dolts" and "asses." He lived off the profits which Engels raked in as a Manchester textile capitalist and his complaint was not that they had been wrung from the sweat and blood of the workers, but that they were often insufficient to support him and his family in middle-class style.

What is considerably more important is that most of the actual thoughts of Marx and Engels remain a closed book to the great majority of their contemporary followers in the free world. (Communists who live in the USSR, by the way, were not allowed to read what Marx and Engels wrote and thought about Russia at least as late as 1952.<sup>17</sup>) The private thoughts of the founders of so-called scientific socialism are largely contained in the four volumes of letters which Marx and Engels exchanged. These letters have, for understandable reasons, not been translated into English.<sup>18</sup>

If they had gone through the available material, these Communists and socialists would have discovered that the founders of "scientific socialism" enthusiastically approved of the American military defeat of Mexico and the annexation of Texas and California. They welcomed the French conquest of Algeria. They considered British rule in India no doubt cruel and oppressive, but historically progressive.

Marx and Engels envisaged a world dominated by the revolutionary proletariat of Western Europe and the overseas areas of Anglo-Saxon colonization. Of



course, when one speaks of a proletarian dictatorship of this sort, it is evident that the ordinary factory worker would not rule the world. He would have neither the time nor the training for that task. Hence, somebody else would have to do it for him. Who would be better fitted for the task than the nineteenth century counterparts of Plato's philosopher-kings, the small band of intellectuals whose infallible vision of the course of future events had been given them by Marx's discovery of dialectical materialism? Would not these modern seers have a better understanding of the true historic needs of the proletariat than the ignorant workers? And if it turned out that defending the historic interests of the working class involved wiping several million actual members of that class off the face of the earth, would these intellectuals shrink from that disagreeable duty? Certainly, in Stalin's Russia, they did not shrink from the use of terror and genocide against the class they claimed to represent.

Interestingly enough, several of Marx's contemporaries, people who knew him well, had a strong suspicion that the forthcoming "red terror" and "permanent revolution" would be orchestrated by Marx and his zealous subordinates against the masses of workers and peasants. Thus, Mikhail Bakunin, the father of revolutionary anarchism, predicted in 1873 that Marx and his friends planned to "concentrate the reins of government in a strong hand" so that "the masses of the people will be divided into two armies, the industrial and the agricultural, which will be under the direct command of government engineers, who will constitute a new privileged scientific political class."<sup>19</sup> Karl Heinzen, an early associate of Marx, concluded that the latter planned "a communist factory and barracks state." Several other contemporaries reached similar conclusions.

## **Marxist Theories of National Difference**

This does not mean that the theories advanced by Marx and Engels to explain what we may call the concealed racial and national hierarchical system within their philosophy of history are necessarily insincere or without merit. The most important of these concepts is that of Oriental despotism. It has evoked an impressive study by Karl August Wittfogel and a good deal of subsequent critical commentary.<sup>20</sup> Marx's generalizations about Asia were based on a superficial knowledge of Asian history and institutions; he had practically no understanding of the esthetic and scientific contributions of the various Asiatic civilizations. Nor did he or Engels ever give a clear and comprehensive statement of their hypotheses. But the relationship Marx posited between irrigation and the despotic state provided new insights and raised new questions.

The successive arguments put forward by Marx to justify either conquest of

the Slavic lands by Germany or else driving the Russian people into the tundras of Siberia are of interest as rationalizations. Marx evolved a psychological explanation of what he considered to be the inherently despotic and expansionist character of the Russian state and the inherently servile character of the Russian people. Whatever the merits of this theory may be, it has nothing whatsoever to do with Marx's materialistic conception of history.

When all else failed, Marx turned to the half-baked theories about geology and ethnology of academic quacks to justify his ethnic prejudices and hatreds and his fundamental destructiveness. Some of these theories, notably those of Pierre Trémaux, were pure moonshine and beneath contempt. Having virtually no scientific training, Marx tended to accept this sort of nonsense uncritically, but Engels, whose scientific education was sounder, generally prevented him from making a fool of himself in public.

### **Irony and Paradox**

A final irony and paradox of Marx's career is that he is seen today by millions as a sage and visionary, a prophet of the future, an internationalist and a lover of mankind, the champion of the oppressed and injured, a secular saint whose glorious concept of man's future can and must be reconciled with modern Christianity and modern humanism.

Yet, the real, historic, living Marx was a man who glorified war. He dreamed of total wars, conducted by entire peoples under arms, lasting for decades and generations, wars that would shatter capitalist civilization and steel the proletariat for the ruthless exercise of dictatorial power. The real Marx was hag-ridden by racial prejudices. His demonic visions of a future totalitarian inferno were aspects of his destructive personality.

Sympathetic biographers have tried to explain away Marx's lifelong love affair with destruction, his malicious intrigues against his benefactors, his envy of the successful, his fierce intolerance of dissent, his readiness to stoop to slander and lies to gain his ends, and his exploitation of all personal relationships by appealing either to his righteous anger against the oppression of the European masses under capitalism during the Victorian era, or to the traumatic effect of a life of poverty, illness, persecution, and failure.

But long before this righteous indignation and long before these Egyptian plagues had descended on his head, Marx's writings revealed an obsessive preoccupation with destruction. I refer to Marx's early attempts at poetry when he was a young, rich, admired university student with an apparently brilliant future ahead of him, the proud hope of his parents, and the fiancé of the most beautiful

and aristocratic girl in his native Trier. These strange literary efforts date from a period when Marx had no interest in either the working class or in socialism, when his life ambition was to be a great poet. It is intriguing that, in the longest of these rather untalented literary productions, an unfinished tragedy called *Oulanem*. Marx apparently visualized himself either as Satan or the Antichrist.<sup>21</sup>

Marx's period of early glory was brief. A harrowing descent into squalor and penury followed the defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe. Marx lived largely on charity; his predictions turned out wrong; his writings were ignored by the critics who counted; most of his books fell stillborn from the presses.<sup>22</sup> As he aged, the worms of doubt ate into his liver like the vulture of Prometheus. Just as his theories were beginning to make their way in the world, Marx would become skeptical of their validity.

Toward the end of his life, he said to his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue: "*Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste*" ("That which I am certain of is that I, myself, am not a Marxist").<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

1. Marx to Engels, June 18, 1862.
2. The "rice Christians" were impoverished Asiatics who professed Christianity to get bowls of rice from missionaries.
3. Bertram D. Wolfe, "Das Kapital, One Hundred Years Later," *Antioch Review*, Winter 1966-67, pp. 421-41.
4. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, MEGA, III, 112-13. I have used the translation of Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 155.
5. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, III, 294-95.
6. Marx-Engels correspondence, February 9, 1860, July 14, 1859, June 9, 1858, June 27, 1860, February 5, 1865, and February 4, 1860.
7. Engels to Marx, October 2, 1866.
8. Engels to Conrad Schmidt, August 5, 1890. See also Saul Padover, *Karl Marx, an Intimate Biography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), p. 502.



9. Engels to August Bebel, November 17, 1885. Marx-Engels, *Briefe an Bebel, Liebknecht, Kautsky und Andere* (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1933), p. 412.
10. *NRZ*, August 12, 1848.
11. Karl Marx, *Exzerpte* from H. J. S. Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions*. Cited by Norman Levine, *The Tragic Deception: Marx Contra Engels* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1974), p. 92.
12. *NRZ*, February 15, 1849. Emphasis in the original. Cited by Bertram D. Wolfe, *Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1967), p. 39.
13. *Ibid.* Not much should be made of the fact that the author of this article was not Marx but Engels. The editorial structure of *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was "simply the dictatorship of Marx," Engels later recollected. (Of course, the Poles were also Slavs, but this apparent logical inconsistency did not seem to bother Engels and Marx.)
14. Marx, Second Address to the First International, Marx-Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1933, 2 vols.), II, 446-52.
15. *NRZ*, February 16, 1849.
16. See, for example, Engels to Karl Kautsky, September 12, 1882.
17. Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz, eds., Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), write: "The writings of Marx and Engels on Russia with very few exceptions cannot be published in Russia [p. 17]."
18. Selected editions of the correspondence have, of course, been published in English. Eventually, the English edition of the *Collected Works* will presumably issue all the letters which were not destroyed by Engels, Laura Lafargue, Eleanor Marx-Aveling and those successive custodians of the flame, both socialist and Communist, into whose hands the manuscripts have passed.
19. Quoted in Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1939), p. 199.
20. Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: a Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.)
21. *Oulanem* is available in English in the *Collected Works*, vol. I, and in an earlier translation by Robert Payne, *The Unknown Karl Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), pp. 65-94.
22. As late as 1930, John Maynard Keynes in the second volume of his *Treatise on Money* would classify Marx as belonging to the underworld of economic theory and lump him with such monetary crackpots as Silvio Gesell and Major Douglas. Of course, with the growth

of Communist world power, all that has changed. Everything that Marx wrote is today treated with the greatest respect, if not reverence, in university circles. Those who believe that the occupants of the groves of the academy are too noble to prostitute themselves before power have lost touch with reality.

23. *MEW*, XXXV, 326, 427.



## 2

# Origins, Family, Youth

Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818, in the Rhineland city of Trier. The town claimed to be the oldest in Germany and to have stood "1,500 years before Rome existed." It was famous (or notorious) for its support of French rule under Napoleon and for the hostility its citizens bore toward Prussia, which had acquired it after Napoleon's downfall in 1815. The *Trierische Zeitung* "was the main organ of radical republicanism and utopian socialism in Germany" during the 1840s.<sup>1</sup>

On both sides, Karl Marx was of unalloyed Jewish and rabbinical descent. For two centuries, his paternal ancestors had served as rabbis. Others had been eminent theologians of Judaism. His mother, Henrietta Presburg, was a Dutch Jewess. The men in her family had "been rabbis for centuries."

Marx was not originally a Jewish surname. Karl's grandfather, according to the archives of Sarrelouis, was Rabbi Marc Levy. Moving to Trier toward the close of the eighteenth century, he began to call himself Marx-Levy, then dropped the Levy and became simply Marx.<sup>2</sup> (The fact that the great revolutionary's original surname had been Levy has an ironic significance. In 1860, he would shower vulgar anti-Semitic abuse on a London newspaper publisher, ridiculing the fact that the latter was named Moses Joseph Levy.)

The Marx family was respected and lived in fairly comfortable middle-class circumstances. Heshel Marx, Karl's father, was a self-made man who had won a prominent position for himself as an attorney through diligence, brains, and probity. Under Napoleonic rule, neither his Jewish origin nor his *pro forma* adherence to Judaism blighted his career. When Trier became Prussian, however, he had to choose between embracing Christianity and abandoning his profession. Accordingly, shortly before Karl's birth, Marx converted to Lutheranism and changed his given name from Heshel to Heinrich. His children were subsequently

baptized. Karl Marx's mother, however, who had much stronger ties to Judaism and Jewry, put off the ceremony as long as possible.

Heinrich's conversion caused him no spiritual torment. Intellectually, he was a child of the French Enlightenment, a disciple of Voltaire and Lessing, of Leibnitz and Kant. He believed fervently in the eighteenth century doctrines of continuous human progress, rationalism, and gradual progression toward individual freedom and representative government. He was a Deist whose library contained no works on either Judaism or Christianity. Even so, he never attempted to conceal his Jewish origin or to abandon the Jewish community. In fact, on one occasion under Napoleon, he risked his career to protest a discriminatory law excluding Jews from moneylending.

Although Heinrich was not a moneylender himself, he entered the arena with a public statement that, if Jews tended toward usury, it was because they had been barred from more socially useful occupations. He suggested that the Napoleonic measure might have been inspired by ambitious French politicians who had borrowed from Jews to advance their careers and now wished to repudiate their debts. The solution which Marx proposed was a general law making it a crime for anyone to engage in usury.<sup>3</sup>

### **"Child of Fortune"**

The Marxes had nine children, of whom Karl was the first son to survive. A younger brother, Hermann, was dull-witted. The youngest son, Eduard, died at eleven of tuberculosis, a family affliction which also carried off one of Karl's sisters and another of his brothers.

The sisters never showed any indications of above-average ability, but then, considering the debased status of nineteenth century Jewish girls, they were probably given few educational opportunities.

Eleanor Marx, Karl's youngest daughter, made a diligent effort, after her father's death, to pick up scraps of information about his boyhood from survivors, but she is an unreliable witness because she "idolized her father and made up the most beautiful legends."<sup>4</sup>

According to Eleanor:

I have heard my aunts say that as a little boy, he was a terrible tyrant to his sisters whom he would "drive" down the Markusberg at Trier full speed, and worse, would insist on their eating the "cakes" he made with dirty dough and dirtier hands. But they stood the "driving" and the "cakes" without a murmur for the sake of the stories Karl would tell them as a reward for their virtue.

How significant is this anecdote? And is it true? We don't know. Two characteristics emerge from it that would be leitmotifs in Marx's later life—his passionate need to dominate other people and his almost obsessional preoccupation with dirt and excrement, or, as he would put it in his correspondence with Engels, *crap* ("Dreck") and *shit* ("Scheiss").

Karl was the shining hope of his parents. His mother called him her *Glückskind*, or "child of fortune." His father was awed at the boy's mental gifts. Since the Marx family remained fixed in the Jewish patriarchal tradition despite conversion, the eldest son counting for everything, the daughters for little, Heinrich resolved to make every sacrifice to give Karl all the educational and financial advantages that the fates had denied him.

At seventeen, Karl was shipped off to the University of Bonn, a three-day trip by riverboat down the Mosel and then down the Rhine. At Bonn, the young man rapidly ran through his unusually large allowance, plunged into debt, got into drunken sprees, and engaged in a pistol duel. His father urged him to study the natural sciences and some field such as public finance which would guarantee him future professional employment. Marx ignored this advice. During his two semesters at Bonn, he studied Greek and Roman mythology, Homer, modern art, the Elegiacs of Propertius, juridical institutions, natural law, and the history of Roman and German law. He managed to convince his father that he should be transferred to the University of Berlin, a more prestigious institution. Heinrich agreed and Bonn University gave Karl a certificate of release, stating that he had been "diligent and attentive" in most of his courses, but had "incurred a punishment of one day's detention for disturbing the peace by rowdiness and drunkenness at night" and "was accused of carrying prohibited weapons" in Cologne.<sup>5</sup>

In August 1836, Marx became secretly engaged to Jenny von Westphalen, the most beautiful and most sought-after girl in Trier. She descended on her father's side from both the Prussian and the Scottish nobility. Ludwig von Westphalen, Jenny's father, was a *Regierungsrat*, or privy counselor, a scholar and man of wide culture who considered young Karl a sort of protégé and introduced him to the writings of Goethe, Cervantes and the utopian socialist Saint-Simon. According to Eleanor Marx's starry-eyed account, the old baron could recite most of the plays of Shakespeare by heart in either German or English.<sup>6</sup>

The engagement was kept secret for years because of fear that the Westphalen family would disapprove, as there was a large social difference between the two families. Karl was a teen-age student of uncertain prospects, four years younger than Jenny, swarthy, hairy, and physically unattractive. He was also the son of a converted Jew and markedly Jewish in appearance.<sup>7</sup>



## Father and Son: Ambivalence and Disillusion

Our main source of information for Marx's early university years is his correspondence with his father: Marx kept his father's letters, even the bitterly reproachful ones. During a visit to Trier in 1863 to cash in on his mother's estate, Marx seems to have destroyed all of the letters he wrote his father, except for one which was inadvertently missed.

This correspondence began on November 8, 1835, and ended on February 10, 1838.<sup>8</sup> Three months later, Heinrich Marx died.

This one-sided correspondence is a poignant, tragic record of Heinrich's progressive disillusionment with his son's character and prospects. The letters fluctuate between expressions of love, admiration, and parental weakness and harsh charges that Karl is an embittered weakling, an utter egoist, a man who merely manipulates those who love him, and an individual "governed by a demon." The elder Marx appears as a father sadly bewildered by his inability to influence his son in any direction which he considers constructive. As the correspondence proceeds, the note of dread for the future—particularly where Jenny von Westphalen is concerned—predominates.

This disillusionment proceeded on several levels. He was horrified at his son's spendthrift habits and aristocratic airs. The financial difficulties of the family were mounting. Eduard's terminal illness involved significant outlays. The dull-witted son, Hermann, had finally got a job, but only on condition that his employer be paid 1,000 francs for taking him on. Heinrich's earnings were shrinking with bad health and the vigorous competition of younger men. Unavoidable trips to spas and health resorts to ward off the liver disease that was killing him added to the problem. On December 9, 1837, Heinrich wrote Karl at Berlin: "As if we were men of wealth, my Herr Son disposed in one year of almost 700 talers contrary to all agreement, contrary to all usage, whereas the richest spend less than 500."

Heinrich was the father of five daughters. For these daughters to marry well, perhaps for them to marry at all, dowries were needed, and Karl's lordly extravagance was devouring this dowry money.

Heinrich had had two fond dreams; the first was: "I should like to see in you what perhaps I could have become if I had come into the world with equally favorable prospects." The second was that Karl would take over the financial and moral responsibility for the family when his father was gone. Not unreasonable expectations, one would think.

Both dreams were being shattered on the rocks of Karl's narcissism. As early as November 8, 1835, Heinrich wrote his son that "in your heart egoism is

predominant." He observed somewhat more sharply on December 9, 1837: "I must add too the complaints of your brothers and sisters. From your letters, one can hardly see that you have any brothers or sisters; as for the good Sophie, who has suffered so much for you and Jenny and is so lavish in her devotion to you, you do not think of her when you do not need her."

Heinrich Marx was not one of those driving, ambitious fathers who demand that their sons set the world on fire. He did not measure success in life by money, position or prestige. The most important thing was to be a complete man. Without harmony, he wrote Karl, "magnificent natural gifts" can "produce caricatures: if restricted to the physical part—simpletons; if to the moral part—fanatical visionaries; if to the political part—intriguers; and if to the intellectual part—learned boors."

He was deeply troubled about other matters. In the same letter, he observed that Karl had not written for months despite the fact that he knew "Eduard was ill, mother suffering and I myself not well, and moreover cholera was raging in Berlin. . . ."

There was little communication between father and son. On November 17, 1837, Heinrich wrote that he had received from Karl "a letter without form or content, a torn fragment saying nothing, which stood in no relation to what went before and had no connection with the future."

## The New Immoralists

Heinrich had written several letters asking for information on specific points. Instead, he had received

a letter of bits and fragments, and, what is much worse, an *embittered* letter.

Frankly speaking, my dear Karl, I do not like this modern word which all weaklings use to cloak their feelings when they quarrel with the world, because they do not possess, without labor or trouble, well-furnished palaces with vast sums of money and elegant carriages. This embitterment disgusts me and you are the last person in the world from whom I would expect it. What grounds have you for it? Has not everything smiled on you ever since your cradle? Has not nature endowed you with magnificent talents? Have not your parents lavished affection on you? Have you ever up to now been unable to satisfy your reasonable wishes? And have you not carried away, in the most incomprehensible fashion, the heart of a girl whom thousands envy you? Yet the first untoward event, the first disappointed wish, evokes embitterment! Is that strength? Is that a manly character?



Of course, this was precisely the trouble. Like many of the young terrorists of the 1960s and 1970s, Karl Marx had been brought up as a pampered *Wunderkind* whose every wish was a command. While his father's letters were often perceptive, penetrating, and wise, there is not a single instance in the entire correspondence in which Karl asked for money and was refused it. The paternal advice came late in the day and it came from a man who, in the last analysis, was unable to enunciate the simple word *no*.

This may well have solidified a repugnant lifestyle. Karl Marx later sponged on relatives, friends, acquaintances, publishers, and anyone else available until his dying gasp. His father's acquiescence had taught him that the world owed him a living. Not only a living, but a living in the grand style. This being the case, he could cheat and prevaricate to take what the world owed him. And since Marx sponged and "borrowed" with this unshakable inner conviction, he was able to do so for his entire life in the grand manner, accepting alms as if he were bestowing a favor on the giver. Psychiatrists might say that the unfortunate possession of a father who was wise in words and weak and foolish in deeds perpetuated certain infantile traits in the son, so that the adult Marx is some ways resembled the psychological character structure of the baby who believes itself to be omnipotent because he has been shielded from harsh reality. All this seems in conflict with the conventional story of Marx's indomitable struggle against grinding poverty during his years of exile in London, but here we shall see that appearance does not coincide with reality.

To return to the letters, when Heinrich Marx learned that his son was secretly engaged, he was disturbed. He loved Jenny as one of his own daughters and feared, quite realistically, that Karl would not make her happy or take care of her (or, for that matter, remain faithful to her). There was nothing he could do about the matter because the girl was head over heels in love with his son and was also strong-willed enough to override all her family's objections to what they considered a *mésalliance*.

Heinrich wrote that Karl had "a big debt to repay, and a noble family has the right to demand adequate compensation for the forfeiting of its great hopes, so well justified by the excellent personality of the child." Thousands of such families would have forbidden the match. Sometimes he wished the Westphalens had done just that because "I am so anxious for her happiness."

The obligations Karl had assumed in proposing marriage "should suffice to turn an uncivilized stripling into an orderly human being, a negating genius into a genuine thinker, a wild ringleader of wild young fellows into a man fit for society, one who retains sufficient pride not to twist and turn like an eel. . . ."

Karl had sent his father

some badly written lines and an extract from the diary entitled *The Visit*, which I would quite frankly prefer to throw out rather than to accept, a crazy botch-work which merely testifies how you squander your talents and spend your nights giving birth to monsters; that you follow in the footsteps of the new immoralists who twist their words until they themselves do not hear them; who christen a flood of words a product of genius because it is devoid of ideas or contains only distorted ideas. . . .<sup>9</sup>

But his son was not part of the common herd. These mediocre fellows

sleep quite well, except when they sometimes devote half a night or a whole night to pleasure, whereas my hard-working, talented Karl spends wretched nights awake, weakens his mind and body by serious study, denies himself all pleasure in order in fact to pursue lofty, abstract studies, but what he builds today he destroys tomorrow, and in the end he has destroyed his own work and not assimilated the work of others. In the end, the body is ailing and the mind confused. Whereas the ordinary little people continue to creep forward. . . .

On March 2, 1837, Heinrich wrote his son that he was plagued by "sad forebodings." He was "struck, as if by lightning, with the thought: Is your heart in accord with your head, your talents? Has it room for the earthly but gentler sentiments . . . ? And since that heart is obviously animated and governed by a demon, is that demon heavenly or Faustian?"

## Notes

1. Jerrold Seigel, *Marx's Fate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 39.
2. Saul K. Padover, *Karl Marx, an Intimate Biography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), p. 5.
3. Adolf Kober, "Karl Marxes Vater und das napoleonische Ausnahmegesetz gegen die Juden, 1808," *Festschrift Johannes Bärmen* (Wiesbaden, 1966-67). See also Seigel, pp. 42-43.

In his brilliant psychoanalytic study of Karl Marx, Künzli suggests that Heinrich behaved like a coward in the struggle for democratic rights in the Rhineland and that this caused his son, Karl, to develop an ambivalent love-hate relationship toward him. Arnold Künzli, *Karl Marx, eine Psychographie* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1966), pp. 45-50. I have found no convincing evidence in support of this hypothesis.

# 3

## Angel Mother

Now that Marxism has become the established secular religion of about a third of mankind, its founder is treated in Western academic circles with a respect which amounts at times to veneration—a very different treatment from what he received during his lifetime. But the standards of scholarship have fortunately advanced to a point where odious facts cannot simply be swept under the rug. Those who portray Karl Marx as a noble visionary who sacrificed his life for the common man whom he loved impute evidence at variance with this picture to external forces.

Writers with a flair for psychiatric or psychoanalytic biography—particularly Jewish ones—frequently award the role of villain in the drama to Karl Marx's mother, Henrietta. Consider the judgment of Sir Isaiah Berlin, who says she was an "uneducated woman entirely absorbed in the cares of her large household, who did not at any time show the slightest understanding of her son's gifts or inclinations, was shocked by his radicalism, and in later years appears to have lost all interest in his existence."<sup>1</sup>

Seigel, a much more recent biographer, notes that Marx's mother was solicitous about his health, urged him to exercise regularly, not work all night at his studies, consume liquor and tobacco only in moderate quantities, and bathe from head to foot with soap and water. Dr. Seigel concludes that "her mothering was intrusive and manipulative." After pages of psychiatric theorizing, Seigel finally admits that "in fact, we really do not know how regularly she sought to control and dominate him. . . ."<sup>2</sup> That is quite correct. We don't.

Henrietta Marx was deeply concerned about her children's health because they were sickly and prone to tuberculosis. The "intrusive demands" she made on Karl when he was a teen-age college student do not seem unreasonable. As for his drinking, he had been arrested for drunken rowdiness while a student at



Bonn, and that she was correct to be disturbed by this is shown by his being pursued by the London police for drunken vandalism two decades later.<sup>3</sup> His habit of smoking a pound of cigars daily did not contribute to his physical well-being.<sup>4</sup> As for her demand—"my dear Karl, have a weekly scrub with soap and water"—it is unfortunate that it went unheeded. People who knew the adult Karl Marx commented on his dirty complexion and unwashed appearance, for example, his associate in revolutionary journalism, Karl Heinzen.

Lewis S. Feuer advances the fascinating theory that Marx's destructiveness and his hatred of Jews both sprang from "maternal rejection." While I find the evidence for this conclusion inadequate, Feuer's observations are sufficiently stimulating to warrant quoting them at length:

To begin with, Marx was a man who, unlike other Jewish sons, hated his mother. In his innermost roots, he had none of the reassurance of maternal love. . . .

The Promethean complex, we perceive, is basically different from the kind associated with Napoleonic ambition. A Napoleon could venture forth fortified by his mother's love, with supreme self-confidence; Marx, choosing Promethean revolt as his life's plan, a perpetual struggle against the gods, was always to re-enact a search for self-confidence, always seeking recognition as a god, always anticipating rejection. His world was always to be one of struggle because he never felt secure in love. . . .

Marx's hatred for Judaism—otherwise inexplicable—was the outcome of an animosity toward all that his mother signified for him. His youthful essay on *The Jewish Question* (1843) was the confused argument of a man who hates his Jewish heritage so much that he cannot bring himself to say plainly that he supports political and civil rights for the Jews.<sup>5</sup>

Feuer's insights seem deeper than the judgments of Berlin and Seigel. However, I find little evidence that Marx's mother was cold, intrusive, domineering, stupid, unloving, or anything of the sort. These inferences seem part of a fashion, prevalent in the 1960s, to depict Jewish mothers as ogres whose ambition causes the psychic castration of their sons. (Philip Roth's novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, is one of the more loathsome examples of this genre.) Never having had a Jewish mother, I can take no sides in this controversy. But I can give the reader the evidence available about the relation between Karl Marx and Henrietta.

## Boyhood and University

Karl was almost certainly her favorite. She called him her "child of fortune." Her letters to him are addressed to "greatly beloved dear Carl," to "dear darling

Carl," and are signed "your eternally loving Mother." When Karl left home for Bonn and failed to write home for three weeks, Heinrich chided him because "you know your mother and how anxious she is, and yet you show this boundless negligence." In his long, reproachful letter to his son of November 17, 1837, Heinrich refers to "your good mother, who has a softer heart than I have. . . ." None of this sounds like cold indifference, the thirst for domination, or withholding of love. That Henrietta Marx was uneducated is true, but it does not follow that she was stupid. Of Dutch origin, she spoke and wrote German badly and her punctuation was atrocious. The Jewish tradition was to make every sacrifice to educate sons, but to teach daughters merely practical household matters.

The only letter from Karl Marx to his father that is preserved, one dated November 10, 1837, proposes that he leave Berlin during the middle of a semester and return to Trier to discuss his career with his father. His real reason may have been that he wanted to see Jenny von Westphalen. In this communication, Karl refers to his "Angel Mother." He suggests that his proposed trip home be kept secret from her so that "my unexpected arrival may perhaps cheer up that great, splendid woman."

The final paragraph contains this exalted thought:

In the hope that the clouds which hang over our family will gradually pass; that I may be permitted to share your sufferings and mingle my tears with yours, and perhaps in your presence demonstrate the deep affection, the boundless love, which I have often expressed poorly; in the hope that you too, dear eternally beloved father, mindful of the confused state of my storm-tossed soul, will forgive where the heart must often have seemed to err as my overburdened spirit stifled it; in the hope that you will soon be fully restored to health so that I shall be able to press you close to my heart and tell you all I feel,

I remain your ever loving son,  
KARL.<sup>6</sup>

This letter did not produce the effect that its author had hoped to achieve. I have already quoted parts of Heinrich's scorching reply of December 9, 1837. He rejected the proposal that Karl break off his studies to vacation at home, thus adding to the expenses of a financially overburdened family. What he thought of his son's expressions of boundless love for his parents may be gleaned from his comment concerning Karl's attitude toward his devoted sister, Sophie: "You do not think of her when you do not need her."



## Squabbles Over Money

Heinrich Marx died on May 10, 1838. By the time the estate was settled in 1841, Henrietta Marx had already advanced her son 1,111 talers on his inheritance, this apparently being over and above substantial gifts of cash from "your mother who loves you."<sup>7</sup>

A storm broke out over the inheritance and over the fate of the family. Henrietta argued that Karl, who was now 23, had a moral obligation to find remunerative work and to support his sisters. As the oldest son, he was the head of the family. His mentally limited brother, Hermann, was not able to help, and Eduard, the youngest brother, had died in 1837. There were five sisters, all of marriageable age. According to Schwartzschild, Karl's favorite sister, Sophie, told him "that it was undignified and irresponsible of him to count on living the life of a perpetual parasite. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Karl Marx reacted with indignation. "My family," he wrote his friend, Arnold Ruge, "in spite of their wealth, put obstacles in my way which place me, for the moment, in the most straightened circumstances." His mother was guilty of "skulduggery" toward him. Unidentified people, he alleged, "had infiltrated the bosom of his family and had organized a villainous conspiracy against him."<sup>9</sup> As long as his mother lived, he would have "no right to my fortune."<sup>10</sup>

As usual, the facts bore only a remote resemblance to Karl's assertions. On Heinrich's death, the gross estate of the family was 22,110 talers. Of this, 11,136 talers was the result of Henrietta's investment of her dowry. This, of course, she kept. Probably, Karl Marx had his mother's dowry in his mind when he complained to Ruge that he would not be able to touch "my fortune" until she was dead.

After expenses and debts, Karl's share of the estate worked out to about 800 talers.

Marx's mothers and sisters were disgusted at Karl's unwillingness to lift a hand to help support them or to assume the normal responsibilities of the head of a family. He left them in a situation where their primary source of income was the 8 percent or so interest which Henrietta's dowry earned. This meant an annual income of about 900 talers for a widow and five daughters and placed the family barely above the poverty line. (This contrasts with the 700 talers a year that Karl had managed to fritter away while a student at Berlin.)

Both Henrietta and Karl's sisters seem to have opposed his marriage to Jenny—at least none of them attended their church wedding. One reason was that the Westphalens had no property, but lived on the large salary and later on the diminished pension of the old *Regierungsrat*. Jewish families are quite familiar

with the problems caused by brilliant, bookish scholars who can't tell one coin from another and are totally incapable of earning a livelihood. They generally solved this sort of problem, throughout most of their history in Europe at least, by marrying these prodigies off to the daughters of wealthy merchants or bankers. The merchant and banker families considered marital alliances of this sort an honor. But Jenny von Westphalen was not Jewish; she had no money and no dowry; she was almost as impractical in financial matters as her husband.

Henrietta aroused Marx's envy by steadily increasing her wealth. Through native shrewdness and the sound advice of her brother-in-law, the Dutch Jewish banker, Lion Philips, she made excellent investments. One of her daughters died; the other four married. That this uneducated woman should prosper while Karl and his family lurched from one financial crisis to the next rankled.

### Waiting for the Inheritance

"I can do nothing with my old woman, who still keeps herself in Trier, unless I sit on her neck," Marx wrote Engels on September 13, 1854.<sup>11</sup> Since in the previous sentence, Marx had complained of paying pawnbrokers 25 percent interest, the reference was evidently to getting money.

On July 20, 1858, Marx wrote Engels that he had received a "long letter" from his mother. One of Marx's friends had given her a portrait of Karl's youngest child, Eleanor, "with it a few lines in which I mentioned my numerous illnesses." Marx thought that a meeting was likely within a few weeks: "If so, I shall arrange things. I must not exert pressure in this respect. Otherwise, she will immediately draw back."

On August 3, Marx wrote Engels: "How I should answer the old woman concerning my relationship to Prussia is a very ticklish point." Marx had foolishly relinquished his Prussian citizenship. If Henrietta found out about this, she might cut him out of her will from fear that the Prussian authorities might confiscate his inheritance. The letter continues: "*Que faire dans cette situation?*" She writes that her hours are numbered. But I consider this merely talk. She probably wants me to invite her to London and I would positively do so except that right now I can't spare the time."

In September, Marx was still dreaming that he could get his mother to pay off all his debts. Then "I can arrange my domestic affairs completely and again begin horse exercise."<sup>12</sup>

By October, the dream was fading. His mother had "suddenly fallen back into inexplicable silence toward me." Then she "sent me a silly letter." Obviously, people were conspiring against him. By November 24, he believed that he had



found the culprit. His sister had prevented Henrietta from carrying out her "entirely rational intentions"—that is to say, paying off all his debts.<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, on November 28, 1860, he discussed with Engels the feasibility of again trying to get money out of the old woman. "But after the Prussian junior officer married into the family, just because of a few remarks I made, all intercourse has ceased." (This referred to the marriage of Marx's youngest sister to Johann Jakob Conradi, who was actually a local engineer, with whom she would spend the rest of her life in Trier.)

On November 6, 1861, Marx wrote Engels: "I got a reply from my old lady yesterday. Nothing but 'affectionate' talk, but no cash. She also told me, what I have known for a long time, that she is 75 years old and feels many of the infirmities of age."<sup>14</sup>

On January 8, 1863, he wrote Engels concerning the death of Mary Burns, who had been his friend's mistress for the past twenty years. Marx expressed his regret that it had been Mary who had died rather than his mother.

On December 2, 1863, the long-awaited moment finally arrived. Marx immediately wrote Engels: "Two hours ago, a telegram came that my mother is dead. Destiny demanded one of us from this house. I myself already stood with one foot in the grave. Under present conditions, I am more needed than the old woman."<sup>15</sup>

The letter continued with the statement that Marx must "go to Trier at once to settle the inheritance" and needed cash for the trip from Engels. There was no expression of regret or grief.

Marx fumed when he discovered that legal requirements made it impossible for him to get the money he wanted right away, but in time, his patience was rewarded. Henrietta had amassed an estate of 41,300 florins, or about 7,000 English pounds sterling. By the terms of her will, this estate was divided equally among Karl and her three surviving daughters except for an additional 270 pounds which she bestowed on her son. However, Marx had already borrowed from his banker uncle, Lion Philips, well over 5,000 florins of this inheritance during his mother's lifetime.

Under the circumstances, this disposition seemed most generous toward Karl Marx and an adequate refutation of Isaiah Berlin's charge that Henrietta "in later years appears to have lost all interest in her son."

Thus, Marx had a windfall of about 850 pounds, which was approximately 15 times the annual earnings of a British skilled worker.<sup>16</sup> By the standards of the day, it was a modest fortune and enough to resolve the financial problems of the Marx family. However, it slipped through Marx's improvident fingers in short order.

The evidence does not support the hypothesis that Karl Marx's character was



warped by a cold, unloving, and heartless mother. As for Feuer's views, he is obviously right in his conclusion that Marx came to dislike his mother. Feuer's belief that this hatred dated from childhood and was so intense that it explains Marx's destructive character structure and his violent anti-Semitism seems much less tenable.

The simpler explanation of the relationship between mother and son was that Karl, as his father eventually discovered and as others would also learn to their cost, exploited everyone to the best of his ability and hated those people he was unable to dominate. His "Angel Mother" was useful as long as she served as the goose that laid golden eggs. When she decided that her son was old enough to stand on his own feet, she aroused his animosity and he wanted her to die as quickly as possible.

## Notes

1. Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 31.
2. Seigel, *Marx's Fate*, pp. 49, 51, 53.
3. Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs* (Chicago: Kerr, 1901), pp. 145-51.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 151-54.
5. Lewis S. Feuer, "Karl Marx and the Promethean Complex," *Encounter*, December 1968, pp. 15-30.
6. I have used the translation in Padover, *Marx*, p. 104.
7. Padover, p. III.
8. Leopold Schwartzschild, *Karl Marx, the Red Prussian* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1947), p. 49.
9. Quoting Padover's paraphrase, pp. 154-55.
10. Marx to Arnold Ruge, July 9, 1842. *MEGA*, I, 1 (2), 277, 294. See also Schwartzschild, pp. 49-50, for details of this rather sordid story.
11. The German phrase used is *die Alte*.
12. Marx to Engels, September 21, 1858. The phrase *horse exercise* is in the original. Marx was proud of his command of English. One must infer that, despite the hardships of his family, he regarded his riding lessons as of fundamental importance.

13. Marx to Engels, October 8, 1858, October 22, 1858, November 24, 1858.
14. The four-volume edition of the *Briefwechsel*, edited by the German socialist leaders Bebel and Bernstein omits the last sentence quoted.
15. In the Bebel and Bernstein edition, the word *mother* is substituted for *old woman*. This and similar changes were made throughout to soften the public image of the paladin of the proletariat. Otherwise, German socialist workers, with their bourgeois prejudices, might have considered Marx lacking in filial respect.
16. The most reliable estimates of the estates of Marx's parents are in Padover, pp. iii, 338–39.

## 4

# Apes of a Cold God

Marx's first life-ambition was to follow in the footsteps of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine, to be a great poet and dramatist. While a university student he wrote three books of poems to the love of his life, Jenny von Westphalen, which she treasured until her death. They then passed to her daughter, Laura, who gave them to Franz Mehring, the German socialist scholar who was designated to write the official biography of Karl Marx. Mehring decided that they breathed "a spirit of trivial romanticism" and that "very seldom does any true note ring through" them.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he lost them. They were rediscovered in the mid-1920s by the outstanding Marxist scholar David Riazanov, thus enriching our knowledge of Marx, though not of world literature.<sup>2</sup>

Ludwig von Westphalen, Jenny's father, thought the poems had been "artificially squeezed out of [Marx's] brain."<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Marx's reaction was similar. He wrote his son toward the beginning of 1836 that great poets were "demigods," but "their superiority must show itself in the first verse, so that everyone immediately recognizes their divine inspiration. . . . It would grieve me to see you make your appearance as an ordinary poetaster." He urged Karl to study some solid scientific subjects, such as physics and chemistry. If they were badly taught at Bonn, he should attend such lectures on his transfer to Berlin.

As he received more of Karl's literary productions, he became apprehensive about their tenor.

At Berlin, Marx took a hodge-podge of courses on such varying subjects as Isaiah, Euripides, art history, and law. His schedule was extremely light and there were three semesters in which he attended no lectures at all.<sup>4</sup>

He avoided the natural sciences although the giant figure of Alexander von Humboldt loomed over the university. At Berlin, Leopold von Ranke was applying scientific methods to history, substituting the careful evaluation of documen-



tary evidence for grandiose a priori speculations. Marx may have attended a few of Ranke's lectures, but he thought the "little twerp" far beneath him intellectually and characterized him as a "flunkey" and a pedant who attributed "all great events to trifles and lousinesses."<sup>5</sup> Ranke was not a man like Marx who could grasp the "laws of motion" of all human society intuitively. His aim was merely to disclose the past "as it actually was."<sup>6</sup>

Marx also showed his contempt for science in five poems satirizing medical students. The theme of these somewhat childish productions is that medical students and doctors deal with the merely physical (as against "the spirit"), that they are concerned only with things that are dead, and that they are money-grubbers. Biographer Saul Padover thought one of these poems "amusing" and "satiric." Let the reader judge its quality for himself:

### Medical Ethics

Traveling you must many shirts wear  
So your sweat won't penetrate there.  
Protect yourself from the rages and howls  
That spring from the gripes of your guts and bowels.  
Never let your vision stray  
To where fire can eat your heart away.  
Mix wine and water properly  
Pour milk in your coffee diligently.  
Never forget to call on your fraternity  
When you're headed for eternity.<sup>7</sup>

The point is not that Marx was an incompetent poet. What is significant is that he jeered at science students, considered the greatest historian in the university a "little twerp" and a "flunkey," and avoided courses in the exact sciences. It was easier to dream up metaphysical systems in his study at night. Consequently, he never acquired a firm grasp of either the sciences or scientific method; all his life he would be easy game for scientific mountebanks. As a result of this self-imposed ignorance, the philosophical system that he eventually devised could easily be shot full of holes on grounds of bad logic, unsound premises, inaccurate observations, and distortions of fact. He never subjected any of his dogmatic assertions to empirical verification.

This was not merely something he neglected to do. From at least his late teens, Marx seems to have considered that he had a mission to totally transform man's concept of the social universe. The key to this great transformation was meta-



physics, the secular handmaiden of religion. Philosophers could build all-encompassing systems out of the air. After all, Hegel had done just that. Marx had chosen philosophy as the royal road to undying fame. He had no use for scientific method.

Let me jump forward a few decades in time to give an example of his arrogance and condescension toward real scientists. When *The Origin of Species* appeared in 1859, Engels immediately grasped its grandeur and significance and badgered Marx to read it. Finally, Marx condescended to do so. He gave Darwin his qualified endorsement on December 19, 1860 despite the fact that the latter's work was "developed in the coarse English manner." By the "coarse English manner," Marx meant that Darwin had spent thirty years accumulating the evidence on which his evolutionary theory rested. His method evoked the admiration of real scientists. J. A. Thompson, for example, called Darwin's work "scrupulous, careful and fair-minded marshalling of evidence."<sup>8</sup>

### The Poet as Necrophile?

Marx's early efforts at poetry and drama are significant solely for what they reveal about the man and his inner drives. Oddly enough, Marx manifests some of the characteristics which Erich Fromm later imputed to the death-oriented, or necrophilous, personality in a classic 1973 study.<sup>9</sup> The examples that Fromm used to depict this character structure were Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler. The parallel between these monsters and Marx is not complete, but it is suggestive.

Marx failed as a poet for at least two reasons. The first was his incapacity to express any genuine human emotion of love or affection directly, sincerely, and simply. The second was his almost total obliviousness to the sensible world around him. There are no flowers, meadows, or sunshine in his poems. There is no birdsong. When nature appears to Marx at all, it is as a hostile and destructive force—grim, menacing, and implacable. Nature to Marx seems without color or sensuous movement when he is aware of nature at all. Typical are the following lines:

Marble pillar towers high,  
Jagged summit saws the air.  
Putrefaction, life's decay,  
Moulders in the abyss down there.  
Grim the cliff that upward climbs  
Clamps the ground with iron limbs.<sup>10</sup>

The necrophilous personality, according to Fromm, is preoccupied with vermin, filth and excrement. In the poems he wrote for Jenny, Marx avoided that sort of thing, but in these poems, as elsewhere, the climax of love was death.

In one of the verses he sent his father, a young officer picks up a girl. Marx's doggerel ends with these lines:

"Sweetie," she answered in a trice,  
"Of course, you're sure I have no lice?"

There was another Marx poem about a "Knight-Hero" who danced divinely, "but ancient bugs eat him at night."

Much of this may simply have been envy. A Trier acquaintance recalled the squat, swarthy Marx, Padover tells us, as "nearly the most unattractive man on whom the sun ever shone."<sup>11</sup> As he grew older, Marx's scatological interests would shift from vermin to excrement. His favorite expression in his correspondence with Engels is *shit*. There would be nothing remarkable about that today, but one will search in vain through the correspondence of educated men of the Victorian era for a comparable obsession with excrement.

In other words, Marx viewed the world as filthy and hostile. The impression his poetry conveys is that here was a man who lived without joy and who hated life. He could express genuine emotions eloquently and forcefully, but only when the emotions in question were hatred and destruction.

Let me illustrate this by quoting some lines at random, not bothering either with the verse form or the page references in the *Collected Works*: "Waves are his murderers every one, / they gnaw his ancient skeleton. . . / The Mannikin plucks out his eyes, / digs himself a hole deep down; / Digs his own grave and lies, / Buried, buried underground." Voices are "roaring crazy from the marble womb. . . / Like remembrance howling doom." "Blood spurts from eyeball, terror-enormous."

### **Faust, Mephistopheles, Antichrist**

It was a short step from the belief that the order of the world was man's enemy to the conviction that the task of the Hero was to annihilate both the world and its order. In a published poem, *The Fiddler*, Marx wrote of a frenzied violinist who played "while hellish vapors rise and fill the brain . . . the dance of death," and who carried a sword that Satan had sold him.

Marx's most ambitious attempt at creative writing was an unfinished tragedy



which he called *Oulanem*. He began this dramatic work at the age of nineteen, and, when he finally decided to abandon poetry, considered it the only work of his which had been "struck by the magic wand" of inspiration.

Oulanem is an anagram of Emanuel, that is to say, the Messiah (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23). But the Oulanem of Marx's drama bears no relationship to either Isaiah's Messiah or Matthew's Jesus Christ. He seems rather to be Satan or the Antichrist. This would be in accord with the diabolist practice of spelling holy names backwards and the inversions of the black mass. The other two leading characters are Pertini and Lucindo. Pertini derives from *perish* and is presumably a soul lost to the devil. Lucindo is Lucifer.

The main plot is the attempted seduction of the young Lucindo, who has come to an Italian mountain town with his older male companion, Oulanem. The would-be seducer is Pertini, the keeper of the inn where the two are staying. Pertini recognizes Oulanem as his mortal enemy and chooses to wreak revenge by leading Oulanem's young male companion astray.

If there is a latent homosexual theme in this relationship, it is subordinate. The main theme is death and destruction. All three characters spout the same sort of grandiloquent anathemas at each other. Oulanem and Lucindo, and perhaps Pertini as well, are projections of Karl Marx. Accordingly, the play has no characters, no credible conflict, and no structure. It is unreadable. But it is immensely revealing.

Lucindo agrees to "enfold" Pertini in his "youthful arms, / And twine themselves in frenzy round your breast. / The abyss yawns gaping night to both of us, / If you sink down, smiling, I'll follow you and whisper to you, / 'Down! Come with me! Comrade!' "

Pertini comments: "There's still one place to knit us two together / And that is Hell—Hell not for me, but you."

Meanwhile, Oulanem is alone in his room, meditating about the vileness of the universe and the loathsomeness of mankind. Seething with hatred of all existence, he plots the destruction of everything. This soliloquy is one of Marx's more eloquent passages. It is a hymn of hate, a psalm in praise of death:

This pigmy universe collapses.  
Soon I shall clasp Eternity and howl  
Humanity's giant curse into its ear.  
Eternity, it is eternal pain,  
Death inconceivable, immeasurable.  
An evil artifice contrived to taunt us,  
Who are but clock-work, blind machines wound up  
To be the calendar-fools of time. . . .

Oulanem must "smash the world" and "shatter it with his long-drawn curses." His "poisoned eye flashes forth destruction." The universe "howls the burial song of its own death. And we, the Apes of a cold God, still cherish / With frenzied pain upon our loving breast / The viper. . . ."

Marx's lifelong preoccupation with the Faust legend is related, not merely to the medieval morality play of the scholar who sold his soul to Satan, but also to Goethe's characterization of Mephistopheles in *Faust, Part One*, as "the spirit that always denies."<sup>12</sup> Criticism, not poetic drama, Marx would later decide, was the weapon that would destroy religion, the established institutions of society and the entire realm of order.

That Marx conceived of himself at times, half playfully, half in earnest, as an heir to the diabolism of the medieval era is an intriguing probability. He would sometimes sign his letters "old Nick."<sup>13</sup> A letter from his seven-year-old-son, Edgar, is addressed to "my dear devil." Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor, remembered how her father would tell the children endless and entrancing stories during their country outings from London. These tales concerned a magician, named Hans Roeckle, who could create all kinds of marvelous toys, but was perpetually impoverished and therefore had to sell his inventions to the devil. "Some of these stories were gruesome and hair-raising," Eleanor recalled. The magic toymaker was, of course, Marx himself. The stories were a strange confabulation: On the one hand, they reflected the belief that capitalist society had robbed Marx of the fruits of his creative thinking; on the other hand, they were a restructuring of the Faust legend.

## Notes

1. Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 39.
2. Robert Payne, *Marx* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), pp. 59-65.
3. Schwartzschild, p. 13.
4. Padover, 73.
5. *Ibid.*
6. "Ich will blos sagen wie es eigentlich gewesen ist."
7. My translation from the German text. For another English version, see *Collected Works*, I, 547-48.



8. Thompson's evaluation is quoted in Grace Carlton, *Friedrich Engels, the Shadow Prophet* (London: Pall Mall, 1965), p. 43.
9. Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973).
10. *Collected Works*, I, 561.
11. Padover, p. 46.
12. "Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint."
13. *Old Nick* was a common euphemism for the devil in Victorian England. Its first known use in this sense will be found in Ebsworth (1643). The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that "the reason for the appellation is obscure." Samuel Butler in *Hudibras*, his 1663 satire on the Puritans, traced it to the evil reputation of Niccolò Machiavelli's masterly treatise on power, *The Prince*. Butler wrote: "Nick Machiavel had no such trick / Though he gave's name to our Old Nick." However, Partridge, a distinguished authority, considered this etymology suspect. Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English Usage* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 585.

## The Impact of Hegel

Karl Marx had not been idle at Berlin. He claimed to his father that he had not only done a colossal amount of reading in both German and Latin, but had also translated the first two *Pandects* of Roman law from Latin and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* from Greek. In addition, he had studied Italian and English and, as a side measure, had written "a philosophy of law of almost 300 pages" and had elaborated "a new system of metaphysics."

He had done all this in his first year! Unfortunately, we are not able to verify these Herculean achievements because Marx became dissatisfied with the two philosophical systems he had invented and burned the manuscripts. Or at least so he wrote in a remarkable letter to his father, dated November 10, 1837, which runs to about 4,000 words.

The letter begins in this chatty fashion:

Dear Father:

There are moments in life which stand as landmarks, terminating the past and at the same time pointing firmly in a new direction. At such a point of transition, we feel compelled to contemplate, with the eagle eye of thought, the past and present, in order to arrive at a true awareness of our actual situation. Indeed, world history loves such a retrospect. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In this letter, he describes a mysterious, but probably real, psychological crisis which he had experienced. Working day and night, driving himself at a furious pace, his health had collapsed and he had left Berlin for the small town of Stralau. Here he spent days meditating about his life and writing.

We can infer from the somewhat grandiose letter that he alternated between moods of exaltation, with feelings of omnipotence, and periods of bleak despair.

At Stralau, the eighteen-year-old youth sat down to write a new metaphysical system which would unify art and religion. But when he read what he had written, he was depressed and destroyed it. "All my creations are reduced to nothing. . . . Nothing is clear . . . rhetorical reflections instead of poetical thoughts. . . . A curtain had fallen, my holy of holies had been shattered, and it was necessary to find new gods to put in their place."

Marx returned to Berlin. He walked along the banks of the muddy Spree. Then, just as the vision came to Paul on the road to Damascus, his life-problem was solved. The "rage for irony," which had made him oppose Hegel's philosophy, passed away, and Marx became a Hegelian.

Was that what had really happened? Was this tremendous psychic conflict, one that shattered his health and forced him to flee the university to a quiet village, merely a matter of whether he should follow Hegel rather than some other philosopher? Or had he suffered some deep personal conflict and torment, one which he would not reveal to anyone, that was tearing him apart? Or was the description of this psychic episode merely an effort at self-dramatization designed to impress his father with his titanic intellectual struggles?

We will probably never discover the answer. Whatever the real nature of the psychic crisis, Marx had found the philosopher whose method he would use to transform the world.

## Hegel and the German Mind

Hegel was probably the most turgid and incomprehensible writer who ever lived. It can be argued that he seldom said anything clearly or uttered a thought that was both original and true. Nevertheless, he exercised a prodigious influence on Marx. Marx's conviction that the world must necessarily pass through conflicts of the most violent sort imaginable, through storm and travail, into a never-never-land of utopia was pure Hegel. Some writers, the late Arnold J. Toynbee, for instance, have supposed that Marx's bizarre concept of history derived from his Hebraic heritage and from a projection of the concept of the Chosen People to the proletariat, but this is not so. It is Hegel, Hegel turned upside down, but still Hegel. Because of Hegel's impact on Marx, this chapter is necessary, but the reader who finds Hegel an unutterable bore may skip it.

In 1801, seventeen years before Karl Marx's birth, Hegel proved by purely philosophical and deductive methods that magnetizing iron increases its weight



and that no planet can possibly be located between Mars and Jupiter. The first of these propositions is nonsense. As for the second, the asteroid Ceres had already been discovered on January 1, 1801, in the region where Hegel said it was impossible for it to be. But the great philosopher did not yet know that.

In his magnificent work, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl R. Popper asks how a whole generation of educated Germans could have been taken in by "Hegel's bombastic and mystifying cant" and how they could possibly have believed his absurd claim that the dialectical method, which he claimed to have discovered, replaced "barren formal logic."<sup>2</sup>

Popper offers three explanations: "the backwardness of German natural science in those days," the fact that first-class minds such as Schopenhauer had utter contempt for Hegel and the Hegelians,<sup>3</sup> and, finally, that Hegel's "ability to draw real physical rabbits out of purely metaphysical silk-hats" had an irresistible appeal for ambitious and intellectually lazy minds who wanted to arrive at astounding philosophical conclusions without wasting their time with the laborious and plodding investigations of either the scientist or the historian.

There is a good deal of validity in these criticisms, but they are somewhat more harsh than the evidence warrants. It is true that few people who are not Marxist scholars bother to read Hegel today and most of those who do find it incomprehensible that brilliant minds could have wasted time on this pretentious and at times virtually incomprehensible balderdash. One finds occasionally acute and perceptive observations in the vast mass of Hegel's writings, but, for the most part, they are a Sahara of misconceptions, mystifications and irrational assertions.

If he had been born at almost any other time and place, Hegel might have sunk into obscurity. But the era into which he was born was one in which the values of Western man had been cast adrift on the seas of uncertainty. For the previous twelve centuries, Christendom had believed that the only reason for history was man's fall from grace and that the purpose of history was to provide man with the opportunity for salvation on the Day of Judgment.

This theological view had been largely exploded by such minds as Spinoza, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau and Kant. The French Revolution had enthroned the deity Reason, but the rule of abstract reason had led to the Reign of Terror.

The reaction against this cataclysmic experience was aptly expressed by Edmund Burke when he observed: "In the groves of *their* academy, at the end of every vista you see nothing but the gallows." It was a "confused jargon of their Babylonian pulpits . . . , the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings," a state of affairs where "people will not look forward to posterity who never look



backward to their ancestors" and one in which "learning will be cast into the mire, and trodden down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude."<sup>4</sup>

If renewed regard for tradition and history was part of the reaction against the French upheaval, the rise of modern nationalism, with its strange mystique, was another of its dimensions. Nowhere was this nationalism more fervent than in Prussia, which had made such an enormous military and ideological contribution to the downfall of Napoleon.

Hegel had first sympathized with, then dreaded, the French Revolution. Born in 1770, his youth had been overshadowed by the Reign of Terror. The prime years of his manhood had for their political background the Prussian struggle against Napoleonic domination of Europe.

Hegel concluded that morality, progress and freedom were subordinate to social order and, in fact, were improbable without it. As John C. Calhoun would put the matter in a different context, "when the two come into conflict, liberty must and ever ought to yield to protection; as the existence of the race is of greater moment than its improvement."<sup>5</sup>

The Hegelian system saw history as "the march of God on earth." Having cast Aristotelian logic out of the window, Hegel proceeded to fit the entire history, law, and political and cultural life of mankind within the system he had devised. The supremacy of this so-called dialectical method meant that no assertion need be subjected to evidential proof. As distinct from the theories of progressive human betterment that had gained popularity with the advance of science and technology, the Hegelian world moved by means of conflict—thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

It appealed to conservatives, to revolutionaries and to pessimists. By contrast, the linear theory of increasing progress offered no explanation for periods of human retrogression, for man's demonic descent into the abyss, whereas mankind's move from the intellectual crest of fifth century Athens to the crude superstitions, the fanaticism and ignorance of the Dark Ages, and the French Reign of Terror both fitted into the Hegelian system as phases of negation in the fugue of history. This interpretation was quite acceptable to the Prussian state.

Even after his lordly dismissal of the rules of logic, Hegel was unable to fit the entire history of mankind into his system. Hence he made the somewhat arbitrary decision that certain races, peoples and nations were "ahistoric." Either they had never played any role in history and never would, as in the case of the African Negro, or they were insignificant little peoples whose history was irrelevant, or they were frozen at civilizational levels which the more advanced portions of mankind had already left behind them. These were ideas which Marx would adopt and transform.<sup>6</sup>

## Modern Marxists Rediscover Hegel

At the risk of being considered superficial, I shall leave Hegel at this point. With the growth of world Communist power, there has been a corresponding revival of interest in the writings of Marx and a diligent effort to find wisdom and truth in them. Much of the work which Marx did in his mature years and practically everything that Engels wrote is often dismissed, even by devout Marxists, as nonsense. Hence, the search for the "truly significant" Marx takes captive scholars into the largely unpublished writings of his youth and early manhood. This draws them into the morass of Hegelian double-talk. We shall not follow them into this night where all cats are gray. Marx stopped dabbling with the Hegelian dialectic at about the age of thirty because he realized that much of it was nonsense, because it was incomprehensible to the people he wanted to convince, and because Hegel had practically vanished into oblivion as far as the European intelligentsia were concerned.

The reason to avoid talking about Hegel any more than one has to is that he is a colossal bore. Nevertheless, where I have to deal with matters which Marx borrowed from Hegel, I may sometimes point out the extent to which the disciple changed the thoughts of the master.

An example of the "modern Marxist" who returns to Hegel is George Lukács who died in 1971 and who was one of the most influential Marxist philosophers of the twentieth century, according to such thinkers as Jean-Paul Sartre and Thomas Mann. "Admit for the sake of argument that all of the particular affirmations of Marx have been shown to be factually inaccurate by modern scholarship," this dedicated disciple wrote as early as 1923. It does not follow "for an instant" that one must renounce the true faith.

In Marxism, orthodoxy refers solely and exclusively to the question of *method*. It implies the scientific conviction that the Marxist dialectic is the right method of investigation, and that this method cannot be developed, perfected, or made more profound except in the tradition of its founders. Further, Marxist orthodoxy understands that all attempts to go beyond this method, or to "improve" it necessarily trivialize it and end up in eclecticism.<sup>7</sup>

Poor Lukács! The dialectical method, whether Hegelian or Marxian, is the weakest link in the whole chain. It has nothing to do with science or the scientific method. It rejects all logic, both that of Aristotle and the more modern symbolic logical systems. Not a single valid scientific discovery has ever been made with it. The appallingly backward condition of Soviet science under the rule of Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev was at least partially due to the official requirement that



science be chained to dialectical materialism. This was one of the "theoretical" reasons given for the killing off of the Soviet geneticists who were doing sound scientific work and for the acceptance of the exploded doctrines of Trofim Lysenko, a half-mad ignoramus. It explains why the USSR dismissed computer science as contrary to Marxism until the scientists and military leaders pointed out to the ideologues that they would either have to develop computers or go down the drain.

The objections to the dialectical materialist method are multiple. It is based on bare dogmatic assertion. It has never been used by any scientist to discover anything that is true. As applied to sociology and history, it presupposes that there is one central, inescapable process that shapes all of man's most significant activities, which cannot change direction, and which leads to certain posited, inevitable results—in the broadest sense, proletarian dictatorship and socialism.

But when one says that something is historically inevitable, this means that man's thoughts, discoveries, inventions, etc., are predetermined. It denies the possibility of novelty. If one accepts novelty, one accepts unpredictability.

Take one example. It was absolutely essential to Marx's cataclysmic view of history—and how he loved and looked forward to bloody catastrophes!—that the proletariat be ground down into the dust and, at the same time, that it be alienated from life. We'll have to deal with these two thoughts in greater detail later on. Here, suffice it to say that "alienation" meant to Marx in this context the sort of division of labor in which the manual worker is dehumanized because his sole function in life is to turn widgets counterclockwise. This was the theme of an old Charlie Chaplin movie.

This expectation was overturned by the computer. Now nobody blames Karl Marx for not foreseeing that the computer would mechanize all these routine operations and a lot of very complex ones as well. But he is to be blamed for the arrogant acceptance of a rigidly bound theory of history which denied any place for significant innovation, which tacitly assumed that nobody would invent anything of fundamental importance, and that all history would move on a predetermined track.

Similarly, Lukács, the Hungarian pundit, wrote nonsense during an exceptionally long life because of blind, superstitious faith in a method which was inherently unscientific and useless. Perhaps he did so because he had one characteristic in common with his idol. Like Karl Marx, he was a man who had been overeducated in impractical matters and was almost totally ignorant of science or of the economic realities of the world he inhabited.

Among the captive scholars who have tried to rescue Marx from the dump heap of exploded theories is the British writer David McLellan. McLellan had published an English translation of a manuscript of about a thousand pages that



Marx had written during 1857-58. This interminable document seems to have been a first draft of *Das Kapital*, or at least part of it. The late Edmund Wilson had some pertinent comments about McLellan's attempted salvage operation in his introduction to the 1972 reissue of *To the Finland Station* that are worth quoting:<sup>8</sup>

Mr. McLellan insists on the importance of this manuscript, describing it as "the centerpiece of Marx's thought" and asserting that "any discussion of the continuity of Marx's thought that does not take account of the *Grundrisse* would be doomed from the start." This manuscript was a sort of attempt by Marx to outline his designs for his whole system, and according to Mr. McLellan, it has led some scholars to conclude that Marx was "really a humanist, an existentialist, even a 'spiritual existentialist' (whatever that is)." But, after all, the *Grundrisse* was never published, and it remains as only another example of Marx's reluctance to finish his works. The problems they raised were, I believe, always too much for him to grapple with. . . . To trace Marx's intellectual development on the basis of earlier unpublished material seems rather futile and arid, an exercise in academic one-upmanship. What Marx wanted people to read they have read and have experienced the intended emotions.

What Wilson is suggesting is that McLellan and others of his sort are engaged in a sort of swindle. When a man's published writings are shot full of holes, his reputation as a thinker can hardly be reestablished by rummaging in old wastepaper baskets for the stuff he himself thought not worth publishing.

## Notes

1. I have used the translation in Padover, p. 102.
2. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Volume II: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962, 1971).
3. Schopenhauer concluded that Hegel had created an "intelligence-destroying pseudo-philosophy" by the "mischievous and criminal misuse of language." He added that where his fellow metaphysician Fichte was merely a "windbag," Hegel was a "charlatan." He considered that Hegel's success was due to the fact that he had made himself the paid agent of the Prussian state: "Governments make of philosophy a means of serving their state interests, and scholars make of it a trade." Quoted in Popper, II, 63, 54, 33.
4. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

5. John C. Calhoun, *Works* (New York, 1851), I, 54–55. One can live without freedom, but one cannot be free without living.
6. The repudiation of “barren formal logic,” whether Aristotelian or symbolic, has had a certain appeal to German philosophers. In *The Decline of the West*, for example, Oswald Spengler declared that civilizations could only be understood as organic wholes and that causality had nothing to do with history. Spengler claimed to have derived his method from Goethe. The social theorists of national socialism turned their back on scientific evidence and appealed to “instinct” and the concepts of “blood and soil.”
7. George Lukács, *Marxism and Human Liberation* (New York: Delta, 1973), p. 21. The quoted essay is entitled “What Is Orthodox Marxism?”
8. Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972). When Wilson first wrote this book, he sympathized with the views of Marx and Lenin. He wrote a fresh introduction for the new edition to give some of the reasons for his complete change of viewpoint.

# 6

## The Battle Against Religion

Having failed as a poet and creative writer, Marx plunged into the battle against religion. At the University of Berlin, he virtually ceased to attend lectures. He frequented the Philosophers' Club, an organization of two or three dozen radical intellectuals who met at the Café Stehely on the Gendarmenmarkt. Most of them were five or ten years older than Marx and were able to spend evenings talking and drinking because they either had independent means or were earning a living from their professions.

Marx impressed his fellow members with his ability. Karl Friedrich Köppen, a weird-looking history teacher ten years Marx's senior, called him "a storehouse of ideas." Köppen wrote a book about Frederick the Great, either because that monarch was a freethinker or because he was a homosexual, and dedicated it to Marx.

The club members were animated, not merely by a ferocious hatred of Christianity and of religion in general, but by an inchoate desire to bring down the existing social order. They were not yet socialists or communists, but they talked and dreamed of terror and the guillotine. Except for the fact that they were not on dope, they seem similar to some of the brighter activists of the Weathermen and the European terrorist gangs of the 1960s and 1970s.

The atmosphere of this nursery of nihilism can be gleaned from a long satiric poem composed by two of its members, Edgar Bauer and Friedrich Engels, in the summer of 1842.<sup>1</sup>

Edgar's older brother, Bruno, was a Protestant minister and a more-or-less secret atheist who had managed to wangle a lectureship in the theology department of Marx's old university, Bonn. The poem read:

Upon that Chair of erstwhile pious reputation  
Mad *Bauer* lectures through the Devil's ministration.



He stands and foams with rage, a demon on his back  
Goads him and sets him on the Theologian's track.  
Just like a hydrophobic dog, he howls and bays;  
Through his blaspheming mouth, the Adversary says:  
"Let not the Theologians fool you with their guiles,  
Or rank hypocrisy, or low perfidious wiles. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

## The Scum of Germany

The poem describes Bauer's supporters as "a frenzied host so glittering bright with Blasphemy, the very sun has lost its light. . . . / The scum of Germany, they meet in convocation to whip their spirits up for more evil action."

Who were the leaders of this "scum of Germany . . . this lunatic and loathsome throng . . . that yelling gang, that atheistic mob?" There was *Eduard Meyen*, who would "take his family with you on your trip to Hell." There was *Friedrich Engels*, who appears here under one of his pseudonyms, Oswald, "a radical is he, dyed in the wool, and hard. / Day in, day out, he plays upon the guillotine, a single solitary tune. . . ." *Bruno Bauer* was "old Bloodlust himself." His brother, *Edgar*, was his "evil shadow," always ready "to drink blood like water." Then there was the anarchist, *Max Stirner*. Where others shouted, "Down with kings," he would add: "Down with laws."

There was *Ludwig Buhl*, a terrorist who was also "soap and water shy." *Arnold Ruge* was "Czar of all the Atheists." And there was Marx's most intimate friend, Adolf Rutenberg, "a one-man host of Atheists fanatical, a one-man store of craft Satanical, a one-man fount of blasphemy and shame." Rutenberg was a newspaperman who had earned a living of sorts as teacher to the Prussian Cadet Corps, but the poor fellow had been discharged solely because he was found one morning lying dead drunk in the streets of Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

And finally we come to Marx himself, who is not identified by name in the poem:

A swarthy chap from Trier, a marked monstrosity.<sup>4</sup>  
He neither hops nor skips, but moves in leaps and bounds,  
Raving aloud. As if to seize and then pull down  
To Earth, the spacious tent of Heaven up on high,  
He opens wide his arms and reaches for the sky.  
He shakes his wicked fist, raves with a frantic air,  
As if ten thousand devils had him by the hair.

To be sure, this was satire and need not be taken literally. But it is quite clear that the philosophers and pseudo-philosophers of the club thought of themselves at times as nihilists and world-destroyers. And the hatred was there. The imagery about guillotines and intellectuals possessed by devils and serving Satan was not without a kernel of sincerity.

### **The Quest for a Professorship**

It was evident to some of these unruly and destructive people that they had a young man of unusual ability on their hands who had no means of support now that his father was dead and who had few prospects for a career. When he was asked to write something for publication, he would procrastinate or perhaps claim that he had written a book, but had decided to burn it.

Unless something was done about the matter, Marx seemed fated to become one of those perpetual students who spend their lives talking and for whom the university serves as a protective cocoon against the harsh realities of life. These people swim aimlessly in a sea of books. They are literary Penelopes who unravel by night what they create by day. Marx had not even faced the reality of compulsory military service. He had avoided that either because he was in fact tubercular or because, through his father's influence, he found a doctor who was willing to claim that he was.

Arnold Ruge, who had independent means, offered to publish an article by Marx claiming that Hegel was secretly an atheist. Marx promised to write it, but didn't deliver.

Bruno Bauer had hopes of a professorship in the Department of Theology at Bonn University. He had the wonderful thought that Karl Marx should join him on the faculty where they could jointly teach atheism. But the prerequisite was that Marx finally get his Ph.D. Although he had been "studying" at the University of Berlin for five full years, his friends strongly advised him to apply for his doctorate at Jena. The advantages of Jena were that it had lower academic standards, it awarded doctorates to students like Marx who had never attended its classes, and it dispensed with such disagreeable requirements as oral and written examinations. Accordingly, Marx wrote a dissertation on the comparative philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus, shipped it off to Jena, and on April 15, 1841, became Dr. Karl Marx. He would use that title for the rest of his life and would never allow anyone to forget that he possessed it.

But Bauer's plan to infiltrate the theology faculty at Bonn was shipwrecked by his inability to behave with even a modicum of diplomacy. He proclaimed his



antireligious views to anybody who would listen; he gave lectures which had his students' "hair stand on end," and he narrowly avoided a fist fight with more devout members of the faculty. When his name was proposed for a professorship, it was unanimously rejected. To make matters worse, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, king of Prussia, was a pious man who took religion very seriously. Outraged, he issued an order that barred Bauer from teaching at any Prussian university.

This meant that Karl Marx's prospects of spending his life as a professor of theology were also shattered. Both Marx and Bauer considered that they had been harshly and unjustly treated. Schwartzschild summarizes their attitude:

In their letters and conversations, they represented the theologians of Bonn as fanatical enemies of freedom. And worse still, these fanatics had not even behaved according to their own personal convictions. It was all a plot. The pious souls in the Ministry in Berlin had declared a secret feud against the unsuspecting Bauer and the theologians in Bonn, in their cowardly servility, had obeyed. A conspiracy of sinister, hidden forces. And in Karl Marx stiffened a hostility toward everything which connoted God and religion.<sup>5</sup>

## Hatred of Religion

Obviously, Marx did not seriously consider himself an antichrist or a follower of Satan as some religious writers have asserted.<sup>6</sup> He was an atheist. He did not believe that God had created man, but rather that man had created God or gods. The world, in his opinion, did not exist to serve some purpose related to man's fate; it existed independently of man and operated according to its own laws.

None of this was, in any sense of the word, an original opinion. Similar views could be found in Spinoza and in dozens of other places, though they had usually been expressed circumspectly so that their authors could avoid being burned at the stake by the Inquisition or some similar agency.

What Marx believed that he had discovered that was new and important about religions was that they arose to meet the specific needs of different types of class societies. As he put the matter in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845): "Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the 'religious sentiment' is itself a *social product* and that the abstract individual whom he analyzes belongs in reality to a particular form of society."

Most psychologists, sociologists, and historians would probably agree that Feuerbach was much closer to the truth than Marx—that man's need for religion is caused by general human psychic characteristics and is not primarily due to the class nature of the society in which he lives. The rather illusory trail that



Marx followed would lead him to such untenable assertions as that "religion is the opium of the people" and that Christianity was imposed by the ruling class of the Roman Empire to keep the masses docile and to make them accept meekly their miserable condition in this world to enjoy salvation in the next. Nietzsche would advance similar theories for very different reasons. Later, Nazi philosophers would condemn Christianity as a Jewish plot to anesthetize mankind, much as the Marxists had condemned it as a ruling-class plot for the same purpose.

But in addition to these views, Marx was consumed with a rather virulent hatred of religion and in pursuit of that hatred he sometimes used the imagery of diabolism. He allowed his hatred of religion to blast whatever hopes for a successful career he may have had on more than one occasion.

After his failure to obtain a post at the University of Bonn, Marx drifted to Cologne, the richest and most liberal city in the Rhineland. Here he met Moses Hess, a thirty-year-old Jewish socialist of middle-class origin. Hess was enormously impressed. He hailed Marx as his idol and as "the greatest, perhaps the only real philosopher now living."<sup>7</sup>

In Cologne, some liberal businessmen, several of them Jewish, decided to start a newspaper to be called *Die Rheinische Zeitung*. One of its major purposes would be to counteract the thoroughly conservative Catholic journal of the region. The new venture was launched with champagne, 400 subscribers, and the generous capitalization of 30,000 talers on January 1, 1842. Marx's closest friend from Berlin days, Adolf Rutenberg, was appointed editor. Marx was given an editorial job under him.

In very short order, Marx proclaimed that Rutenberg was "incompetent" and "impotent." With the support of the Prussian censors, Marx ousted his rival and took over command.

He soon transformed the *Rheinische Zeitung* into a vigorous, fighting organ, which crusaded for such cherished liberal causes as freedom of the press. It is possible that Marx believed in freedom of the press in the early 1840s, but seven years later, as editor of another German newspaper, he would present a diametrically opposite view—one that may well have represented his secret convictions during the earlier period.<sup>8</sup> Marx ditched his old Berlin friends, such as Bauer and Köppen, calling them "Berlin windbags," and came out editorially against communism and socialism. *Die Rheinische Zeitung* could "not even grant any theoretical validity to communist ideas, much less desire their practical realization, or even consider such a thing possible. . . ." He proposed to present "communism to the public in all its unwashed nakedness."

Was this a strategy of accommodation to advance his own career? Or was Marx in 1842 actually opposed to communism? Did he consider at that time that his

mission was not to tamper with the economic system, but rather to destroy Christianity?

He wrote an article on the "ecclesiastical controversy" in Cologne, which was a direct attack on religion. The censors would be too stupid to get the point, Marx believed. He wrote Arnold Ruge on November 10, 1842 that he was "bringing atheism to the people."

This turned out to be a gross miscalculation. The censorship law had been extended, not against socialism, but against attacks on religion and morality. The paper was now gliding on thin ice and the censorship was becoming increasingly harassing.

The *coup de grâce* came when the paper attacked Russian despotism. Prussia and Russia were staunch allies, and when the czar complained furiously, the king of Prussia ordered that "the whore on the Rhine" be shut down.

After less than a year, Marx was unemployed and with no apparent prospects. He had tried to keep in the good graces of the censors by pointing out that *Die Rheinische Zeitung* was actually defending Prussian interests against Catholicism. This had failed and he no longer needed this hypocrisy. He wrote Arnold Ruge that "Prussian despotism" was "the most hypocritical, the most perfidious." Ruge believed that Marx was now "possessed with hatred and mad with rage."<sup>9</sup>

Almost ten years later while an exile in London, Marx was one of the leaders of an international revolutionary organization, composed primarily of emigrés from the defeated 1848 revolutions in Europe. His opponents called Marx and his followers "the sulphur gang."<sup>10</sup> They were attacked for sowing dissension, and for spinning wild theories that bore no relationship to reality, for making predictions that never came to pass. Marx and Engels raged against all those socialist leaders who seemed to be infected with the deadly bacillus of Christian charity and brotherhood. Thus, Engels attacked Wilhelm Weitling, who was almost the only man of any prominence in this raffish group of would-be proletarian leaders who actually was born into the working class and who had actually earned his livelihood as a manual worker. Weitling was guilty of "infamy" in opposing his and Marx's views, Engels declared. They would have to sever "all connections with the 'warm brotherliness,' 'gentleness,' and 'meekness' of prophets of this kind."<sup>11</sup>

Others who opposed or ignored them—and particularly those who attempted to give some ethical content to socialism, to appeal to the morality of mankind and to the good will of decent people—were characterized by Marx and Engels as "toads . . . rabble . . . the emigrant scum . . . the rotten emigrant swine who wallow in the filth of the newspapers. . . ." The devout Mazzini was "a cunning visionary." Arnold Ruge, Marx's former friend and benefactor, was a "perfidious boor."<sup>12</sup>



## Notes

1. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, II, 326–35.

2. Back in the 1840s, infiltration of a recognized department of theology by an atheist so the latter could serve as mouthpiece of “the Adversary,” that is to say, the devil, was profoundly shocking and most unusual.

A century or so later, when I was the leader of the radical movement on the Columbia University campus, I was invited to become an honorary member of the Atheists' Club at adjacent Union Theological Seminary. I asked rather naively how an honorable man could accept an appointment to the ministry if he didn't believe in God. The reply was that the pulpit provided a captive audience, a position of authority and a regular salary—all most useful to socialist and Communist propagandists. I declined the invitation. At the time, the counterpart of Bruno Bauer at Union Theological Seminary was a clandestine Communist named Prof. Harry F. Ward.

3. Schwartzschild, p. 34.

4. Another allusion to the general impression that young Marx was physically ugly and unattractive.

5. Schwartzschild, p. 45.

6. For example, see Richard Wurmbrand, *Was Karl Marx a Satanist?* (Glendale: Diane Press, 1976).

7. Moses Hess to Berthold Auerbach, *MEGA*, I, 1 (2), 260.

8. “The first duty of the press is, therefore, to undermine all the foundations of the existing political system.” *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, February 14, 1849. Padover, p. 273.

9. Arnold Ruge, *Briefwechsel und Tagebuchblätter* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1888), p. 351.

10. Karl Vogt, *Mein Prozess gegen die Allgemeine Zeitung* (Geneva, 1859), pp. 136–37.

11. Carl Wittke, *The Utopian Communist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), p. 118.

12. All these tributes will be found in the Marx-Engels correspondence: *MEGA*, III, 1, 121; Marx to Engels, February 10, 1851; Engels to Marx, February 13, 1851; Marx to Engels, December 1, 1851; Engels to Marx, September 23, 1851, and *ibid.*



## **Part II:**

# **Marx as Racist**

## Karl Marx on the Negro

Marx and Engels are customarily depicted as admirers of Abraham Lincoln, resolute foes of chattel slavery, and courageous champions of Negro rights, Negro equality, and Negro freedom.

There is scarcely an iota of truth in this interpretation. Publicly and for political reasons, both Marx and Engels posed as friends of the Negro. In private, they were antiblack racists of the most odious sort. They had contempt for the entire Negro race, a contempt they expressed by comparing Negroes to animals, by identifying black people with "idiots," and by continuously using the opprobrious term *nigger* in their private correspondence. Since they wrote to each other in German, this meant inserting the offensive English word instead of using the correct German word, *Neger*.

Since neither revolutionary theorist had much interest in the Negro and still less in the fate of Africa south of the Sahara, the quest for Marx's and Engels's true views on the Negro has required a diligent and prolonged search. It has been rewarded, if that is the correct word, by some revealing expressions of gutter race hatred of the lowest sort.

Marx wrote Engels on July 30, 1862, that "the Jewish Nigger, Lassalle," was fortunately leaving London toward the end of the week for his native Germany, adding:

It is now absolutely clear to me that, as both the shape of his head and his hair texture shows—he descends from the Negroes who joined Moses' flight from Egypt (unless his mother or grandmother on the paternal side hybridized with a nigger.) Now this combination of Germanness and Jewishness with a primarily negro substance necessarily creates a strange product. The pushiness of the fellow is also nigger-like.

Quite outside of the offensive tone of this letter, it illustrates Marx's tendency to twist and invent evidence to express the envy and hatred he felt for his successful contemporaries. Judging by surviving photographs, Lassalle rather closely approximated the German Nordic type.

Marx, on the other hand, was so swarthy that he was called "the Moor" by acquaintances ever since university days. He had a thick, flattened nose. One observer described his complexion as "dirty yellow."<sup>1</sup> Nobody in his right mind would have thought Marx's physiognomy German. The official Prussian police report, a document which attempted accuracy for purposes of identification of suspects, reads: "Special recognition signs: (a) in his speech and appearance reminds one somewhat of his Jewish origin, (b) is clever, cold and resolute."<sup>2</sup> While he was certainly not a Negro type, Marx's appearance was more negroid than Lassalle's.

Nor was there anything to Marx's theory that the Jews of the Exodus had hybridized with Negroes en route to the Holy Land. There were no Negroes in the area. Again, we have a case of Marx inventing historical theories for malicious purposes. Marx's speculation that Lassalle's ancestors had mated or intermarried with blacks was fanciful. The passage quoted is interesting both as an example of Marx's paranoid hatred of people, particularly Jews, who were conspicuously more successful than he was, and as a revelation of his secret loathing of the Negro race.

Let's look at another example. On August 7, 1866, Marx wrote Engels about an exciting discovery he had made. The find was a pompous and preposterous book by a French ethnologist and racist crackpot named Pierre Trémaux which anyone well versed in science and scientific method would have dismissed as rubbish.

Marx, however, hailed Trémaux's work as marking "a *very significant* advance over Darwin." Marx's infatuation with Trémaux's race theories will be discussed in considerably more detail in chapter twelve. Here, suffice it to say that Marx wrote Engels that Trémaux had "proved that the common Negro type is the degenerate form of a much higher one. . . ."

Actually, Trémaux had proved nothing. He had made the extraordinary and, of course, unsubstantiated, assertion that the Negro race was not a product of evolution, but of human degeneration. His actual words were: "The backward negro is not an evolved ape, but a *degenerate man*," a finding that, in Marx's opinion, made Trémaux superior to Darwin.<sup>3</sup>

On October 2, 1866, Engels replied to one of Marx's enthusiastic letters about Trémaux with a long refutation of that charlatan's theories. At the moment, we are concerned merely with what Engels had to say about Trémaux and Negroes. (As before, when I use the word *nigger*, it means that Engels inserted the offensive English term into the German text of his letter.)



The stories about the Nigger, Santa Maria, and about the transformation of whites into Negroes are laughable. Namely that the traditions of the Senegal niggers are worthy of unconditional belief *precisely because the fellows don't know how to write!* . . .

The way the fellow explains how we Rhinelanders on our Devonian transitional rocks (which have not been under water since long before the era of coal formation) did not become idiots and Niggers, he will perhaps show us in his second volume, or else assert that we really are niggers.

Another incident gives us a clue to Marx's true feelings and thoughts about Negroes. Marx's old patron, Charles Dana, approached him with the proposal that he write articles for an American encyclopedia. Marx was assigned subjects beginning with the letter *B*. This was a welcome source of income for the always debt-ridden and impecunious revolutionary.

Marx wrote a violently intemperate biography of the Liberator of Latin America, Simón Bolívar. Dana said that he was disturbed by its "partisan" tone and asked Marx to give his reference sources. On February 14, 1858, Marx wrote Engels about the matter. He considered Bolívar "that coward, that vile and miserable swine." He added, "Bolívar is a real Soulouque." (The reference was to Faustin Elié Soulouque, a black former slave, who, through a combination of ruthlessness and native ability, had seized power in Haiti and had himself proclaimed Emperor Faustin the First.)

## Paul Lafargue

Marx's second daughter, Laura, fell in love with a young medical student named Paul Lafargue in 1866. Lafargue was of French-Cuban origin. He was apparently one-quarter Jewish, one-quarter Carib Indian, probably less than an eighth Negro, and the rest French.

Although Lafargue was a socialist and one of Marx's great admirers, Marx was not at all pleased with the proposed marriage until he discovered that the bridegroom-to-be was the only son of a wealthy West Indian planter whose father planned to settle a large sum on the couple. This not only provided Laura with apparent financial security, but opened up a new source from which Marx himself might borrow money. Marx decided that Lafargue was "a handsome, intelligent, energetic and gymnastically developed fellow" with "an exceptional talent for medicine."

Lafargue's "exceptional talent for medicine" may seem dubious to the modern reader since he believed that the main cures for disease were "alcohol and

electricity."<sup>4</sup> He opposed Pasteur's discoveries and sent Marx articles that maintained that germs were spontaneously created.<sup>5</sup> Whether he was a potential medical genius or not, Lafargue in time abandoned medicine for unsound business schemes and socialist politics.

Lafargue seemed in many ways an ideal son-in-law. He was comparatively rich, a socialist, a man who ran political errands for Marx, a professional, and, by Marx's standards, a coming man in medicine. This did not prevent Marx from telling Theodore Cuno, a fellow socialist who was emigrating to the United States that one of his daughters had contributed to "solving the color question by marrying a nigger. . . ."<sup>6</sup> In addition, Marx habitually referred to Lafargue as "the little Negro" (*Negrillo*) or as "the Gorilla."<sup>7</sup>

This was unadulterated race prejudice; Lafargue was a man of distinguished appearance and aristocratic bearing.

Jenny von Westphalen Marx characterized Lafargue as "a true nigger" for whom "the sky was always full of violins."<sup>8</sup>

Laura bore a second child a year after the first. On January 17, 1870, Jenny Marx wrote Engels that she hoped her daughter would practice reproductive restraint and not produce "ten little nigger boys."<sup>9</sup>

I have already quoted the unpleasant remark which Engels made in 1887, three years before his death, that it was highly appropriate for Lafargue to run for office in a Paris district that included the zoo since "in his quality as a nigger" he was "a degree nearer to the animal kingdom than the rest of us. . . ."

Most, if not all, of these insulting racial slurs were made by Marx and Engels behind the backs of Paul and Laura Lafargue. Whether this made them more excusable is for the reader to judge. (In fairness to Engels, it should be pointed out that, when the Lafargues lost their money, he supported them financially with numerous "loans." Until his dying breath, Engels supported Marx's children and grandchildren whenever they were in need, which was most of the time, just as he had supported Marx himself.)

## The Poisoned Hegelian Root

Marx and Engels derived their belief that the Negro stood outside of history and was incapable of contributing to civilization from Hegel. Hegel did not, of course, descend to the mean and nasty abuse which characterized his two revolutionary followers. But what he had to say was harshly condemnatory and based on skimpy evidence. The gist of it was that the Negro "exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." He believed that the Negroes of Africa

were incapable of religion, but were rather "sorcerers" who imagined that with their fetishes they could command the forces of nature. The Negro race, Hegel continued, has

perfect contempt for humanity. . . . Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper. . . .

. . . Parents sell their children, and conversely children their parents, as either has the opportunity. . . . The polygamy of the Negroes has frequently for its object the having of many children, to be sold, every one of them, into slavery; and very often naive complaints on this score are heard, as for instance in the case of a Negro in London who lamented that he was now quite a poor man because he had already sold all his relations. . . .

Slavery is in and for itself *injustice*, for the essence of humanity is *freedom*, but for this, man must be matured. The gradual abolition of slavery is therefore wiser and more equitable than its sudden removal.

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.<sup>9</sup>

Marx and Engels apparently accepted Hegel's conclusions about the relationship of the Negro world to civilization, although they obviously did not relate the "ahistoric" condition of the Negro world to a lack of consciousness of God. Hegel himself is unclear, probably deliberately so, about the reasons for the Negro being frozen, as he sees it, in the savage and brutish state of natural man.

## Marx Champions Negro Slavery

Marx spent a large part of his life writing diatribes against fellow revolutionaries who had the impudence to differ with him. When Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, probably the leading socialist thinker in France at the time, published a book called *The Philosophy of Poverty*, Marx immediately replied with a vitriolic rebuttal entitled *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847). Proudhon had been childish enough to advocate the emancipation of the Negro slaves in the United States. Marx answered contemptuously:

Without slavery, North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe out North America from the map of the world and you will have anarchy—the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization. Abolish slavery and you will have wiped America off the map of nations.<sup>10</sup>



What Marx was saying in effect was that Negro slaves were needed to produce raw cotton; cotton was the basic raw material of modern capitalist industry; therefore, Negro slavery was necessary to the survival of America and to the survival of modern civilization.

The first thing that is interesting about the quoted paragraph is that Marx again makes it abundantly clear that he has no interest whatsoever in the fate or welfare of Negroes. The second point of interest is his preposterous predictions. If slavery were abolished, America would become "a patriarchal country." What does that mean? A nation of primitive shepherds? Perhaps like the tribes of the Old Testament patriarchs? Evidently, Marx actually believed that emancipation would wipe America off the map of the world; America would cease to exist as a nation!

For a reasonably well-educated man to make this sort of judgment in the year 1847 is incomprehensible. Alexis de Tocqueville had published his great work on the United States, *Democracy in America*, between 1835 and 1840. Marx could have read there:

The inhabitants of the United States constitute a great civilized people, which fortune has placed in the midst of an uncultivated country, at a distance of three thousand miles from the central point of civilization. America consequently stands in daily need of European trade. The Americans will, no doubt, ultimately succeed in producing or manufacturing at home most of the things which they require, but the two continents can never be independent of each other, so numerous are the natural ties which exist between their wants, their ideas, their habits and their manners.<sup>11</sup>

So much for the disappearance of the United States from the face of the earth if Negro slave labor should be outlawed.

Compare Marx's prediction that the United States would become a "patriarchal" society with Tocqueville's more or less contemporary view of the American future:

There are, at the present time, two great nations in the world, which seem to tend toward the same end, although they started from different points: I allude to the Russians and the Americans. Both of them have grown up unnoticed; and whilst the attention of mankind was directed elsewhere, they have suddenly assumed a most pronounced place amongst the nations; and the world learned their existence and their greatness at almost the same time.

All other nations seem to have nearly reached their natural limits, and only to be charged with the maintenance of their power; but these two are still in the act of growth; all the others are stopped, or continue to advance with extreme

difficulty; these are proceeding with ease and with celerity along a path to which the human eye can assign no term. The American struggles against the natural obstacles which oppose him: the adversaries of the Russian are men; the former combats the wilderness and savage life; the latter, civilization with all its weapons and its arts; the conquests of the one are therefore gained by the ploughshare; those of the other, by the sword. The Anglo-American relies upon personal interests to accomplish his ends, and gives free scope to the unguided exertions and common sense of the citizens; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm; the principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different, and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems to be marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.<sup>12</sup>

This contrast in prophecies speaks for itself and needs no commentary.

## **The American Civil War**

Marx and Engels followed the course of the American Civil War with intense interest. Both fervent partisans of the North, they favored emancipation and arming of the Negro slaves and hoped that circumstances would compel the North to transform the struggle into a total, revolutionary war.

Engels, as a Manchester businessman in the cotton textile industry, was particularly alive to the possibilities the conflict opened up for an economic crisis in Great Britain, caused by the cutting off of raw cotton shipments from the American South to the Midlands. This could create mass unemployment among the British and European textile workers and perhaps serve as an overture to a new round of European social revolutions.

On January 7, 1861, three months before the firing on Fort Sumter started, he wrote Marx: "The slightest riot by guerrillas from the North could set everything ablaze. In any event, in one way or another, slavery appears rapidly to be approaching its end, and then the same thing will happen to cotton production. How that will affect England will soon be seen."

Marx was more concerned with the dangers of Confederate victory to potential revolutionary developments within the United States. He believed that a Southern triumph would extend chattel slavery throughout the North. This would depress white wages, cut off the flow of European immigration to America, and stifle the possible growth of an American revolutionary labor movement.

This scenario was unrealistic because Negro slave labor was competitive only in the sort of agriculture that involved gang work on plantations. With part of his mind, Marx seems to have realized this. Thus, there is an intriguing footnote

in *Das Kapital*, Volume One, on comparative slave and free-labor implements and work animals. Marx wrote: "In the slave states bordering on the Gulf of Mexico, down to the date of the civil war, ploughs constructed on old Chinese models, which turned up the soil like a hog or a mole, instead of making furrows, were alone to be found." He then quoted Olmsted that the Negroes were given crude, heavy, and clumsy tools that "no man in his senses" would allow a free worker to use. Olmsted added, according to Marx, that the farm tools ordinarily used in the North

"would not last out a day in a Virginia cornfield. . . . So, too, when I asked why mules are so universally substituted for horses on the farm, the first reason given, and confessedly the most conclusive one, is that horses cannot bear the treatment that they always must get from negroes; horses are always soon foundered or crippled by them, while mules will bear cudgelling, or lose a meal or two now and then, and not be materially injured. . . . But I do not need to go further than to the window of the room in which I am writing to see, at almost any time, treatment of cattle that would ensure the immediate discharge of the driver by almost any farmer owning them in the North. . . ." <sup>13</sup>

Engels wrote Marx, predicting that the South would win because she was fighting in earnest, had mobilized her entire manpower between eighteen and thirty-five, and was under splendid military leadership.<sup>14</sup> In the North, there was no will to victory and "a total lack of talent. One general is dumber than the next one. Unless the North at once becomes revolutionary, it will suffer a decisive defeat and deserve it—that is the way it looks."

Marx replied on August 7 that things weren't that bleak. He predicted that the North would "eventually wage war in earnest and proceed to revolutionary methods. . . ." He added that "a single nigger regiment will have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves."

No matter what the conflict was, Marx and Engels always had the answer. It was to proceed to "revolutionary" means. In this respect, their correspondence is not entirely dissimilar to that of religious fanatics who believe they know that the end of the world is at hand.

Why Marx, who considered himself an economist, imagined that the North, with its immense superiority in industrial production, armaments output, financial resources, and transportation arteries, was not destined to win in the long run remains an enigma. Just as it is an enigma that he should have imagined that the industrial and capitalist North would accept a sort of domestic "Reign of Terror." It never seems to have occurred to either of them that neither Lincoln nor the American people wanted revolution and that wars had been won and



would continue to be won without resort to their favorite and only recipe.

In their private correspondence, Marx and Engels characterized Lincoln condescendingly as a small lawyer who put forward "pettifogging stipulations." They thought "old Lincoln" would "blunder to his heart's content." Lincoln's peace negotiations with the Confederate Commissioners were "merely an election maneuver" and "humbug."

The two prophets were cocksure about everything. When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, Marx wrote Engels that his successor, Andrew Johnson, "bore a deadly hatred for the oligarchy," that is to say, the Southern ruling class.<sup>15</sup> Two and a half months later, Engels wrote Marx that this same Johnson was determined to restore "the old lords of the South" to power.<sup>16</sup>

Marx wrote from his strategic vantage point in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Engels communicated from Manchester. Neither man knew anything more about either Lincoln or Johnson than they read in the newspapers. But they believed themselves infallibly accurate in discovering the inner motivations, secret purposes, and strategies of the little, foolish people who unfortunately governed the world.

Publicly, of course, Marx and Engels sang a very different tune. In the name of the First International, Marx congratulated Lincoln on his reelection to the presidency in 1864. He hailed the man whom he had privately called pettifogging and blundering as "the single-minded Son of the Working Class." He informed Lincoln that "the triumphant Warcry of your Re-election is Death to Slavery."

This florid and grandiloquent document informed Lincoln that "from the commencement of the Titanic American Strife, the Working men of Europe felt instinctively that the Star Spangled Banner carried the Destiny of their class." In case President Lincoln had not grasped the purpose of the war, Marx informed him that it was being waged "to decide whether the virgin soil of immense tracts should be wedded to the labor of the Emigrant, or prostituted by the Tramp of the Slave Driver."<sup>17</sup>

Lincoln needed all the support he could get in England and composed a gracious and generous reply.

## **Legacy of Hatred**

Within two months of Lee's surrender at Appomattox courthouse, Engels made some comparatively shrewd predictions about the long-range consequences of the Northern victory. The white ruling class of the South had been "totally ruined." They would "sell their land to immigrants and speculators from the North. . . ."

As for the poor whites, or the "mean whites" as Engels put it, they would "soon die out. Nothing is to be done with this race; whatever remains two generations from now will have intermarried with the immigrants to form an entirely new race. The niggers will soon become small squatters as in Jamaica."<sup>18</sup>

In other words, the important result of Northern victory for the South was that the Confederate states would be opened up to a flood of European immigrant workers who could form the basis for a future socialist and revolutionary movement. There was no place for the Negroes in this movement, as Engels saw it. They were destined to sink to the bottom of society as "squatters." The Southern terms would be "sharecroppers" and "field hands."

These attitudes of Marx and Engels would have a profound influence on the American Socialist Party during the one period when it was a mass movement of labor—the period from its foundation in 1901 to U.S. entry into World War I in 1917. Between 1901 and 1912, the Party grew from 10,000 to 150,000 dues-paying members. At the peak of its power, it polled 900,000 votes and elected over 2,000 public officials.<sup>19</sup>

The mainstream of the Socialist Party shared Marx's and Engels' private views on the Negro. On September 14, 1901, the *Social Democratic Herald* characterized Negroes as inferior, depraved elements who went around "raping women [and] children."<sup>20</sup> In an article in the same organ, dated May 31, 1902, Victor L. Berger, one of the national leaders of the Socialist Party, wrote that "there can be no doubt that the negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race" and that "free contact with the whites has led to further degeneration of the negroes."<sup>21</sup>

In 1903, the American Socialist Party was criticized by the Second International for its indifference to the widespread lynching of Negroes by white mobs.

The Socialist National Quorum replied that only the abolition of capitalism and the victory of socialism could prevent the procreation and production of "lynchable human degenerates." This extraordinary response seems to have satisfied the international socialist organization.<sup>22</sup>

As Kipnis summarizes the mainstream views of the Socialist Party before World War I, black and white workers would be entitled to receive wages based on their productivity under socialism. But that did not mean that the two races would have to live or work in the same places. "Socialism would solve the race question in the only possible manner—complete segregation."<sup>23</sup>

The legacy of Marx and Engels, as far as the Negro is concerned, is painfully visible in the Soviet Union. Proclaiming total racial equality, the USSR invites tens of thousands of Negroes from Africa and the Americas to train as profes-

sional revolutionaries. The accounts of those who return provide abundant evidence that, beneath the veneer of equality and acceptance, there is animosity, prejudice, and virtual social ostracism.

## Notes

1. Karl Peter Heinzen, who worked with Marx in the 1840s, described him thus: "He had wildly dishevelled, coal-black hair, and his complexion was dirty yellow. Whether the dirty complexion was as nature made it, or whether the dirt came from outside, can no more be decided than whether his shirt and his clothes were originally made in a dirty color or merely acquired dirt." Karl Peter Heinzen, *Erlebtes* (Boston: published by the author, 1864-74, 2 vols.), II, 423; as translated by Payne, *Marx*, pp. 154-55.
2. Wermuth and Wilhelm Stieber, *Die Communisten-Verschwörungen des 19ten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1853; reissued Hildesheim: Olms, 1969), II, 80.
3. Pierre Trémaux, *Origines et transformations de l'homme et des autres êtres, Première partie* (Paris: Hachette, 1865), p. 31. My translation.
4. Marx to Engels, August 7, 1866.
5. Marx to Engels, June 9, 1866.
6. Padover, p. 425.
7. Payne, *Marx*, p. 391.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 500.
9. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree, (Britannica Great Books), pp. 196-99. Hegel points out that he will continue to discuss civilizations on the African continent, such as the Egyptian and Carthaginian, but these he regards as projections of European or Asian civilized man.
10. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Quoted from the British edition (London: Martin Lawrence, 1935) as reprinted in *A Handbook of Marxism* (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 357.
11. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1965), I, 417.
12. *Ibid.*, I, 430-31.
13. Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, 95 n.
14. Engels to Marx, July 30, 1862.



15. Marx to Engels, May 1, 1865.
16. Engels to Marx, July 15, 1865.
17. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Letters to Americans, 1848-1895* (New York: International Publishers, 1953), pp. 65-67.
18. Engels to Marx, July 15, 1865.
19. Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 422.
20. Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York, 1964), III, 381.
21. *Idem.*
22. Nathaniel Weyl and William Marina, *American Statesmen on Slavery and the Negro* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1971), p. 295. Socialist leaders like Bill Haywood and Norman Thomas fought vigorously for full civil rights and racial integration. But the Socialist Party had ceased to be a mass movement of the working class by the time Norman Thomas became its leader.
23. Kipnis, p. 131.

## Did Marx Hate Jews?

Few aspects of Karl Marx's character are more contemptible than his ferocious attacks on Jews and on Judaism at a time when anti-Semitism was still rife in Europe and massacres of Jews were a recent memory. Although Marx was of pure Jewish descent on both sides, he consistently repudiated or was silent concerning his origin. As Sir Isaiah Berlin puts it:

The fact that he was a Jew neither he nor Engels ever mentions. His references to individual Jews, particularly in his letters to Engels, are virulent to a degree: his origin had become a personal stigma which he was unable to avoid pointing out in others. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The socialist custodians of Marx's hate-brimmed correspondence suppressed or embellished those letters which cast their hero in an unsavory light. They eliminated the language of gutter anti-Semitism which came so naturally to both Marx and Engels. Let us consider one example. Ferdinand Lassalle, the German-Jewish leader of the German socialist and labor movement, had at all times done whatever he could to help Marx and to promote Marx's books. While professing friendship for Lassalle, Marx would secretly characterize him as "the little kike,"<sup>2</sup> "Ephraim Smart," a "shameless beast . . . , a pompous ape . . . and a Water-Polack Jew."<sup>4</sup>

On March 7, 1856, Engels wrote Marx on the same subject, declaring that Lassalle was "nothing but a greasy Jew from Breslau" who "has always been repulsive to me."<sup>5</sup> We owe this unvarnished text to the integrity of the Soviet scholar, David Riazanov, who managed to get the four volumes of Marx-Engels correspondence off the presses before Stalin had him expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

But the Marx-Engels letters had been in the hands of the German Social

Democratic Party for a whole generation. The editors were August Bebel and Eduard Bernstein, the latter a Jew. How had they handled this editorial problem? They had simply expurgated or eliminated the things Marx and Engels wrote that might offend the national or racial pride of those groups their party wanted to manipulate.

As for Engels's letter of March 7, 1856, the only one of these anti-Jewish tirades that I have checked out in both editions, they resorted to the simple expedient of eliminating it. Thus, these people, who claimed to be "scientific" socialists and who were quick to cast slurs on the integrity of "bourgeois" scholars, engaged in a systematic falsification of evidence.

What was involved was much more than the feelings of Jewish socialists. Marx's phobia toward Jews was extremely significant on several levels. The first was pathological. To rise above one's origins is one thing. To spew hatred, contempt, and loathing on them suggests a deep-seated disturbance and has resulted in several attempts to understand Marx in terms of "Jewish self-hate."<sup>6</sup>

The second area of significance was that the correspondence makes it abundantly plain that Marx and Engels were not internationalists, but racists. The third area is that these race hatreds were not confined to Jews, but spilled over with venomous detestation on Negroes, Slavs, and many others. Finally, the correspondence, viewed as a whole and in its unexpurgated condition, is filled with fierce vituperation against almost everyone who failed to kowtow to Marx on all occasions.

Strangely enough, the so-called secret conversations of Adolf Hitler are less suffused with hatred and destruction than Marx's contributions to the Marx-Engels correspondence.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the explanation of this anomaly is that Hitler was able to express his total destructiveness in action—by waging a war in which millions would perish, by driving six million Jews into gas ovens, and by inflicting death by overwork and starvation on millions of Slavs and other Russians, whereas Marx and Engels were impotent. They merely dreamed of catastrophic wars; they could only condemn whole peoples to "eradication" in their imagination.

The "official" biography of Marx by Franz Mehring has no index listings under either "anti-Semitism" or "Jews." There is a brief section on Marx's notorious essay *On the Jewish Question*, in which Mehring inaccurately summarizes Marx's conclusion as: "Practical Judaism is nothing but the fully-developed Christian world."<sup>8</sup>

A more recent Marxist scholar, David McLellan, assures us: "It is largely this article that has given the impression that Marx was an anti-Semite. This is inaccurate. . . . *Judentum*, the German word for Judaism, had the derivative



meaning of 'commerce,' and it is this meaning which is uppermost in Marx's mind throughout the article."<sup>9</sup>

What McLellan is saying in essence is that all Marx meant was that he regarded "practical" Judaism as the highest expression of capitalism. Consequently, the emancipation of the Jews involved the abolition of this "practical Judaism," that is to say, the abolition of capitalism. This is an ingenious explanation, but it does not stand up against the evidence.

## Early Expressions of Anti-Semitism

The first point to make is that Marx expressed his aversion to Judaism before he became a Communist and at a time when he publicly opposed both socialism and communism. While he was editor of *Die Rheinische Zeitung*, the leaders of the Cologne Jewish community asked him to support their petition for equal civil rights with Christians. Marx wrote Arnold Ruge on March 13, 1843, that he had decided to do so in order to "puncture as many holes as possible in the Christian state. . . ." He would do so even though he found "the Israelite religion *widerlich*. . . ." Padover translates the German word *widerlich* as "revolting, repulsive, loathsome, nauseating."<sup>10</sup>

Marx's essay *On the Jewish Question*, that has received the unstinted praise of Mehring and the bland apologetics of McLellan, is in reality one of the most violent and mindless attacks on Jews and Judaism of the nineteenth century. Marx thunders:

What is the secular basis of Judaism? Practical *need*, *self-interest*.

What is the wordly cult of the Jew? *Haggling*. What is his wordly god? Money! . . .

Money is the jealous god of Israel before whom no other god may exist. Money degrades all the gods of mankind and converts them into commodities. . . .

What is contained abstractly in the Jewish religion—contempt for theory, for art, for history, for man as an end in himself. . . .

The social *emancipation* of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Jewishness*.<sup>11</sup>

If this hymn of hate had been penned by a man utterly ignorant of Judaism and of Jewish culture, it might have been explained away as due to the prevalent prejudices of the time. But Marx knew from his own background, family ambience and lineage that the charges he had made were lies. A large number of his ancestors and at least one of his uncles had been rabbis, some of them distin-

guished scholars. Did he sincerely believe that these theologians had “contempt for theory?” Did he imagine that a people that had written the Bible had “contempt for history”? And if the nature of Jewishness was haggling and money worship, how did he reconcile this fact with the sacrifices his own family had made to provide him with that education and culture which, according to Marx, they must have despised?

At the time this vitriolic essay was published, over half the Jews in the Rhineland made their livelihood as artisans and craftsmen. But Marx had not, of course, bothered to ascertain these facts any more than he had taken the trouble to read anything about Jewish religion or Jewish history, except for a few anti-Semitic outbursts by Bruno Bauer. This condemnation of his own origins, his own cultural heritage and the religion of his ancestors was published by Marx at a time when pogroms still occurred, when the Jews were falsely accused (as the early Christians had been accused) of performing human sacrifices in their religious rites. In short, it was an incitement not only to religious and racial intolerance, but also to genocide.

We do not know whether any of the people who herded cringing Jewish women and children into Hitler's gas ovens had read Marx's *On the Jewish Question*. But it is safe to say that, if they had, it would have encouraged them in their activities.

## The Wasp's Sting

Goethe once said: “I am always astounded at the malevolence of little people.” Karl Marx never wrote another article about Jews or Judaism, but he remained an active anti-Semite until his dying breath. The hatred he bore for his people exuded out of him on the most inappropriate occasions like pus from an infected wound.

Consider the case of Moses Hess. Hess was the man who had hailed Marx as his “idol” and as a philosopher who combined the wisdom and wit of Rousseau, Voltaire, Heine, and Hegel. He had also converted both Engels and Marx to socialism. Under the circumstances, Marx might have been expected to treat Hess with at least outward respect and decency.

On September 22, 1856, Marx hurried to inform Engels of some gossip he had heard about Moses and Sybille Hess which placed them in a discreditable and ridiculous light. According to Marx, Sybille Hess (whom he always referred to as *Mösin*—presumably the feminine form of *Moses*) had been seduced by an impecunious Russian named Sassanoff. This fellow was “much in tatters, very

much without cash or credit, and consequently open to plebian and revolutionary and world-storming ideas."

Moses Hess had introduced Sassanoff to the right salons and advanced him the money he needed. "And then," Marx wrote, "Sassanoff enticed a rich old Jewess and took her in kosher wedlock. . . . But he abandoned Mösin faithlessly and she is now running around Paris scolding and howling, and tells everyone who will listen to her about the treachery of the perfidious Muscovite. This is certainly the story of the grandeur and decadence of the House of Moses." Four days later, Engels replied, saying that "the stories about Moses and Mösin made us laugh a good deal around here."

Many years later, Jenny von Westphalen died and Sybille Hess, now widowed, wrote Karl Marx:

Ach, what a terrible surprise when I read the death notice of your dear wife, written by our gallant Engels. . . . I first learned to love and to appreciate her when we all lived together in Brussels, and from that time on she has remained in my memory full of love and reverence. . . . I find it impossible to describe to you how deeply the news has shaken me.<sup>12</sup>

In his *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), Marx comments that Feuerbach considers practical human activity "only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance." Comments of this sort are scattered through his writings.

### Marx as "Tribune" Correspondent

During 1851–61, Karl Marx was the London correspondent of the *New York Daily Tribune*, the largest and probably the most influential newspaper in the United States. He got the job from Charles A. Dana, Horace Greeley's second-in-command.

Dana had spent five years of his life in the transcendentalist utopian community of Brook Farm where brilliant minds such as Emerson, Hawthorne, and Amos Bronson Alcott philosophized about the cooperative commonwealth while their women did the necessary hard physical labor. During the later years of Dana's stay there, Brook Farm was modelled on the *phalanstère* system of Fourier. François Charles Marie Fourier was certifiably insane by contemporary standards.<sup>13</sup> He was also the author of "primitive anti-Jewish diatribes" and recruited as disciples "rabid anti-Semites."<sup>14</sup>

Dana met Marx in 1848. They found they were kindred spirits and had a great



deal in common. Marx handled his journalistic assignment for the *Tribune* in the manner one would have expected, given his symbiotic or parasitic relationship to Engels. Complaining that he was unable to turn out the two articles a week for which Dana paid him generously, by the standards of the time,<sup>15</sup> he got Engels to write about a third of them for him, signed his name to Engels's work and pocketed the money.

On March 15, 1853, Marx wrote an article which the *Tribune* published on what he called the "Jews' bill." This was a measure designed to give English Jews most of the civil rights enjoyed by other British subjects. Marx called it a "miserable reform farce," designed for the exclusive benefit of Baron Lionel de Rothschild. "The exclusion of Jews from the House of Commons after the spirit of usury has so long presided in the British Parliament, is unquestionably an absurd anomaly."

### The Case of Levy's Nose

One of the many interminable quarrels that Marx involved himself in concerned a Swiss naturalist of distinction named Karl Vogt. A former revolutionary of 1848 vintage, Vogt publicly accused Marx of using his position as leader of Communist groups for purposes of blackmail and extortion.

This case will be discussed later. The only aspect of it that is relevant to anti-Semitism is the matter of Levy's nose. Moses Joseph Levy was the editor of the London *Daily Telegraph*. In its columns, he discussed two long articles dealing with the charges against Marx which had appeared in the German press.

With the heavy sarcasm that he so frequently affected, Marx wrote that "all the lavatories of London spew their physical filth into the Thames" and similarly all the "social filth" is poured into the "central sewer called the *Daily Telegraph*." Levy was the presiding alchemist of this sewer system. In his office building, the legend should be inscribed: "Wayfarer, stop and piss."

The diatribe continued with a pseudolearned discussion of Levy's nose, which cited *Hamlet* and *Tristram Shandy* and quoted some unidentified English poet: "And 'tis a miracle we may suppose, / No nastiness offends his skillful nose."

Marx added that "the great art of Levy's nose consists in the fact that it caresses foul odors, and that it can sniff them out over a hundred miles and attract them." It was "an elephant's trunk, an antenna, a lighthouse, a telegraph."

Robert Payne in his unjustly neglected biography, *Marx*, which I have already cited, goes into this rather sordid and shabby attack at considerable length (pp. 322-25) and attributes its venom to Marx's "sexual nightmares and frustrations, his aversion to Jews, his perpetual consciousness of his own Jewishness, his

loneliness and physical weakness, his manic depressions, his urge to destroy everything he admired or envied. . . ." Whether Marx had "sexual nightmares" and whether he could clinically be classified as a "manic depressive" seems questionable, but the broad picture Payne draws is fundamentally right.

Marx continued his attack with the bizarre insinuation that a man named Moses Joseph Levy was basely trying to conceal his Jewish origin! This was a straight case of Freudian projection of Marx's own offense onto his intended victim. Marx *never* acknowledged his Jewish origin.

Marx's argument was that "not one of the 22,000 people of the tribe of Levi who were counted by Moses on the journey through the desert were called Levy."<sup>16</sup> This suggests to the reader that Marx's scholarship was often superficial and his parade of erudition at times flimflam. The Hebrew alphabet does not contain vowels. Hence, it is utterly immaterial whether a surname is spelled *Levi* or *Levy* in the Latin alphabet.

What had Moses Joseph Levy done to warrant this ferocious attack? He had done several things. He bore Marx's *real* surname—the family surname before Marx's grandfather had changed it from Levy to Marx-Levy to Marx. He was a successful editor of a large newspaper, whereas Marx had failed at every newspaper editorship he had been given. And to add insult to injury, this Moses Joseph Levy was a successful Jew who lived in London without panhandling from his acquaintances. Here again, rage and envy against success seem to have been Marx's primary motivations.

## The Russian Loan

Marx's article on "The Russian Loan," published in the *Tribune* on January 4, 1856, is probably the closest approximation in all of his writings to the style and tone of *Der Stürmer* and the other Nazi publications that paved the way psychologically for the "Final Solution." Marx wrote:

Take Amsterdam, for instance, a city harboring many of the worst descendants of the Jews whom Ferdinand and Isabella drove out of Spain and who, after lingering a while in Portugal, were driven out of there too and eventually found a place of retreat in Holland. . . . Here and there and everywhere that a little capital courts investment, there is ever one of these little Jews ready to make a little suggestion or place a little bit of a loan. The smartest highwayman in the Abruzzi is not better posted about the locale of the hard cash in a traveler's valise or pocket than these little Jews about any loose capital in the hands of a trader. . . . These small Jewish agents draw their supplies from the big Jewish houses . . . and practice great ostensible devotion to the religion of their race.

Marx descended, as Lewis S. Feuer aptly puts it, to "utter vulgarity" in describing the Jewish businessmen in an Amsterdam office: "The language spoken smells strongly of Babel, and the perfume which otherwise pervades the place is by no means of a choice kind."<sup>17</sup> He proceeded from this to something very close to the Nazi theory of a world Jewish conspiracy:

Thus we find every tyrant backed by a Jew, as is every Pope by a Jesuit. In truth, the cravings of oppressors would be hopeless, and the practicability of war out of the question, if there were not an army of Jesuits to smother thought and a handful of Jews to ransack pockets. . . . The fact that 1,855 years ago Christ drove the Jewish money-changers out of the temple, and that the money-changers of our age, enlisted on the side of tyranny, happen again to be Jews is perhaps no more than a historic coincidence.

This article seemed little short of an incitation to mob action and murder. The facts of the matter, as usual, bore virtually no resemblance to Marx's hatreds. The Amsterdam Jewish community consisted primarily of the descendants of those Jews who had been expelled from Spain on religious grounds and who constituted the most advanced Jewish community on the face of the earth in terms of intellectual ability, professional skills, former administrative rank, and intermarriage with the Spanish aristocracy. One of the members of this community was Benedict Spinoza. According to some modern economic historians, the lightning rise of Holland to one of the world's greatest mercantile, colonial and maritime powers during the seventeenth century was in large part due to the presence of these Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition.

Marx's articles were so violent and inflammatory that in 1857 he was informed that the *Tribune* would take only one a week, rather than two. The Civil War concentrated American attention on domestic issues and in 1862, the paper published only two of Marx's articles. In the same year, Horace Greeley fired Dana. One of the reasons he gave for this action was the anti-Semitic articles that Dana had published.

Feuer is convinced that Marx's especial loathing and detestation for Dutch Jews was due to the fact that his mother was of Dutch-Jewish origin.<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to judge the validity of that assertion.

One could go on with other incidents. Thus, on May 10, 1861, Marx wrote his crony Engels that the Egyptologist, Lepsius, had "proved" that the Exodus was "the expulsion of a *Leper* people from Egypt, at the head of whom was an Egyptian priest named Moses. Lazarus, the leper, is also the basic type of the Jew. . . ." Three years later, on June 16, 1864, he wrote Engels that a Dutch Orientalist named Dozy had proved that "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were



fantasy-mongers, that the Israelites were idolators . . . , that the tribe of Simeon (exiled under Saul) had moved to Mecca where they built a heathenish temple and worshipped stones." Old age and infirmities and illnesses, some of them of mysterious origin, blunted Marx's savagery toward his own people, but not his basic attitudes.<sup>19</sup>

If the greatest folk hero of the Jewish people was Moses, then it was essential that Marx convince himself that this Moses was the leader of a band of outcast lepers, that Moses was not a Jew at all, but a renegade Egyptian priest, and so forth. Since Marx merely hated Jewry, whereas he despised the Negro race, he "discovered" that the Jews of the Exodus had hybridized with blacks during their long sojourn in the desert.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Gutter Attack on Ferdinand Lassalle**

Marx reached the depths of gutter anti-Semitism in his correspondence with Engels concerning the versatile and brilliant German-Jewish socialist leader, Ferdinand Lassalle. All the time Marx pretended to be Lassalle's friend, accepted favors from him, used him to puff unsuccessful books, "borrowed" money from him, and accepted his lavish hospitality, he made accusations that verged on the insane. Nor did Marx's vendetta against Lassalle cease with the latter's tragic death in a duel at age thirty-nine. Marx and Engels denounced Lassalle posthumously as a "traitor"; they intrigued against his reputation; they jeered at him in their private correspondence.

The rivalry with Lassalle reveals Marx at his worst. He appears as mean-spirited, intriguing, unforgiving, two-faced, and devoid of honor. He hated Lassalle because his younger rival was also a German Jew and because Lassalle had succeeded brilliantly in everything that Marx had attempted, but failed to accomplish.

Engels' attitudes toward Lassalle were somewhat different. His hatred was more uncomplicated. On the other hand, no hypocrisy was involved. Engels did not praise Lassalle to his face, pretend friendship, or accept his hospitality. He no doubt felt threatened by Lassalle. At one period, cooperation between Lassalle and Marx in the leadership of the nascent German socialist and labor movement appeared a distinct possibility. This would have displaced Engels from the role to which he had devoted his entire adult life—that of being Marx's chief lieutenant and confidant. With his strongly ingrained authoritarian attitude toward life, Engels needed a leader whose wishes he could consider commands, whose beliefs he could appropriate as his own, and whose power would partially descend to him through a chain of command.

The other and closely related threat was that Lassalle would eclipse Marx. This was not merely a question of leadership of the European labor and socialist movement, though that was bad enough. There was also the distinct possibility that Lassalle's theories would supplant Marx's and that Lassalle would be accepted as the founder of "scientific socialism." If that occurred, the meaning of Engels' life would be shattered.

If one glances at the index to the Riazanov edition of the Marx-Engels correspondence, one finds this heading: "Lassalle (*Jüdel Braun, Ephraim Gescheit, Itzig, Wieseltier*)."

To translate: "Lassalle (Little Jew Braun, Clever Ephraim, Izzy, the Weasel.)"

As I have already indicated, the founders of scientific socialism also used other and more opprobrious epithets.

## The Rupture

At the University of Berlin, Lassalle was dubbed a *Wunderkind*. At twenty-one, he became nationally known because of his championship of the separation and alimony suit of Countess Sophie von Hatzfeldt—an early version of women's rights. Imprisoned in 1848 for revolutionary activity (a fate which Marx had avoided), he soon had *entrée* to all circles of German society, including the aristocracy. He did everything within his power to help Marx find publishers for his books and, in his entire relationship to the older man, displayed a characteristic attitude of *noblesse oblige*. It was a long time before Lassalle perceived that his friendship was not reciprocated.

In 1859, storm clouds appeared on the horizon. Marx tried to borrow money from Lassalle, but the latter had lost heavily in bad speculations and was unable to help him. Marx then asked for Lassalle's full support in his feud with Karl Vogt, whom he had accused of being a paid secret agent of Napoleon III. Since Lassalle was a man with an international reputation in both scholarship and politics, he asked Marx for "documentary evidence."

When he received what little Marx had to offer, he wrote Marx: "You cannot deny that your case is not very good," adding that Marx had been foolish to accept the "unconfirmed statements" of an habitual liar, and that the involvement of a man like Wilhelm Liebknecht on Marx's side was unfortunate.<sup>21</sup>

In reply, Marx sent him some unsavory charges that had been made against Lassalle by a group of Düsseldorf workers six years previously.<sup>22</sup> Although ill, possibly with tertiary syphilis, Lassalle suspected Marx of malicious intent: "Why do you send me this stuff with so triumphant a mien and superb a gesture? To prove you mistrust me a little? . . . I get the impression that these notes were in reply to a request for a confidential report on me."<sup>23</sup>

Lassalle foolishly patched things up. He entertained Marx in Berlin where he gave the older man "an extraordinarily friendly welcome."<sup>24</sup> Lassalle wanted to start a great radical newspaper in Germany for which he would raise the large sum of 20,000 talers. He proposed that Karl Marx take over as editor. The negotiations broke down because the Prussian government refused to restore Marx's citizenship. Nevertheless, Marx was entertained royally and charmed by Countess Sophie von Hatzfeldt, Lassalle's mistress who was 20 years his senior. Jenny von Westphalen Marx strongly disapproved of the Berlin trip, referred to the countess as the "Babylonian woman," and said that she would not have their daughters introduced to immoral people of that sort.

Lassalle made a return visit to the Marxes in London in July 1862. The Marx family was as usual desperately hard up and plunged in debt. Marx attempted to return the younger man's hospitality, as Lassalle was at the height of his fame and could still be useful to him. Jenny Marx reacted to the presence of their visitor with a cold fury uncharacteristic of her. She wrote in her autobiographical sketch that Lassalle

was almost crushed by the weight of the fame he had achieved as scholar, thinker, poet and politician. The laurel wreath lay fresh upon his Olympian brow and ambrosian locks, or rather on his stiff, bristling Nigger's *chevelure*. . . . There were still many fields of knowledge he had left unexplored. He had made no advances in Egyptology. "Should I therefore astonish the world as an Egyptologist, or should I demonstrate my versatility through my actions as a politician, a warrior, or a soldier?" It was a terrible dilemma.

Lassalle hurried back to Berlin, to a congenial "society of spongers and sycophants," where, "instead of demonstrating his prowess as an Egyptologist, or as a soldier, or as a politician, or as a poet, or as a thinker, he chose to follow a yet untrodden path—he became the Messiah of the workers."<sup>25</sup>

Lassalle may well have been a man difficult to take, except in small quantities. He was at least as egocentric as Marx himself, and deficient in tact and reticence. In addition, he had an enormous appetite for women which he habitually gratified, and Jenny Marx was as prudish about marriage and monogamy as Queen Victoria. To what extent was Jenny's bitterness toward Lassalle unconsciously directed against her husband? Marx too was a man of grandiose promises, a self-styled authority on all fields of human knowledge, and a man who turned from one great project to the next. Lassalle was seven years younger than Marx. Marx had written a doctoral dissertation on Democritus, an Ionian nature philosopher, which sank into instant obscurity. In the later 1850s, Lassalle published a treatise on another Greek philosopher of the same period, entitled

*Heraclitus the Obscure, the Philosopher of Ephesus*. The book was hailed as a masterpiece by von Humboldt, Varnhagen, and Lepsius, the leading Egyptologist of Germany. Lassalle was invited to become a member of the Berlin Philosophical Society.

Foolishly, Lassalle sent a copy of his book to Marx with the modest comment: "Philosophers and scholars go before me like the heralds of King Ahasueras before Mordechai and proclaim, 'This is the man who has written *Heraclitus*.'" Marx delayed acknowledging the gift for months, then wrote Lassalle that the book was "masterly." But the bile of envy poured out in a letter Marx wrote Engels: "Heraclitus, the Obscure, by Lassalle, the Bright, is a feeble composition." It was "an enormous display of erudition" which "adds nothing to what Hegel wrote. . . . When one has time and money and, like Lassalle, can send to the Bonn University Library for any book one wants, it is easy to compose this exhibition of quotations. . . ." <sup>26</sup>

Marx's fury and spite at Lassalle's success erupted in a long, angry letter to Engels, dated February 25, 1859, in which he referred to him as "the little Jew" and "little Jew Braun." Lassalle had written him "a ridiculous letter," in which he hoped that Marx's book on economics would appear shortly, since he, Lassalle, was working on "a major economic study." Marx answered Lassalle that he "had no fear of the competition." He was ostensibly enraged that "the little Jew" would presume to compare his scribbles with Marx's great work in progress. Perhaps what he really feared was that Lassalle would again seize the laurel wreath. Marx found it almost impossible to finish what he started; Lassalle had the disagreeable habit of accomplishing whatever he undertook.

There were other reasons for envy.

At huge meetings throughout Germany, Lassalle was urging the workers to form their own political party. He was one of the greatest mass orators of the nineteenth century in contrast to Marx and Engels who, in the opinion of a contemporary, were able to stutter and lisp in twenty different languages. <sup>27</sup>

In 1862, Lassalle drafted a program for a German socialist party and in the following year he founded the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein* (General Union of German Workers), the nucleus from which the powerful German Social Democratic Party would arise. When he was killed in 1864, 4,000 people attended the funeral service in a Geneva synagogue. Vast crowds of mourners turned out as the embalmed body was taken down the Rhine by Countess von Hatzfeldt. As Lassalle had remarked concerning his last Rhineland speaking tour, it seemed "like the birth of a new religion." <sup>28</sup>

When Karl Marx died nineteen years later, fewer than two dozen people attended his funeral.



## Vendetta after Lassalle's Death

When Lassalle died, Marx wrote Countess von Hatzfeldt on two separate occasions: "I know what he was to you and what his loss will mean. But rejoice in one thing, he died young, in triumph, like Achilles. . . . You are quite right in feeling that I, more than any other, could appreciate his greatness and importance. . . . I loved him *personally*."<sup>29</sup>

To Engels, Marx wrote: "It is hard to believe that such a noisy, stirring, pushing man is now dead as a mouse and must altogether hold his tongue."

Death could not save Lassalle from the malignant and spiteful pens of Marx and Engels. Lassalle had proposed to Bismarck that the latter establish a "social and revolutionary people's monarchy." This was not as wild an idea as it appears in retrospect since Bismarck was engaged in promoting a large program of social welfare legislation and had made overtures to such veterans of the 1848 revolution as Liebknecht, Carl Schurz, and Karl Marx himself.

Bismarck's version of his discussions with Lassalle was given in a speech to the Reichstag on September 17, 1878:

He was one of the most charming and gifted men I have ever known, and I have never regretted the three or four occasions on which we met. He was ambitious on a large scale and in the grand manner; it was instructive even to talk to him; our conversations lasted for hours and I was always sorry when they were over. There was no question of negotiating with him. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Long before this was published and within a year of Lassalle's death, Marx wrote Engels about the man he "loved . . . *personally*" that "Izzy wanted to sell out the workers' party to Bismarck."<sup>31</sup> And Engels, faithful to his master, echoed this verdict and called Lassalle "a common scoundrel . . . a traitor."<sup>32</sup>

In a letter to the gullible Dr. Kugelmann dated February 23, 1865, Marx claimed that he had broken with Lassalle because of the latter's "self-flattering braggadocio to which he added the most shameless plagiarism from my writings" and because "*Lassalle* had in fact *betrayed* the Party" by making a deal with Bismarck. Marx added that Lassalle had "a theatrically vain nature" and was "a quack savior."<sup>33</sup> In another communication to Kugelmann, Marx dismissed both the French emperor, Napoleon III, and the Prussian chancellor, Prince von Bismarck, as "*mediocre canaille*."<sup>34</sup> It was not hard to see that beneath Marx's "ideological" attack what was involved was something which Aesop had discovered about human nature two and a half thousand years previously and had recounted in his fable about the fox and the grapes.

One final word about Lassalle. His opponent had shot him in the genitals.

Despite heavy dosages of opium, Lassalle suffered three days of torment before finally dying. This "comic side" of the Lassalle affair naturally appealed to the mirthful Engels. On August 22, 1868, he wrote Marx: "Poor Baron Izzy! To be shot by a Wallachian and turned into a eunuch. You already found it funny that his mouth was stopped, but now there is also this."<sup>35</sup>

When one looks at this mass of evidence, it seems apparent that we are dealing with a pathological case of hatred and envy—a man who despised his own people, probably because he secretly despised himself (and, if so, with good reason). When an eminent Marxist scholar like David McLellan, who is thoroughly familiar with all the evidence, blandly informs his readers that Marx was not an anti-Semite, one wonders just what sort of evidence of anti-Semitism is needed to convince him. Or, to put it differently, whether any conceivable evidence would make him change his ideological preconceptions, prejudices, and commitments.

### The Cream of the Jest

The cream of the jest, as James Branch Cabell would have put it, is that nobody would ever brand Karl Marx as one of the chief originators of modern political anti-Semitism.

That opprobrious distinction would be bestowed upon Joseph Arthur Count de Gobineau, who wrote a four-volume treatise in 1853–55 called *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. We have already examined what the "internationalist," Karl Marx, wrote about Jews. Now let us see what Gobineau has to say about the same subject:

Since the chosen race ceased to dwell in the mountains and plains of Palestine, the well where Jacob's flocks came down to drink has been filled up with sand, Naboth's vineyard has been invaded by the desert, and the bramble flourishes in the place where stood the palace of Ahab. And what did the Jews become in this miserable corner of the earth? They became a people that succeeded in everything it undertook, a strong and intelligent people, and one which, before it lost, sword in hand, the name of an independent nation, had given as many learned men to the world as it had merchants.<sup>36</sup>

Marx was vaguely aware of Gobineau's existence. He wrote Engels on March 5, 1870 that he "suspected" that Gobineau sprang "not from an ancient French warrior, but from a modern French doorman. . . ."

Pulling other people down to his own level or even below it seems to have given

Marx one of the few pleasures he was allowed to enjoy in life. But in this instance, he was mistaken. Gobineau belonged to the ancient French nobility.

## Aftermath

Marx became less virulent as disease and age drained his mental powers, but his hatred of Judaism and Jewry remained constant. His notorious essay *On the Jewish Question* was reprinted in the German socialist press during his declining years—probably with his consent.

The “narrow-minded, fanatical and neurotic” Wilhelm Liebknecht praised Marx’s “Jewish discoveries.” Anatole Lunacharsky, Lenin’s Commissar of Education, hailed Marx’s Jewish study as “a true stroke of genius” and “absolutely valid to this very day.”<sup>37</sup>

The anti-Semitic writings of Marx are widely disseminated in the Soviet Union. They contribute substantially to endemic Jew-hatred and to the widespread Soviet popular belief that the Jews are, as Marx taught, solely concerned with “haggling,” that “their god is money,” that they have no interest in theory or history. Marx’s writings also inspire anti-Zionist campaigns which seemed to have reached new levels of hatred and mendacity in the late 1970s.<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx is honored in the Soviet Union for his widely reprinted anti-Semitic writings. The Soviet public is not told that Karl Marx was a Jew.

## Notes

1. Berlin, *Marx*, p. 253.
2. Marx to Engels, May 25, 1859.
3. Marx to Engels, July 2, 1858
4. Marx to Engels, February 9, 1860.
5. Engels to Marx, March 7, 1856.
6. Arnold Künzli, *Karl Marx: eine Psychographie* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1966), p. 202; also Lewis S. Feuer, “Karl Marx and the Promethean Complex,” *Encounter*, December 1968, pp. 24–29.
7. H. R. Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler’s Secret Conversations, 1941–1944* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953).

8. Mehring, p. 101.
9. David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (London: Pelican, 1970), pp. 183–84.
10. Padover, p. 166.
11. I have used Padover's translation (p. 169), but have changed the German word *schacher* to *haggling*.
12. Padover, p. 570.
13. For example, Fourier asserted that a natural earth satellite named Phoebe (which existed solely inside his scrambled brains) had collided with our planet, bringing precisely "150 new species of snakes and 43 new races of bedbugs into existence." He foresaw a future for man in which an imaginary animal called the *antilion*, "superb, docile and elastic" and "about three times the size of our own miserable lions," would transport travelers at such incredible speeds that they could breakfast at Calais, lunch in Paris and dine in Marseilles. See Eric von K  hnelt-Leddihn, *Leftism* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1974) pp. 108–20.
14. Robert S. Wistrich, *Midstream*, February 1978, p. 93.
15. Marx complained to Engels about the way the *Tribune* was exploiting him. His articles for the paper, although only part-time work, brought him an estimated 100 pounds yearly, or twice the annual earnings of a British skilled worker. Instead of learning to write legibly, Marx had his wife copy them out in longhand. In the early years, Engels had to translate them from German into English. Marx also earned some money from his other articles and books. He "borrowed" from everybody. In addition, Engels sent him about 100 pounds annually during Marx's darkest years of poverty, more than twice that in the 1860s, and 350 pounds annually from 1869 on. See Seigel, pp. 256–69.
16. Payne, *Marx*, p. 323.
17. Feuer, p. 26.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
19. For details, see Padover, pp. 541–42.
20. Marx to Engels, July 30, 1862. This is discussed more fully in chapter seven.
21. David Footman, *Ferdinand Lassalle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 113.
22. Marx had received these charges in 1853 and had interrogated the accusers. He wrote Engels that he believed the charges "are true." They involved having "constantly exploited the workers for his private dirt . . . for private crimes . . . unsavory personal details. . . ." He was "a kept man" of the Countess von Hatzfeldt. Lassalle was "dangerous"; he wanted to "play the great gentleman and open a salon. . . . He thinks he can order the world about. . . ." Footman, p. 83.



Lassalle's judgment was entirely right. Marx had believed the charges, perhaps he had inspired them. Envy was at the root of it.

23. Footman, p. 112.

24. Marx to Nannette Philips, March 24, 1861. Padover, p. 332.

25. Jenny Marx, *A Short Sketch of an Eventful Life*, reproduced and translated in Robert Payne, *The Unknown Karl Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), pp. 137-38.

26. Footman, pp. 97-98.

27. Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), p. 111.

28. Footman, p. 240.

29. Payne, *Marx*, p. 357.

30. As translated by Schwartzschild, p. 302.

31. Marx to Engels, January 30, 1865.

32. Engels to Marx, January 27, 1865.

33. Karl Marx, *Letters to Kugelmann* (New York: International Publishers, 1934), pp. 28-29.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

35. Lassalle's antagonist was from Wallachia. Engels' pun was based on the fact that the word *Wallach* in German means both *Wallachian* and *gelding*.

36. Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Races* (New York: Putnam's, 1915), I, 58-59.

37. Moshe Glickson, *The Jewish Complex of Karl Marx* (New York: Herzl Press, 1961), p. 21.

38. William Korey, "The Kremlin's Anti-Semites," *Midstream*, October 1978, pp. 8-16.

## 9

# Engels: The Making and Unmaking of an Anti-Semite

Many of the writers who have been disturbed at the pathological nature of Karl Marx's hatred of his own people have expiated on the extent to which Judaism was hated and Jews were regarded as inferiors in mid-nineteenth-century Germany and Europe. Some of them have alluded to the extent to which "emancipated" Jews—those who had abandoned Judaism either for Christianity or for agnosticism and atheism—retained ambivalent love-hate relationships toward their people and their heritage. Others have pointed out that the European socialist tradition was largely anti-Semitic and that Jew-hatred flourished particularly among the unsuccessful and resentful people who embraced revolutionary utopian movements.<sup>1</sup>

I have suggested elsewhere that modern ideological anti-Semitism is primarily concentrated in the ranks of the discontented masses of modern societies.<sup>2</sup> These movements, whether religious or secular, see the Jew as the central societal force for evil and generally advocate his expropriation or extermination. (They are thus quite distinct from the sort of social anti-Semitism, which may merely involve excluding Jews from country clubs because they are believed to be loud or pushy or to have other disagreeable characteristics.)

These movements of ideological anti-Semitism, I have argued, are usually led by intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals whose ambitions are disproportionate to their abilities and power. They resent Jewish success, based primarily on intelligence and ambition. Perhaps they would like to wreak revenge on the entire ruling establishment, but they dare not do so because it is entrenched and powerful. The Jew, on the other hand, is the most vulnerable element in this elite structure. He cannot claim aristocratic lineage or ancient, inherited landed estates. He has made himself a people apart by clinging to separate dietary, ritual, and linguistic customs and by his denial of Christianity.

The other component element in the modern ideological anti-Semitism of the present century (and to a certain extent that of such periods as fifteenth century Spain and Portugal) is that the intense individualism of the Jew has identified him with the private enterprise or capitalist system. Those moribund social elements which see their status, wealth, and way of life threatened by a driving, dynamic, mercantile, or capitalist system often see Jewry as part of this root of evil.

People who create utopias fear change. In this sense, they are reactionaries. Throughout history, they have tended to be people who uphold societies in which power is based on status, rather than on ability. Of course, these utopians need not be anti-Jewish, since Jews are not necessarily part of the ferment of change which they dread. Fear of the emergent Mediterranean-wide mercantile and trading society of Athens probably inspired Plato to create his dreadful frozen utopias of *The Republic* and *The Laws*, modelled on Sparta and utterly intolerant of intellectual dissent.<sup>3</sup>

The point of all this is that some of the "intellectual" anti-Semitism which is supposed to have partially explained Marx's ferocious hatred of the Jewish people comes from bizarre utopians and mad eccentrics like Fourier and from such savage enemies of Christianity as Bauer and Feuerbach—people quite distinct from scholars like David Strauss who sought to extract the figure of Jesus Christ from the miracles and magic of the official theology of the time. The mainstream attitude of educated Europeans toward emancipated Jews in the early and mid-nineteenth century was not one of growing anti-Semitism, but rather one of somewhat greater acceptance and appreciation.

At the time Marx was writing his diatribes against his own people, Benjamin Disraeli was one of the outstanding novelists of England and later became her prime minister. Unlike Marx, he boasted publicly of his Jewish origin. In the United States at the time of Marx's fulminations, Florida entered the Union and sent to Washington as her first senator the converted Jew, David Levy Yulee. Louisiana elected Judah P. Benjamin to a similar position. During the Civil War, Benjamin served the Confederacy first as secretary of war and later as secretary of state, and was dubbed "the brains of the Confederacy."

## Engels and Young Germany

In Germany, Felix Mendelssohn was esteemed as one of Europe's greatest living composers. In addition, and I think of much greater importance, the movement which stirred the liberal thinkers of Marx's and Engels's youth was called "Young Germany." It had two leading lights. In poetry, there was Heinrich

Heine, who had converted from Judaism to Christianity as his "passport" to European civilization. The other leading figure was the satiric essayist, Ludwig Börne. Like Marx, Börne was a Rhineland Jew, originally named Löb Baruch, who had embraced Christianity to be free to continue his professional career.

Unlike Marx, Börne defended world Jewry against every form of discrimination and persecution in trenchant essays that won him an international reputation. Engels became one of his fervent admirers. When he was eighteen, he wrote his friend, Friedrich Graeber, a pastor's son, challenging the Christian doctrine of eternal damnation for infidels and apostates: "Can you imagine that a man who has striven for union with God all his life (Börne, Spinoza, Kant) that after death people like these should be banished from God forever and suffer God's wrath physically and mentally without end in the most fearful torments?"<sup>4</sup>

Engels became a dedicated adherent of Young Germany. On April 28–30, 1839, he wrote Wilhelm Graeber, Friedrich's brother, that the movement

is not a group of writers, like the romantic, demagogic, and other schools, not a closed society; what they want and work for is the ideas of our century—the emancipation of the Jews and of the slaves, general constitutionalism and other good ideas—shall become part of the flesh and blood of the German people. Since these ideas are not far from the trend of my own mind, why should I hold aloof?<sup>5</sup>

In another letter, dated April 8, 1839, he wrote Wilhelm Graeber that the program of Young Germany is "not anything demagogic or anti-Christian," but is based on natural rights. These ideas include:

above all, participation of the people in the administration of the state, that is, constitutional matters; further, emancipation of the Jews, abolition of all religious compulsion, of all hereditary aristocracy, etc. Who can have anything against that?<sup>6</sup>

Engels's hero-worship of Börne was unrestrained and ecstatic: "No one has described the glory of the deed like Börne. With him, all is life, all is vigor. Only of his writings can it be said that they are *deeds* for freedom." He had a literary style that "surpasses everything." He was

the standard-bearer of German freedom, the only *real man* in the Germany of his day . . . , the John the Baptist of the new period who preaches repentance to the self-satisfied Germans and tells them that already the axe is laid to the root of the tree and that one mightier will come, who will baptize with fire and mercilessly sweep away the chaff from the threshing floor.<sup>7</sup>



During these early years, Engels was lonely and isolated. He wrote many more letters than he received and he complains of Graeber's silence. In an effort to win the approval of one of these comparatively untalented young men, Engels included long paragraphs in one of his letters in excellent Latin, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. It was sad that a man of such unusual ability should have to show off before his inferiors to get their attention.

Börne died in Paris in 1837. At the time, Engels was sixteen. Therefore, they never met and Engels turned to another hero-figure—the sinister and destructive Karl Marx.

### From "Philo-Semite" to Anti-Semite

Engels imbibed his anti-Semitism from Marx. He aped, and at times exceeded, Marx in his abusive language about Jews. If a man of pure rabbinical and scholarly Jewish descent despised and hated everything about his people, who was the gentile, Engels, to contradict him?

Marx's hatred of Jews was so intense that, although a quarrelsome man by nature, he never replied to attacks which were levied against him because of his racial origin. These attacks were, by the way, comparatively infrequent and, with one exception, never descended to the scurrilous abuse which Marx would heap on fellow Jews because of their origin. Since Marx was conspicuously Jewish in appearance and so dark-complexioned that he was called "the Moor" from his university days to his death, some such onslaughts were inevitable.

One of the more interesting of these unflattering appraisals came from his great political enemy, the theorist of revolutionary anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin. In *State and Anarchy* (1873), Bakunin wrote:

In origin, Herr Marx is a Hebrew. He unites in himself, one may say, all the characteristics and shortcomings of this gifted tribe. Nervous, as they say, to the point of cowardice, he is extraordinarily ambitious and vain, quarrelsome, intolerant and absolutist like Jehovah, the Lord God of his ancestors, who is, like Marx himself, vengeful to the point of madness. There is no lie or calumny that he is not capable of inventing against anyone who has had the misfortune of arousing his jealousy, or, which is the same thing, his hatred.<sup>9</sup>

When Marx ran the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* as absolute dictator, he chose as his Vienna correspondent during the crucial revolutionary year, 1848, a man called Eduard von Müller-Telling. This Müller-Telling was notorious for his fanatical hatred of Slavs and Jews. Since Marx shared these hatreds, he praised

Müller-Telling to the skies for being "unquestionably the best" of the newspaper's foreign correspondents (in actual fact, he was the most bigotted and the worst) and for writing reports that are "entirely in accord with our policy."<sup>10</sup>

Marx was soon repaid in the coin that he deserved. Müller-Telling wrote the first pamphlet against Marx "that was couched in the jargon of the Nazi *Stürmer*." He called Marx "cowardly . . . garlic-smelling . . . arrogantly jesuitical" and a "Chief Rabbi."<sup>11</sup> In the face of this attack, Marx was quiet as a mouse. How could he reply? He could not deny he was a Jew and he had written much more offensive things about his own people than Müller-Telling.

After Marx's death, Engels dropped his anti-Semitism. He was no longer obliged to follow in the footsteps of the great Jewish Jew-hater and he could return, more or less, to the decent and tolerant attitudes of his youth.

As early as 1881, two years before Marx's demise, Engels characterized some anti-Semitic literature that was sent him as "childish and stupid." In 1890, seven years after Marx had been buried, he wrote a highly significant letter, which was published in the Vienna *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, in which he attacked anti-Semitism as a reactionary production of "feudal socialism . . . with which we shall have nothing to do." He also "warmly praised the services of Jewish intellectuals to the labor movement. . . ."<sup>12</sup> Finally, Engels established a close, protective (but not sexual) relationship to Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor, who worked among the Jewish labor circles of London and proudly asserted that she was a Jewess.<sup>13</sup>

Engels deviated from Marx's attitudes on several other racial and national matters. Marx had been strongly influenced by French thought all his life; wrote much more about French, than about German, political developments, and at times considered Paris the fountainhead of the future European revolution.

### Deutschland Über Alles

Engels, however, was a German first, last, and always. In 1841, when he was 20 years old and not a Communist, he demanded a Greater Germany to embrace Alsace, Lorraine, Flanders, Holland, Belgium, and the entire left bank of the Rhine. Otherwise, Germany could be crushed between Russia and France. Germany must be united, powerful and great:

We want to chase all these crazy foreign habits and fashions, all the superfluous foreign words back whence they came; we want to cease to be the dupes of foreigners and want to stand together as a single, indivisible, strong and, with God's help, free German nation.<sup>14</sup>

Because of his intense and expansionist German nationalism, Engels took a more bloodthirsty attitude toward the small Slavic peoples of Central Europe than did Marx. In this view, he was partly influenced by the tendentious reporting of the insufferable Müller-Telling and in part by his reading of Hegel's thoughts on "peoples without history."

Both men, but particularly Engels, spoke openly as German imperialists. In two pamphlets which he wrote in 1859 and 1860, Engels urged that it was expedient for Germany not to conquer Lombardy. The first and most important thing was "to be strong at home." Afterwards, "our genius will again be 'to attack'; and there still are a few rotten spots [on the map of Europe] where this will be necessary enough."<sup>15</sup>

The clarion call of these pamphlets was not socialism but war against Russia to create a greater German Reich. Engels alleged that Russia was egging on France to absorb the Rhineland:

Shall we any longer tolerate this? . . . That is the question. We hope that Germany will answer it soon, sword in hand. If we stick together, then we shall manage to send the French praetorians and the Russian *kapuschchiks* packing.<sup>16</sup>

## Prophecies of War

Engels wrote Lassalle on May 18, 1859, concerning the Franco-Russian alliance which he believed was impending that the pressure of events would arouse the "*furor teutonicus*" and, if so, "*tant mieux*."<sup>17</sup> In this struggle, the moment must arrive "when only the most determined, the boldest party is in a position to save the nation."

When the Prussians under Bismarck waged war on Austria and smashed the Austrian army at Koeniggraetz, Engels was exultant. He wrote Marx on July 4, 1866, that the Prussians had "fought with a bravery I have never seen in peacetime recruits. . . ."

The two revolutionaries were equally enthusiastic about Prussia's war of aggression against France in 1870. One day after war was declared, Marx wrote Engels: "The French need a thrashing." And Engels responded on August 5, 1870: "What do you think about our soldiers who storm entrenched positions, defended by machineguns, with bayonets. *Molodets!*"<sup>18</sup>

And Jenny Marx joined the triumphant, patriotic chorus with a letter to Engels dated August 10:

How they all deserve the beating the Prussians are giving them; for all Frenchmen, even the tiny handful of the better ones, all of them have chauvinism hidden in the deepest corner of their hearts. That will yet be knocked out of them.<sup>19</sup>

Not a very different reaction, one would think, from that of the ordinary German middle class people of 1940 when they watched Hitler's *Wehrmacht* invade and conquer France.

Liebknecht and Bebel, both members of the North German Reichstag, wanted to vote against the war credits. On August 15, Engels wrote Liebknecht an emotional letter in which he described the German invasion of France as "precisely a matter of national existence" for Germany, denounced "the chauvinism of the mass of the French population" and claimed that "as long as this chauvinism has not been crushed . . . peace between Germany and France is impossible."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the German socialists should support vigorous prosecution of the war.

But during the 1870s, there were indications of a developing revolutionary movement inside Russia and in 1872 a Russian translation of the first volume of *Das Kapital* actually appeared. By 1882, during Marx's terminal illness, Engels had begun to look at the prospect of a general European war with less joyous emotions. He wrote Bebel toward the end of that year:

A European war, I would consider a misfortune. This time it would be terribly serious. Everywhere it would inflame chauvinism for years on end, for each people would be fighting for its existence. The whole work of the revolutionaries in Russia, now on the eve of victory, would become useless, destroyed.<sup>21</sup> Our party in Germany would momentarily be drowned in the flood of chauvinism and shattered, and the same would happen in France.<sup>22</sup>

Engels wrote Bernstein on February 22, 1882, to argue that the socialists should oppose any Slavic rebellion against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His reasoning was that these oppressed peoples would turn to Russia for assistance. This would precipitate a world war which could "spoil our entire revolutionary situation." To risk this for "a couple of Herzegovinians" was utter folly. The inalienable right of the Balkan peoples "to cattle stealing must be mercilessly sacrificed to the interests of the European proletariat."

Engels was an ardent supporter of Bismarckian imperialism. "The German-Prussian Empire," he wrote Bebel on November 18, 1884, "is a thoroughly revolutionary creation. . . . What I reproach the people who made it for is that they were only miserable revolutionaries; they failed to go much farther and annex all Germany to Prussia."



He was perhaps the only political observer in Europe who reproached Bismarck for timidity. In the same letter, he continued:

He who operates with blood and iron, who swallows up entire states, overthrows thrones, and confiscates property, should not condemn other people for being revolutionaries. If our party should have the right to be neither more nor less revolutionary than the government of the Reich has been, it would have all it needs."<sup>23</sup>

Engels's hatred of the Slavic peoples between Germany and Russia did not abate with age. Writing for the British publication, *Commonwealth*, in 1866, he urged that only the "historic peoples of Europe" have "the right to national existence" and that the general principle of national self-determination "is nothing but a *Russian invention concocted to destroy Poland*."

And in a letter to Bebel, dated November 17, 1885, he again called for the obliteration of "these wretched, ruined fragments of one-time nations, the Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and other robber bands, on behalf of which the liberal philistine waxes enthusiastic in the interests of Russia. . . ."<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, military alliances were crystallizing in Europe and the technology of modern warfare was advancing at an alarming rate. Engels finally became aware of the potential impact of world war on both the working class and European civilization. He published an eloquent and realistic analysis of the implications of conflict in 1887:

No other war is now possible for Prussia-Germany than a world war, and indeed a world war of hitherto unimagined sweep and violence. Eight to ten million soldiers will mutually kill each other off, and in the process devour Europe barer than any swarm of locusts ever did. The desolation of the Thirty Years War compressed into three or four years and spread over the entire continent: famine, plague, general savagery, taking possession both of the armies and of the masses of the people, as a result of universal want; hopeless demoralization of our complex institutions of trade, industry and credit, ending in universal bankruptcy; collapse of the old states and their traditional statecraft, so that crowns will roll over the pavements by the dozens and no one be found to pick them up; absolute impossibility of foreseeing where this will end, or who will emerge victor from the general struggle. Only *one* result is absolutely sure: general exhaustion and the creation of the conditions for the final victory of the working class.<sup>25</sup>

Except for the last sentence, an extraordinarily accurate prophecy. This clear and realistic perception of the probable consequences of World War I did not mean that Engels had become a pacifist. His loyalty was first and foremost to

the Fatherland. On November 17, 1885, when he was 11 days short of his sixty-fifth birthday, he wrote August Bebel that he trusted world war could be avoided but, if not, "then I only hope that my old injury doesn't prevent me, at the right moment, from mounting my horse again."

The incisive political analysis and realistic fear of European war that permeates Engels's later writings were primarily attributable to the death of Karl Marx. Engels was no longer chained to that erratic and destructive genius and no longer felt compelled (as a man destined to "play second fiddle") to echo Marx's sanguinary and pathologically satisfying visions of upheavals and catastrophes.

Engels was finally free to use his own excellent analytic mind. If his Pan-German chauvinism and his fierce hatred of the Balko-Danubian peoples had not abated one iota, at least he was able to analyze future events with a realism and sagacity which Marx had lacked. And, by comparison with Marx, Engels was a political writer who felt responsibility toward his fellow man.

## Notes

1. To name only a few of the scholars who have explored this subject: the books by Arnold Künzli and Saul K. Padover already cited; various articles by Edmund Silberner, notably "Was Karl Marx an anti-Semite?" *Historia Judaica*, April 1949 pp. 3-52; Moshe Glickson, *The Jewish Complex of Karl Marx* (New York: Herzl Press, 1961); W. H. Chaloner and W. O. Henderson, "Marx/Engels and Racism," *Encounter*, July 1975, pp. 18-23; Camillo Berneri, *Le Juif anti-Semite*, Paris, 1935; and various important contributions to *Encounter*, *Midstream* and *National Review* by such authorities as Shlomo Avineri, Max Geltman, and Robert Wistrich. See in particular, Robert S. Wistrich, "On Socialist Anti-Semitism," *Midstream*, February 1978, pp. 92-95.

2. My book that expounds this interpretation is *The Jew in American Politics* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968).

3. This interpretation is brilliantly expounded in Karl R. Popper's classic, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, Volume 1: The Spell of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943, 1971). The second volume deals with Aristotle, Hegel and Marx.

4. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, II, 455.

5. *Ibid.*, II, 443.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, II, 142.

8. *Ibid.*, II, 290.
9. Quoted from Padover, p. 180.
10. Künzli, p. 197.
11. Werner Blumenberg, "Eduard von Müller-Telling," *Bulletin of the International Institute of Social History*, VI, 1951, p. 178 ff. Quoted and translated from Künzli, pp. 198-99.
12. Wistrich, p. 93.
13. According to Jewish law she was not, because the status of the mother is the decisive matter. Nevertheless, Eleanor's attitude toward her heritage reflected that integrity and generosity of spirit which characterized her.
14. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, II, 146-50.
15. *Po und Rhein* (1859) and *Savoyen, Nizza und der Rhein* (1860); translation by Bertram D. Wolfe, *Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1967), p. 31.
16. Wolfe, p. 32. *Kapushtchik* is a word of contempt for the Russian foot soldier. It probably means "cabbage-eater" or "cabbage-head."
17. "Teutonic fury" and "so much the better."
18. A Russian word meaning "courageous fellows." Marx and Engels were both studying Russian at the time.
19. Wolfe, p. 50.
20. Wolfe, pp. 52-53.
21. An unrealistic appraisal. The Romanovs would stay on the Russian throne for another thirty-five years.
22. Wolfe, p. 65.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
24. Marx-Engels, *Briefe an Bebel, Liebknecht, Kautsky und Andere* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishers, 1933), p. 412; translated by Wolfe (p. 68).
25. This was part of Engels's introduction to an obscure pamphlet by a German friend named Sigismund Borkheim; translated by Wolfe (p. 67).

# 10

## The War Mongers

Throughout his long life, Karl Marx predicted and hoped for European wars on a gigantic scale. On the basis of the Jacobin experience of the Great French Revolution of 1789–94, he believed that such wars would bring to power the most resolute, ruthless, and extremist elements in European society—in short, himself and his political faction. Wars on a grand scale led to dictatorship, but the specific sort of dictatorship which Marx hoped for and expected—the dictatorship of the proletariat—was not, of course, the rule of those workers whom he called “louts . . . dolts . . . asses,” but rather the rule of those “enlightened” intellectuals who, through their profound grasp of historic materialism, understood the class interests of the proletariat and represented their historic needs.

In plain English, the dictatorship of the proletariat meant the dictatorship over the proletariat by Marx and his Communist faction. Mikhail Bakunin grasped this profound truth and expressed it eloquently. A generation after Marx’s death, Lenin had the same vision: “The Soviet Socialist Democracy is in no way inconsistent with the rule and dictatorship of one person: the will of a class is at times best expressed by a dictator. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Did people like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin believe most of the time that they were motivated by larger social and human ideals than the limitless thirst for personal power? Since we cannot penetrate the innermost recesses of their minds, we shall never know the answer. However, it is worth pointing out that one of the major differences between the ideological practitioner of genocide and the sociopathic criminal is that the former always needs an “idealistic” justification for his crimes. The greatest enormities of history are not perpetrated by men who are merely greedy, corrupt, vicious, violent, and unscrupulous. These men have limited appetites and can satisfy them with small actions. The really great crimes against mankind are the work of self-styled



idealistic leaders of secular or religious ideologies. When they transform earth into hell, they claim to do so for the benefit of humanity.

Marx's and Engels's fervent and continuing hopes for European war were not based on any illusions concerning the consequences of such wars for the working class of the world that they claimed to represent. They had been born and raised in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars which killed an estimated 5 million human beings. In proportion to European population, these struggles were almost as hideously genocidal as those that have disfigured our own century.

## The Neue Rheinische Zeitung

The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* first saw the light on June 1, 1848, with Karl Marx wielding absolute power over its contents. When it was only six days old, the *NRZ* demanded that Germany be unified through "war with the East." On June 25, Marx wrote that the Germans must "wage a war of the West against the East."

On June 12, 1848, Marx and Engels again demanded "a war with Russia . . . in which Germany can become virile. . . ." For those of us old enough to have lived through the era of Nazi propaganda, these expressions have a familiar ring.

Almost forty years later, Engels reminisced in a letter to Florence Kelley Wischnewetsky dated January 27, 1887, that the program of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* "consisted of two major points: a single, indivisible democratic German republic and war with Russia."<sup>2</sup>

This hatred of Russia antedated the czar's role in crushing liberal revolutions in central Europe. Bertram Wolfe writes:

Some biographers of Marx and Engels have suggested that they became enamored of war with Russia only *after* the "gendarme of Europe" had intervened to crush the Hungarian revolution and restore the Hapsburg Empire, and had offered aid to the Prussian king. But the two young warriors demanded war with Russia before any of these things occurred.<sup>3</sup>

In 1848, Marx made the insane proposal in the *NRZ* that "the slumbering German movement" declare war simultaneously against Prussia, Russia, and England—three of the most powerful countries on earth.<sup>4</sup>

All of this was coupled with incessant attacks on those European leaders who preferred peace to slaughter. One of the less endearing qualities of Marx and Engels was their readiness to accuse any European statesman of cowardice and treason who refused to carry out the policies they advocated. They characterized

such men as being guilty of "cowardly diplomacy . . . disgraceful retreat . . . shameful armistice . . . betrayal of the honor and interests of Germany."<sup>5</sup>

Nor did they have any use for pacifism. When it stood in the way of German conquest of Danish soil, pacifism was nothing "but the most trivial soapbox oratory."

## Russia and Poland

"The policy of Russia is changeless according to the admission of its official historian, the Muscovite, Karamsin," Marx wrote in the mid-1860s. "Its methods, its tactics, its maneuvers, may change, but the polar star of its policy—world domination—is a fixed star. In our times, only a civilized government ruling over barbarian masses can hatch such a plan and execute it."<sup>6</sup>

Marx's and Engels' hatred of Russians was not confined to the czar and the aristocracy, but extended to the masses as well. In the *NRZ* for January 1, 1849, Marx called the Slavic people "rabble" (*Lumpengesindel*).

On November 7, 1848, he wrote in the same organ that "Croat freedom and order has conquered and the subjects celebrated the victory with arson, rape, pillage and nameless atrocities."

On January 1, 1849, Marx observed in the *NRZ* that the defeat of the June uprising in Paris "was simultaneously the victory of East over West, the defeat of civilization by barbarism." He added that "Croats, Panduren, Czechs, Serechaner and similar riff-raff strangled German freedom" during the fighting in Vienna.<sup>7</sup>

Marx and Engels believed that the forward bastion for Russia's assault with her Asian hordes on European civilization would be Moscow-dominated Poland. Therefore, both men were, most of the time, fervent supporters of Polish culture, Polish civilization, Polish freedom, and Polish territorial expansion.

Marx and Engels totally rejected the theory that the Greater Poland which they hoped to create should consist only of Poles. It must include all of Lithuania, Galicia, most of the Ukraine, vast stretches of the Baltic seacoast. A Poland that "does not extend from the Baltic to the Carpathians is no Poland."<sup>8</sup> How about the German enclaves in this great new nation? Were they to have the right of self-determination? Of course not. They would be ruled by the Poles.

But in the 1848 revolutionary upsurge the Poles did not live up to Marx's and Engels' expectation. "The more I think over the business," Engels wrote Marx on May 23, 1851, "the clearer it becomes to me that the Poles as a nation are done for. . . . The Poles have never done anything in history except play at brave, quarrelsome stupidity. And one cannot point to a single instance in which Poland represented progress successfully, even if only in re-

lation to Russia, or did anything at all of historic importance."

Thus, Marx and Engels temporarily "punished" Poland by putting her in the category of nations without history and sweeping her off the map of Europe. But when the Poles revolted against Russian rule in 1863, the two pundits changed their tune. "That Poland is not going to be killed was proved in 1863 and is still proved every day," Engels wrote in the socialist organ *Volksstaat* for June 17, 1874. "Its claim to an independent existence in the European family of nations is undeniable."

## Extermination of Slavic Peoples

Hegel had developed the theory that some peoples, among them the Slavs, had remained outside the mainstream of significant history largely because they had remained agrarian and because the Renaissance had hardly touched them.<sup>9</sup>

This view, which Hegel expressed with characteristic moderation, became a justification for oppression and racial genocide in the hands of Marx and Engels. The fact that both men were ignorant of the history, culture, and civilization of the peoples of Eastern Europe did not make them any the less doctrinaire in demanding their total obliteration. Writing in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1849 with Marx's full blessing, Engels declared that the fate of these "retrograde" Balkan nations and peoples was "the immediate task of perishing in the revolutionary world storm." The Germans, the Poles, and the Hungarians would "take frightful revenge on Slavic barbarism. The general war that will then begin will . . . destroy all these little, bull-headed nations so that *their very name will vanish*. The coming world war will cause not only reactionary classes and dynasties but entire reactionary peoples, too, to disappear from the face of the earth. And that also will be progress."<sup>10</sup> The vision of a war in which "entire reactionary peoples"—Slavic peoples, of course—will "disappear from the face of the earth" is too reminiscent of Nazi theory and practice to require explanatory comment.

Engels recognized that some liberals did not share his bloodthirsty visions or approve of his genocidal solutions to racial problems. These "so-called democrats among the Austrian Slavs are either scoundrels or visionaries." The visionaries, of course, were "led by the nose by the scoundrels." As against the "sentimental slogans" advanced by the liberals, "we reply that hatred of Russia was, and still is, the first revolutionary passion of the Germans; and that, since the Revolution, hatred of the Czechs and Croats has been added. . . . We and the Poles and the Magyars will only be able to safeguard the revolution through the most determined terror against these Slavic peoples."<sup>11</sup>

"The most determined terror" against the "Slavic peoples"—again the phrase

sounds as if it had been uttered a century later by Adolf Hitler. When Hitler was a half-vagabond, half-artist, living in Vienna and soaking up an enormous amount of racist hate literature, did he come across these early appeals for genocide by Engels and Marx? It would be interesting to know the answer.

But weren't these violent appeals for war and extermination merely the extravagant rhetoric of young men? Didn't the mature Marx and Engels change their views?

In the first place, Marx and Engels were not juveniles during the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* period. They were thirty and twenty-eight respectively. Marx was seven years older than Newton was when he discovered the law of gravitation and the calculus and seven years older than was Pitt when he became Prime Minister of England. Since the average lifespan was shorter then than now, men were expected to reach mental maturity, sagacity, and sound judgment earlier.

The belief that Marx changed his views concerning Slavs in later years is based on some correspondence he had with Russian revolutionaries toward the end of his life at a time when he suffered from deep, chronic depression and had ceased to do original intellectual work of significance. In 1877, Marx wrote that it was possible that a Russian revolutionary movement might use the old institution of the *mir*, a sort of peasant commons, as the basis for a direct transition toward socialism.<sup>12</sup> And in 1882, the year before his death, he and Engels wrote in a new preface to *The Communist Manifesto*:

If the Russian revolution gives the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complete one another, the form of communal property in the land which now exists in Russia can contribute the starting point for a communist development."<sup>13</sup>

This didn't involve any basic change in his theories. Marx had always asserted that the decisive revolutionary struggle must occur in Western Europe and the United States. Once the proletarian dictatorship was firmly established there, it would probably proceed to rule the backward peoples and "Oriental despotisms" such as that of Russia<sup>14</sup> by some sort of condominium. The precise details could not be predicted in advance.

The hatred of Slavs which Marx and Engels expressed in the *NRZ* would persist through middle age and into old age: Marx's hatred was lifelong. Its targets might change but not the emotional animus. Marx's and Engels's contributions to the *New York Daily Tribune* in the 1860s are filled with invidious contrasts between the "civilized" Germans and the "barbarous" Slavs. Long after the collapse of the 1848 revolutions, Marx and Engels "ridiculed" those peoples they chose to brand as without history "whenever and wherever the opportunity was presented."<sup>15</sup>



Even after Marx's death, Engels continued to argue that "those wretched fragments or ruins of former nations—Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and other robber riff-raff who begrudge each other even the air they breathe, ought to cut each other's throats."<sup>16</sup>

### **Imperialists and War Mongers**

The call for European or world war was incessant and monotonous up to Marx's death; to enumerate all the instances would be tiresome and serve no sensible purpose. Here are a few examples:

In 1853, there was trouble between Britain and Russia. Marx called Lord Palmerston—an English statesman and later prime minister—a Russian agent and cried for war. He was "the unflinching and persevering advocate of Russian interests . . . a man so false and hollow . . . this wily enemy to the progress of human freedom."<sup>17</sup> This time Marx got his conflict. It was the Crimean War. The prime minister of England during the conflict was Palmerston.

In 1857, there was a business recession. War and revolution were on the immediate horizon. On October 8, Engels wrote Marx that he had hurled himself into military studies "and beyond that into nothing but riding," no doubt so he could lead red cavalry charges. Marx replied on December 8: "I am working like mad, day and night, at putting my economic studies together so that I may at least have the outlines clear before the deluge comes." But no deluge came. There was an economic revival.

A year later, the revolution was again about to erupt. On October 8, Marx wrote Engels "that in Russia the revolution has begun." He added the confident prediction: "On the Continent, the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character." How fortunate are those who can foresee the future!

In 1859, Marx's prophecy of war came true. France and Italy clashed in battle. But there was no revolution. Not a hint of it. Later, Prussia attacked Austria. It was 1866. Five years previously, Marx had proved that in such a conflict Prussia would be beaten. On April 2, 1866, Engels wrote Marx that Prussia "will be licked." As a great military expert, he knew that "this Prussian army is incapable of waging a war of attack. There is no doubt that this army will be instantaneously crushed by the furious Austrians." What actually happened was that the Prussian forces decisively crushed Austria in a three-weeks campaign!

In consequence, Marx and Engels reevaluated Prince Bismarck's abilities. They no longer referred to the Iron Chancellor as "Pismarck"! He had now

become, in their imagination, the unconscious catalyst of the coming revolution.

Engels wrote a German correspondent in 1870: "If we were paying the old boy [Bismarck] he couldn't do better work for us. . . ." He elaborated on this grandiose illusion in a letter to the Russian, Peter Lavrov: "'After me the deluge' isn't good enough for him. He insists on having the deluge during his lifetime."<sup>18</sup> But no deluge came.

In 1884, a year after Marx's death, Engels hailed the Bismarckian state as "a thoroughly revolutionary creation."<sup>19</sup> In 1891, near death, Engels wrote Sorge: ". . . if the Russians begin a war with us, we should be attacking the Russians and their allies *à l'outrance*, no matter who these allies may be. If Germany is beaten, we will be beaten with her."

Their dreams were not only of war, revolution, destruction, and chaos; they also dreamed of German military expansion, of snuffing out the existence of the miserable little nations that stood in the way of expanded, paramount Teutonic power. Back in 1848–49, Marx and Engels voiced their imperialist convictions in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*:

With the same right with which France has taken Flanders, Lorraine and Alsace, and sooner or later will take Belgium, with that same right Germany takes Silesia, with the right of civilization against barbarism, of progress against stability. . . . This right is worth more than all treaties, for it is the right of historical development.<sup>20</sup>

Note that the term *barbarism* is not being applied in this instance to North African pirates or Montenegrin bandits, but to Belgium, the Netherlands, Silesia—to cultivated, scientifically advanced, European nations and regions with a long and proud history. They were branded as barbarians because they stood in the path of German military imperialism and because they constricted the frontiers of that imaginary Greater German Communist Reich over which Marx hoped to exercise dictatorial dominion. Note also that Marx and Engels gave the same justification for breaking treaties and trampling on the neutrality of smaller nations that the German Kaiser would use in the first World War and the German *Führer* would use in the second.

## Notes

1. V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniya* (Collected Works) (Moscow: Marxist-Leninist Institute, 1922–24, 1st ed.), XVII, 89; translated by David Shub, *Lenin* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), p. 389.

2. Wolfe, p. 24.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
4. *MEGA*, VII, 1, 354.
5. *Ibid.*, 346–48.
6. Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz (editors), *The Russian Menace to Europe by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), 11.
7. Charles C. Herod, *The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), p. 18. The Pandours were Croatian militia incorporated into the Austrian army.
8. Wolfe, p. 34.
9. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, III, chapter 1. His main point was: “The Slavonic nations were agricultural. This condition brings with it the relation of lord and serf. In agriculture, the agency of nature predominates; human industry and subjective activity are on the whole less brought into play. . . .” This made it difficult for the Slavs “to share the benefits of dawning freedom.”
10. Translated by Wolfe, p. 39.
11. *Idem.*
12. *MEW*, XIX, 108.
13. *MEW*, XIX, 296; translated by Hélène Carrière d’Encausse and Stuart R. Schram, *Marxism and Asia* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 11.
14. *MEW*, XVIII, 563–64.
15. Herod, p. 32.
16. *MEW*, XXXVI, 390–91. Herod, pp. 70–71.
17. Karl Marx, *The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston* (London: Sonnenschein, 1899). Quoted in Payne, *Unknown Marx*, pp. 158, 164.
18. Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels* (New York: Knopf, 1936) p. 246.
19. Wolfe, p. 23.
20. Wolfe, p. 26.

# 11

## Oriental Despotism

In his efforts to develop a universal philosophy of history, Marx vacillated over the years from one position to another on fundamental issues, and when it was politically expedient, he even repudiated what he had previously proclaimed as basic historic laws. Nowhere is this confused situation more apparent than in Marx's elaborations of the theory of Oriental despotism. He was never clear as to what the fundamental factors were which characterized what he called Oriental society. He did not take the trouble to define the interrelationships of these causal factors with any degree of mental discipline or intellectual precision, and he changed the boundaries of this so-called Oriental, or Asiatic, society radically as it suited him and with bewildering frequency.

This aspect of Marx's philosophy of history has been illuminated by Wittfogel's brilliant, scholarly, and thought-provoking work, *Oriental Despotism*.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will not summarize Wittfogel's fascinating analysis of the worldwide interrelationships between hydraulic societies and concentrations of bureaucratic power. We are concerned with the much more limited issue of trying to disentangle Marx's ideas on the nature of Asian society.

### Four Historic Stages

Up to that time, Marx wrote in *Das Kapital*, history had experienced four distinct forms of society, defining each form in terms of who controlled the means of production. In Asian society, control was vested in "the state," the population as a whole being in effect its slaves. In classical antiquity, the ruling class was the "slaveholders," in feudalism, "the feudal landlords," and in capitalism, "the capitalist class."<sup>2</sup>



The first anomaly to note about this view of history is that the Asian form of society, or Oriental despotism, had persisted since time immemorial and was, as Marx would on several occasions observe, "history-less." By contrast, the classical system of private slavery had been supplanted by the "more progressive" feudal system; the feudal system had similarly been displaced by capitalism, and capitalism in turn was destined to yield to the final social system of communism.

Why had the areas subject to Oriental despotism remained outside this process of supposedly inevitable historic evolution? Marx never gave a clear answer to this question, but there is good reason to suppose that he considered those he called Asiatics inferior and incapable of entering the maelstrom of historic development unless they were pushed into it by some external (European or North American) force. Thus, he referred to the "barbarism" of China and China's "semi-barbarian" emperor; referred to China's "patriarchal constitution"; alluded to the "semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities" of India in a *New York Daily Tribune* article; called both Turkey and Persia "barbaric" and alluded to the "barbarian" czar of Russia.<sup>3</sup>

In his article of June 25, 1853, on "The British Rule in India" for the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx observed that the communal Indian rural communities "inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies." He spoke of the Indian peasant's "barbarian egotism" which calmly witnessed "the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties" and added that "this passive sort of existence evoked . . . wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan." This system, "contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery . . . brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow."

In his August 8, 1853, article in the same newspaper, Marx observed: "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we shall call its history is but the history of the successive invaders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society." And in an article in *Die Presse* of Vienna (July 7, 1862), Marx extended this incapacity for autonomous change to "the Oriental empires" as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Again in an article in the *Tribune* (June 5, 1857), written by Engels at Marx's request, the defeat of a large Persian army by a much smaller Anglo-Indian force

was attributed to the fact that the victors had European officers and sergeants. The Persian force had been merely a "European system of military organization . . . engrafted upon Asiatic barbarity." The defeated Persian forces exemplified "Oriental ignorance, impatience, prejudice. . . ."

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Marx and Engels believed that Oriental despotism would survive in Asia indefinitely because the mental and spiritual resources of the Asian people were not adequate to bring about its destruction. It was for this reason that they joyfully hailed every victory of what modern liberals would call European and American imperialism against more backward nations. Marx wrote that the British conquest of India had involved commission of many "crimes," but nonetheless Britain "was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution" from the stagnant Asian system to incipient capitalism.

It was in the interests of these backward and barbarian peoples that they be kicked, pushed, or cajoled into civilization by whatever agency was available. Engels supported the French conquest of Algeria, noting that the Bedouins were a "nation of robbers" who lived in a "barbarian state of society. . . ."

Concerning the American victory over Mexico in the 1840s, Engels wrote in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* for February 15, 1849:

Is it a misfortune that magnificent California was seized from the lazy Mexicans who did not know what to do with it? . . . All impotent nations must in the last analysis, owe a debt to those who, under the laws of historic necessity, incorporate them in a great empire, thus allowing them to take part in an historic development which would otherwise be impossible for them. Evidently, such results cannot be achieved without crushing a few sweet little flowers. Without violence, nothing is ever accomplished in history.

## What Was Oriental Despotism?

Karl Marx had borrowed the idea of Oriental despotism from such classical economists as Richard Jones, Adam Smith, James Mill and his son, John Stuart Mill, and also from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*.

Well, what were the essential ingredients of this system? In some of his articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*, Marx stressed the alleged fact that the Hindus had in common with "all Oriental peoples" certain specific characteristics. "Climate and territorial conditions" made "artificial irrigation by canals and water-works the basis of Oriental agriculture." The administration of these enormous

water-control projects required a centralized despotic state which appropriated the social surplus and was therefore the ruling class.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, there were a few things wrong with this formulation. What were the common "climatic and territorial conditions" that embraced such different Oriental countries as India, China, Manchuria, Japan, and the Siberian steppes? And if hydraulic control necessarily implied a total despotism and an omnipotent state which ruled the entire population except the bureaucracy, how did it happen, Engels once asked, that the Dutch had managed to create and maintain a superb system of water-control through their dikes and polders on the basis of voluntary cooperation and democratic institutions?

John Stuart Mill in his *Principles of Political Economy* had characterized this sort of Asian society as "political slavery" by a "dominant bureaucracy" in which the masses had no rights.<sup>7</sup> When Marx was finishing the first volume of *Das Kapital*, the Proudhonists were attacking him for advocating an omnipotent, centralized state in which the common people would have little or no freedom. After its publication, Bakunin resumed the attack in much stronger terms and with greater political impact. He charged Marx with attempting to set up an elitist, bureaucratic dictatorship in the name of the workers, but actually designed to oppress and exploit the workers and peasants and strip them of their freedom and legal rights. Marxism "begets despotism on the one hand and slavery on the other."<sup>8</sup>

Oriental despotism had too many of the characteristics of Marx's and Engels' future utopia (as their enemies perceived that society) for the fathers of "scientific socialism" to be comfortable with it. Engels waffled on this dangerous issue, and by the time he published his *Origins of the Family*, an attempted hybridization of the popular anthropology of Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society* with Marxism, he simply scrapped the whole concept of Oriental despotism. What was the main reason for this drastic change? Inability to fit the Asian despotism stage into the Morgan-Marx synthesis? Or a desire to ward off political attacks by Bakunin's anarchist followers?

## Oriental Despotism and Land Tenure

While Wittfogel emphasized control of water as the main element in Oriental despotism, Marx was more inclined to give primacy to lack of private ownership of land: "Bernier correctly discovers the basic form of all phenomena in the East—he refers to Turkey, Persia, Hindostan—to be the *absence of private property* in land. This is the real key even to the Oriental heaven."<sup>9</sup>

Neither Marx nor Engels had more than a superficial knowledge of Asian history. They had read a few standard books of the sort that were readily available to the average literate and educated European of the day, but their learning was a thin veneer over vast depths of ignorance. In short order, Marx discovered that there was a small exception to the great generalization about human history he had just discovered: there was private ownership of land in China! This did not, however, prevent him from proceeding with a generalized picture of Asian or Oriental society as being comprised of self-sufficient villages holding their land in common, largely isolated from each other and from civilization. "The whole Indian Empire, not counting the few larger towns, was divided into *villages*, each of which possessed a completely separate organization and formed a little world in itself."<sup>10</sup>

The implication seems to be that these Asian countries are, and from time immemorial have been, congeries of self-sustaining, quasi-communal large villages, combining agriculture with enough handicraft industry to make them self-sufficient. But if Marx had taken the trouble to read even such an obvious popular source as Marco Polo, he might have discovered that the region he was writing about with such superlative self-assurance had had larger cities than Europe for centuries.

The picture in Marx's mind departed from reality in other respects. One would have imagined that cosmopolitan intellectuals of the stamp of Marx and Engels would have at least been aware of the contributions of Japanese, Chinese, and Indians to philosophy, science, medicine, technology, navigation, and warfare—to mention only a few fields at random—that they would have realized that we in the West owe our number system and hence algebra to Indian mathematicians, that the Chinese developed printing before Europe, had seagoing merchant ships large enough to export silk to Rome in the first centuries of the Christian era, used rockets effectively in warfare against the Mongol invaders in the thirteenth century, and so on, all of which seems in obvious conflict with the picture of vast areas of self-sufficient villages steeped in barbarian superstition and without any past that could worthily be called a history.

In this summary, I omit the prodigious achievements of the Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Persians and other Asians in architecture, sculpture, painting, and the other plastic arts, because Marx was almost totally impervious to the sensual world and there is no record that he was really aware of them. This, incidentally, seems to be a characteristic fairly common among political and religious fanatics of all stripes, and particularly common among the founding fathers of world communism.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, because of the traditional communal land-property forms of the Russian village, Marx applied his already ramshackle theory of Oriental despotism



to Russia. Of course, he did know that Russian agriculture was not based on irrigation, drainage, polders, or other instrumentalities of hydraulic control.

At times, the two pundits would include Egypt and other ancient civilizations, the frontiers of Oriental despotism shifting from one Marxian pronouncement to another and from one Engels interpretation of Marxism to the next.

The practical conclusion to be drawn from all this was that these backward, "barbarian" peoples would be incapable of moving into the historical mainstream by their own independent exertions. They would have to be dragged into history by the imperialist expansion of Western capitalism, of which Marx and Engels definitely approved, or by the victorious revolution. When the Communist revolution swept across the civilized world, the Asiatic "barbarians" would be taken under the firm tutelage of the victorious proletarian dictatorship. When the European workers triumphed, the "barbarian" Asiatics would become their vassals.

## In Summary

Marx's whole elaborate theory of Asian despotism was, like so much of his intellectual work, based on borrowings and plagiarisms from other writers. The theory shifted from an emphasis on lack of private property in land to village communal organizations to despotic states administering vast irrigation and flood control works. It was advanced or jettisoned in accordance with the needs of factional politics. The area subject to Asian despotism was particularly elastic, at times, including Russia, at other times Turkey and Persia, sometimes even ancient Egypt.

The stress throughout was that these people—who happened to constitute, then as now, the majority of mankind—were "barbarians" or "semi-barbarians." Whether they were barbarians because they were Asiatics or barbarians because they were the victims of Oriental despotism was never clarified. But as "barbarians," they were destined to be the objects, not the subjects, of history, their destiny to be made for them by others. Those others would, of course, be West Europeans and their overseas descendants.

Did this fate face Asians and Russians only? Or did it also apply to Latin Americans, Middle Easterners, and African Negroes? On this matter, Marx and Engels gave posterity no guidelines to follow. However, Marx's enthusiastic endorsement of Trémaux's "discovery" that "the backward Negro is not an evolved ape, but a *degenerate man*" suggests that a different fate lay in store for blacks under communism.

## Notes

1. Karl August Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: a Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).
2. Wittfogel, p. 380, citing *Das Kapital*, I, 104, and a variety of references in vol. III and in the *Theories of Surplus Value*.
3. For references, see Wittfogel, p. 385n.
4. Shlomo Aveneri, ed., *Karl Marx on Colonization and Modernization* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), p. 9.
5. Engels, "French Rule in Algeria," *The Northern Star*, January 22, 1848.
6. See Wittfogel, p. 374.
7. Cited in Wittfogel, p. 387.
8. Quoted from Bakunin by Wittfogel, p. 388.
9. Marx to Engels, June 2, 1853.
10. Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853.
11. Joel Carmichael in his excellent biography, *Trotsky* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), pp. 375-76, quotes Max Eastman's impressions on visiting the Russian revolutionary exile in Prinkipo, Turkey. The Trotskys had been given a dilapidated villa, which they had turned into a barracks, letting the garden go to weeds. "Through sheer indifference to beauty, I should say," Eastman commented. "Trotsky talks a good deal about art in his books and lays claim to cultivated taste, but shows no more interest in art than in that garden." Carmichael agrees as to Trotsky's "aesthetic 'deadness.'" Lenin, too, lived all his life in drab, little cubicles. And on a far lower level, Fidel Castro, before taking power, lived like a pig, according to early associates. People indifferent to beauty may also be indifferent to the value of human life.

## Marx Finds a Racist Philosopher

Some time during the year 1850, Marx finally realized that the revolutionary upsurge was over. In that year, his effort at terrorist revolutionary organization came to an abrupt end. The one strong group that he had on the European Continent—the Cologne organization—was smashed by the police and its members put on trial.

At the same time, Marx was ignored and isolated from almost everyone who counted for anything in the intellectual or political life of either Europe or England. He had withdrawn from the small band of revolutionary conspirators that he had dominated in London after first smashing it by expelling those he considered heretics. Consequently, the adherents of August von Willich and Karl Vogt publicly branded him an unscrupulous intriguer and a possible police agent.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1850s and the early 1860s, Marx's private fortunes fluctuated between financial insecurity and utter destitution. A proud man, he suffered the humiliation of living on Engels's charity. His family life was not only squalid as to surroundings, but discordant. His wife tormented him with her incessant wailings, reproaches, and threats of suicide. The two sons she had borne him had both died in childhood. An illegitimate son Marx had fathered with her maid, Lenchen, survived, though abandoned. It is probable that she never forgave her husband for this lapse. With the years, her pathological condition—alternating between hysteria and the deepest depression—intensified.

As we have seen, some of Marx's writings (for example, *On the Jewish Question*) and many of his contributions to the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* exuded hatred of such supposedly inferior racial groups as the Jews and Slavs and contained appeals for their suppression, subordination or liquidation. In contrast, *The Communist Manifesto* called for international labor solidarity and seemed by

implication at least to exclude racism. But if one looks at the *Manifesto* more closely, its internationalist appeal is seen to be a hodge-podge of borrowed ideas and phrases, strung together for propagandistic purposes.

The idea that society can always be divided into two classes, oppressed and oppressors, was as old as the hills. It had been expressed long before Marx's birth by Helvetius, Marat, and Baboeuf and later by Saint-Simon, Disraeli, and others. As a matter of fact, the Chinese philosopher, Mencius (371?-289? B.C.), had put the matter succinctly: "Those who work with their heads are the rulers; those who work with their hands are the ruled." The term *class struggle* was in common use at least as early as 1844 in the agitational writings of the Chartist leader, Feargus O'Connor. Marx's idea that "the working man has no country" was analyzed by the English novelist, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in 1833. The greatest slogan of *The Communist Manifesto*: "Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains and a world to gain!" was lifted without credit from Marx's fellow German revolutionary, Karl Schapper.<sup>2</sup>

What gave the document its thunderous appeal was the consummate skill with which these plagiarized ideas were woven into a coherent whole, the eloquence with which they were expressed, and the absolute assurance it offered that a new and harmonious Communist world would be born from the blood and wreckage of international class war. Emotionally exalted readers of *The Communist Manifesto* scarcely noticed that it made the peasantry serfs of an omnipotent dictatorial state, advocated forced labor for all, and seemed to look with favor on the abolition of marriage and the treatment of women as communal property.<sup>3</sup>

## Marx and Mad Urquhart

Now that these dreams of a victorious proletarian revolution had been indefinitely tabled, Marx reverted to his racist preoccupations and his racial hatreds. Detestation of Russia and the hope that a German or even a united West European war would drive the beastly and inferior Slavs back into the steppes and tundras of Siberian Asia became one of his major preoccupations. Since the British Government was not willing to wage war on Russia, Marx devised an intricate theory, according to which the two great powers had been in effect secret allies for over a century. Their nefarious objectives including preventing the creation of a Greater Germany. Marx convinced himself that Lord Palmerston, who was the architect of English foreign policy during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, was a paid, secret agent of Russia.

This bizarre hypothesis was not an invention out of the whole cloth. In 1826, when Marx was eight years old, Palmerston, along with other rich Englishmen,



had overextended himself in various speculations. At the time, he was having affairs with Lady Emily Cowper, Princess Lieven, and various other court beauties. The German-born Dorothea Lieven "was certainly not merely the wife of the Russian ambassador but herself an agent of the Russian Foreign Ministry."<sup>4</sup> Princess Lieven gave or lent Palmerston money to extricate himself from his financial difficulties. Whether her motive was love or political advantage remains obscure. Six years after this cash transaction, she wrote the Russian foreign minister, Count Karl Robert Nesselrode: "The inconvenience of his [Palmerston's] Liberal principles and obstinate character are very great and we should see him go without regret."<sup>5</sup>

However, Palmerston did not go. On the contrary, the Lievens were recalled from London. In Paris, Princess Lieven became the mistress of François Guizot, who later became the commanding figure in Louis Philippe's government. From this vantage point, she did everything in her power to stir up animosity against Palmerston.

The Lievens had been kicked out of England (probably at Palmerston's instigation) at a time when Karl Marx was a young man of sixteen. Nevertheless, Marx convinced himself, more than 20 years later, that Palmerston was a Russian agent! To propound this view, Marx wrote for the yellow press of a mad Scot named David Urquhart. His longest contribution to this campaign was redundantly entitled *The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston*. These and other political attacks were distributed by Urquhart and his backers in editions of tens of thousands and avidly devoured by the more credulous elements in the British reading public.

Urquhart was a British diplomat who had shifted suddenly from being an ardent supporter of Greek independence from Turkey to become a rabid and uncompromising Turkophile. His conduct was so eccentric that he was recalled from his diplomatic post. He drew the expected paranoid conclusions, and on August 6, 1840, Urquhart actually sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Melbourne, charging Lord Palmerston with "high treason" as a Russian agent.<sup>6</sup>

When Urquhart was not busy searching for czarist spies under his bed, he was engaged in such activities as introducing the Turkish bath into England. He also managed to combine his marriage to the evangelical sister of Chichester Fortescue with the establishment of a private harem for himself in the Turkish style.

Marx saw at once that the fellow was quite mad. Their first meeting occurred in 1854. On February 9, Marx wrote Engels:

I had a rendezvous with Urquhart. The compliment that he astonished me with was that my article sounded as if it had been written by a "Turk". . . . He is a complete monomaniac. He believes certainly that he will one day be Prime

Minister of England. When all the others have been put down, England will come and say: "Urquhart save us!" And then he will save her. During his talk, particularly when he was contradicted, he had convulsions, which made such a comic impression on me that I recall by heart all his phrases. The fellow's main idea is that Russia rules the world because of her surplus of brains. To cope with that one needs a man with the brain of an Urquhart and, if you have the misfortune not to be Urquhart yourself, you must at least be an Urquhartite. . . .

Yet Marx worked with Urquhart for years, publishing vehement attacks on the British government and strident demands that the country which had generously accepted him as a refugee go to war with Russia—a war in which Marx would have been under no obligation to fight. In pursuing his hatred of Russians and of Slavs in general, Marx seldom hesitated to spread calumnies which he knew to be false. (As I shall show in more detail in chapter twenty, Marx falsely accused Bakunin of being a czarist agent in his *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1848, but was forced to make a grudging apology and withdraw the charge. This did not prevent him from reviving the libel in 1870 and adding Alexander Herzen's name to the list of supposed Russian agents.) Lassalle had informed Marx of Palmerston's true attitude toward Russia in a confidential report. "I won't say that I want to ruin Russia," Palmerston had revealed privately, "but I do want to deal her a blow that will last her a lifetime." Marx's reaction was: "I have come to the same conclusions as the monomaniac, Urquhart, that Palmerston sold out to the Russians several decades ago."

(As for Palmerston, he wrote privately to his friend, John MacGregor, on October 29, 1855, that Urquhart was "more than half mad, and wholly bad.") Was the Scottish monomaniac on the payroll of the Sublime Porte, as the government of the Ottoman Empire called itself? I have seen no evidence in support of this theory, but his sudden and otherwise inexplicable conversion from a Grecophile to the worship of everything Turkish and a lifelong advocacy of Turkish national interests certainly suggests it. Urquhart provided Marx with a reading public. Did he also give Marx money? Marx's comments concerning the Christian peoples of the Balkans were invariably harsh, contemptuous, caustic and unkind. But when he came to the Turks, he viewed them with a benevolent eye (when, that is, he wasn't including them as subjects of Oriental despotism).

He proclaimed the virtues of the Turkish peasant in a letter to Wilhelm Liebknecht on February 4, 1878:

We are decidedly in favor of the Turks for two reasons: first of all because we have studied the Turkish peasant, i.e. the masses of the Turkish people, and found

him undoubtedly one of the most capable and morally upright representatives of the European peasantry, and secondly because a Russian defeat would greatly accelerate the social transformation.<sup>8</sup>

This "morally upright" Turkish peasant had perpetrated hideous massacres of Greeks, Jews and other minorities which had shocked the civilized world. Within a generation or so, this same "morally upright" fellow would carry out two genocidal actions against the Armenian people which were in some ways even more hideous and sadistic than the Holocaust. Hitler's study of the successful annihilation of the Armenians by the Turkish and Kurdish peasantry helped convince him that the destruction of European Jewry was practicable.

## Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century

Marx followed up his polemical attack on Palmerston with a strange psychological analysis of the Russian character and of Russo-British diplomatic relations which involved a great deal of documentary research on his part. He began this work in June 1856 and never managed to complete it.

The *Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century* advances the bizarre conspiratorial theory that the British Government had traditionally been subservient to Russia. The evidence Marx assembles to support this view includes the opinions of "obscure parsons" and "would scarcely convince a ten-year-old child" of its validity.<sup>9</sup> As the author of the materialistic conception of history, Marx might have been expected to assert that this supposed British kowtowing to the Russian czars was dictated by economic motives. Not a bit of it. In fact, he goes out of his way to argue that British trade with Russia was of little significance and of no benefit to English capitalism as a whole.<sup>10</sup> The real reason for this (wholly imaginary) British submissiveness toward Russia lay in the peculiar character of the Russian personality, one which he summarized as "the slave as master." Some of the English policy-makers were "spiritualists" on the issue, others were "materialists." The latter regarded Russian power as "a palpable fact"; the former considered this power "the mere visions of the guilt-stricken consciences of the European peoples."<sup>11</sup>

He passed from this to an analysis of the Russian character, particularly the character of Russia's rulers. Here the dominant theme is that the Russian is "the slave as master"—in other words, the peculiar character of the Russian personality combines an innate servility with ruthless despotism. The czars, according to Marx, willingly submitted to the Mongol yoke, one of the most brutal and uncouth despotisms in man's history. When they threw it off, they became its

heirs and imitators by employing Western European technicians to perfect their instruments of terror and provide them with a patina of culture and civilization:

If the Muscovite Czars, who worked their encroachments by the agency particularly of the Tartar Khans, were obliged to *tartarize* Muscovy, Peter the Great, who resolved upon working through the agency of the west, was obliged to *civilize* Russia. In grasping upon the Baltic provinces, he seized at once the tools necessary for this process. They afforded him not only the diplomats and the generals, the brains with which to execute his system of political and military action on the west, they yielded him, at the same time, a crop of bureaucrats, schoolmasters, and drill-sergeants, who were to drill Russians into that varnish of civilization that adapts them to the technical appliances of the Western peoples without imbuing them with their ideas.<sup>12</sup>

And again:

To resume. It is in the terrible and abject school of Mongolian slavery that Muscovy was nursed and grew up. It gathered strength only by becoming a *virtuoso* in the craft of serfdom. Even when emancipated, Muscovy continued to perform its additional part of the slave as master. At length, Peter the Great coupled the political craft of the Mongol slave with the proud aspiration of the Mongol master, to whom Genghiz Khan had, by will, bequeathed his conquest of the earth.<sup>13</sup>

This unpublished and unfinished book contains brilliant insights and marks a significant transition in Marx's thought and in the direction that his career was taking. The whole "class shit," as Marx privately called it, is abandoned.<sup>14</sup> The revolutionary prospects of 1848 were over, completed, dead. That card had been played. Hence, no more talk about proletarian internationalism for the present. In fact, the British relationship of subordination to Russia, which was wholly a product of Marx's imagination and his love for conspiracy theories of history, had nothing whatever to do with British economic interests.

The main positive points Marx was making were these: (1) The Russians are the heirs and disciples of the Mongols; that is to say, they are instrumentalities of terror and barbarism, of Asiatic uncouthness, which, when armed with European technology, threatens civilization. In short, he was warning his readers of what would later be called the Yellow Peril. (2) Britain had pursued policies of appeasement toward Russia for complex psychological reasons which had nothing to do with anything Marx had previously written about the motive forces of history. These policies must be reversed.

In short, Russia was a paper tiger. It was the fountainhead of Asiatic barba-



rism, and the British government was playing the role of Russia's lackey. What Britain should be doing was coordinating her political and military power either to destroy Russia by war or, at the very least, hurl her back into Asia.

### Russia Must Be Destroyed

The polemics against Palmerston and the unfinished propagandistic history of Anglo-Russian relations fell on barren soil, but Marx's belief in Teutonic superiority, his drive for personal power, his love of war, and his hatred of the lesser breeds of mankind remained.

In 1865, his search for a savant whose writings would provide "scientific" support for his doctrines of Teutonic expansion and Russian subjugation led him to an obscure Polish ethnologist named François Duchinski. Born in Kiev in 1817, Duchinski settled in France and during 1858-64 published a succession of ethnological and historical volumes which attempted to prove that the Russians were not really Slavs at all. They were Asiatics, he argued. Hence, they were intruders and should be driven back to the Asian land-mass.

On June 24, 1865, Marx wrote Engels in great excitement concerning Duchinski's discovery that "*Russia* is a name usurped by the Muscovites. They are not Slavs, do not belong at all to the Indo-German race, but are *des intrus*, who must again be hurled back beyond the Dnieper, etc."<sup>15</sup>

For Marx, the touchstone of any theory of the origin and formation of peoples was whether it provided ideological justification for his hatred of Slavs, and because Duchinski's supposed discoveries provided an inadequate foundation for these sanguinary visions and for the racist philosophy of history that lay behind them, Marx continued to search for a greater scientific authority.

### A Man Greater Than Darwin

In 1866 his patience was rewarded: he discovered Pierre Trémaux, an ethnologist who claimed to have unveiled the interrelationships between soils, races, and human evolution and to have discovered the key to the rise and fall of civilizations.

Trémaux was greater than Darwin!

With an unbounded enthusiasm which contrasted with the faint and condescending praise he had bestowed upon Darwin six years previously, Marx announced his find to Engels. On August 7, 1866, he wrote his "Lieber Fred": "A very important work which I shall send you . . . is P. Trémaux, *Origins and*

*Transformations of Man and Other Beings*, Paris, 1865. It is, despite all the faults which strike me, a very important advance over Darwin."

At the beginning of his book, Trémaux modestly revealed that he had discovered "THE GREAT LAW OF THE PERFECTING OF BEINGS," namely: "THE PERFECTING OF BEINGS IS OR SHOULD BE PROPORTIONATE TO THE DEGREE THAT THE SOIL ON WHICH THEY LIVE IS WORKED! And, in general, the soil is more heavily worked to the extent that it belongs to a more recent geological formation."<sup>16</sup>

This "great law" disclosed that the beauty, health, intelligence, energy, and civilization level of peoples corresponded directly to the geological age of the land they occupied. Crude, brutish, stupid and lazy peoples and races lived on geologically old terrain. Refined, civilized, handsome, healthy, bright, and energetic peoples occupied geologically new land. Trémaux may have reached this extraordinary conclusion from noting the prevalence of endemic goiter and its deforming effects in the Alps, a region of old, granitic soils. Two years previously, Trousseau had shown that these goiters were caused by iodine deficiency, but Trémaux ignored this finding.

To prove his theory, Trémaux took his readers on a rapid, imaginary tour of the world, correlating soils and peoples as he proceeded: "In India, where the soil permits, one finds fairly handsome people, but in its peninsula, where there are large expanses of primitive soil . . . one sees people with black skins as hideous as monkeys. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

Turning to Scandinavia, Trémaux observed that it contained "the greatest area of geologically primitive terrain in Europe." What followed with respect to its inhabitants? Why that "the Lapps are therefore the most inferior of people." The Swedes, Norwegians and Finns had not lived there long enough, but, give them time, and they would degenerate to the Lapp level.<sup>18</sup>

This gave the semblance of scientific support to one of Marx's and Engels's many racial prejudices. "Scandinavianism," the latter had written in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* for August 12, 1848, "consists of enthusiasm for the brutal, dirty, piratical old-Norse nationality, for that deep inwardness which cannot bring its over-pregnant feelings out in words, but can in deeds, namely in brutality toward women, permanent drunkenness, and tearful sentimentality that alternates with berserk fury." This unflattering characterization of Norse civilization was not unrelated to the fact that Prussia had marched troops into the province of Holstein. Engels was justifying German aggrandizement on the grounds that the Scandinavians were too uncivilized to govern their own territory.

The most favorable soils, according to Trémaux, were "all of the west and

south of Europe, and more especially France, Italy, Greece, part of Germany, southeast England, and eastern Spain. It is there that civilization and the intellectual faculties rule."<sup>19</sup>

All very well, except for the fact that Trémaux had excluded the inhabitants of the Rhineland—that is to say, Marx and Engels. Moreover, he had confined British civilization to the region around London. Yet four years later, Francis Galton would assemble persuasive evidence in *Hereditary Genius* (1869) that East Anglia and the Scottish Lowlands were "a fraction of a grade superior to the ordinary English" in the production of eminent men and in having a working class that was mentally, morally, and physically superior to that of the rest of the British Isles.<sup>20</sup>

One of Trémaux's more remarkable discoveries was the reason for the supposedly debased condition of the Irish people. He claimed that, after the wars of 1641 and 1689, the English chased "the native Irish into the barony of Flews, on a granitic and very poor carboniferous soil." As a result, the English preserved their original character, but the Irish were so changed that "except for their color, they would be taken for a backward population of Australian aborigines."<sup>21</sup>

Another "discovery" of this scientific genius was that Neanderthal skulls were "strongly reminiscent of the crania of monkeys."<sup>22</sup> He also proclaimed that "the backward Negro is not an evolved ape, but a *degenerate* man. . . ."<sup>23</sup> Marx heartily agreed with this last finding and he considered it further proof of Trémaux's scientific superiority to Darwin.

Trémaux's most original finding was that the American Civil War was basically a geological struggle. The constitutional issues at stake and the irreconcilable attitudes of the contestants toward Negro slavery were mere surface phenomena. The real issue was that people who lived on recent soils did not want to be governed by people who lived on old ones. Trémaux wrote in 1864:

What is the secret of this [Southern] resistance? Ask geology. She will show you that the South has a magnificent zone of soils, quaternary and tertiary. On the contrary, primitive silurian and coal-bearing soils predominate in the North. Here, therefore, the same principle as elsewhere: the inhabitants of geologically recent soils do not wish to be governed by those of ancient soils.

Even an eccentric like Trémaux realized that the North had overwhelming industrial and manpower superiority and that Grant was in the process of shattering Lee's armies. Hence, he conceded the possibility of a Northern victory,

but added that, in that case, "we dare to predict that in the future it will be the South which will govern the North, assuming the two countries do not remain separate."<sup>24</sup>

Not all of Trémaux's vaporizings reinforced the Marx-Engels prejudices. Thus, the French ethnologist believed that the modern Greeks, living on the same new soils as their more illustrious ancestors, shared the physical beauty and intellectual ability of the latter. Engels, however, classified the Greeks as one of "the lousy Balkan peoples," adding:

These wretched, ruined fragments of one-time nations, the Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks and other robber bands on behalf of which the liberal Philistine waxes enthusiastic are unwilling to grant to each other the air they breathe and feel obliged to cut each other's greedy throats.<sup>25</sup>

Trémaux may have been a foolish man, but he was not an evil or a hate-obsessed man; he did not share the bloodthirsty visions of Marx and Engels. He neither disliked Slavs nor wished them harm. He merely believed that Russia's great areas of old soils inevitably bred mediocre people. Moreover, if superior people settled there, the unfavorable geological environment would cause them to become equally degenerate.

On geological grounds, he opposed russification of

poor Poland, which suffers most bitterly, as its geological frontiers with Muscovy are ever more vigorously invaded. The Slavic and Lithuanian races have their true frontier with the Muscovites in the great geological line that stretches north of the Niemen and Dnieper basins. In effect, the Slavs who crossed that border have been largely changed—brutalized, say the other Slavs, who attribute this effect to the power of this or that prince. . . . But it is not at all the same south of this great geological line: the aptitudes and the types appropriate to this region will always remain entirely different from those of Russia. When they are in conflict with the great laws of nature, the projects of man are merely calamities, as witness the efforts of the Czars to transform the Polish people into Muscovites.<sup>26</sup>

Trémaux also pleased Marx by observing that the Hungarians, living on splendid, geologically recent soils were therefore superior to their Slavic neighbors. Writing in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* for February 15, 1849, Marx and Engels had argued that the Magyars were a superior racial group which had every right to oppress its Slavic neighbors: "If the eight million Slavs have had to be satisfied to let four million Magyars keep them under their yoke, then this alone is enough to show which is the more capable of living and more energetic,



the many Slavs or the few Magyars. It turns out that this 'crime' of the Germans and Magyars against the dubious Slavs is one of the best and most worthy acts of which our people and the Hungarians can boast."

Extending Marx's and Engels' argument that a minority is justified in ruling a majority if it has the force to do so from the category of nation to that of class, it would follow that both aristocratic and capitalist domination of the laboring masses were morally justified.

## Engels Rejects Trémaux

On August 7, 1866, Marx explained to Engels why he found Trémaux's book so exciting: "In its historical and political implications, it is far more meaningful and fruitful than Darwin. Here is the only place where a basis in nature is provided for certain questions, such as nationality, etc." In plain English, Trémaux was more fruitful than Darwin because the French ethnologist provided a pseudoscientific basis for racism, whereas Darwin did not.

Trémaux had proved that "on the basis of the predominant earth formation in Russia, the Slav must become tartarized and mongolized just as he . . . proves that the common negro type is merely the degeneration of a far higher one. . . ."

Having discovered Trémaux, Marx could abandon Duchinski. It was no longer necessary to "prove" that the Russians weren't Slavs; the ethical justification for throwing them out of Europe was that Trémaux had proved that they had been brutalized and degraded by living on geologically old soils.

On August 7, Marx again urged Engels to read Trémaux's "very important work." On August 13, he returned to the subject. Finally, Engels looked at the book and on October 2 gave his "Dear Moor" his verdict:

Concerning Moilin and Trémaux, I write more fully today: the latter I have not entirely finished reading, but am convinced there is nothing to his theories, because he neither understands geology nor is capable of the most ordinary literary-historical criticism. The stories about the Nigger, Santa Maria, and about the transformation of whites into Negroes are laughable. Namely, that the traditions of the Senegal niggers are worthy of unconditional belief precisely because the fellows don't know how to write! Beyond that, it is beautiful to attribute the difference between a Basque, a Frenchman, a Breton and an Alsatian to earth formation, which is doubtless also responsible for the fact that these people speak four different languages!

The way the fellow explains how we Rhinelanders on our Devonian transitional rocks (which have not been under water since long before the era of coal

formation) didn't become idiots and Niggers will perhaps be revealed to us in his second volume, or else he may assert that we really are niggers.

This book is worth nothing, pure hypotheses that fly in the face of all the facts, and for every proof that it supplies, another proof must be adduced.

Engels had two fundamental objections to Trémaux's theories. The first was that the man was a fool, an ignoramus and probably a charlatan. The second, and much more fundamental, objection was that Trémaux denied that race differences in ability were permanent.

If soils determined the ability of races, then Swedes, Rhinelanders, and Scots were destined to sink into imbecility. On the other hand, the Negro cotton hands of the splendid new geological soils of the American South could be expected to produce black Shakespeares, Newtons, and da Vincis.

Marx failed to grasp the fact that, far from supporting his racist theories of history, Trémaux's doctrines undermined them, a failure due to his lack of any real grounding in science, scientific thought, or scientific method. Thus, he was almost always wrong on scientific issues and was taken in by a whole retinue of cranks in addition to Urquhart, Duchinski and Trémaux. I have already alluded to the fact that he thought that his son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, had a brilliant future in medicine precisely because Lafargue doubted Pasteur's germ theory of disease! Another example was his belief in phrenology, a quack pseudoscience that had been discredited for decades.<sup>27</sup>

On October 3, Marx wrote Engels a rejoinder: "Trémaux's basic idea concerning *the influence of soil* . . . is, to my mind, an idea which merely has to be uttered to earn for itself an eternal citizenship in the sciences. . . ." Engels replied on October 5 that soil certainly had something to do with human society, but that Trémaux's theories were ridiculous, his ignorance of geology appalling, and his judgments about ethnology absurd.

Marx did not reply. The two Engels letters apparently ended his infatuation with the French ethnological quack. At least, there are no further references to Trémaux in the correspondence, nor did Marx find a substitute racial philosopher of history to buttress his prejudices and his hatreds. The road was thus paved for the fraudulent assertion that Marx, like Darwin, was a great pioneer in the life-sciences and that he had unveiled evolutionary processes in human society parallel to those Darwin had discovered in the plant and animal kingdoms. The road was also cleared for the even more convenient political lie that Marx and Engels were not racists at all, but true internationalists who nobly championed the rights of weak peoples, nations, and races against the great powers which sought to subjugate and oppress them.

## Notes

1. This latter charge is clearly implied in Karl Vogt, *Mein Prozess gegen die Allgemeine Zeitung* (Geneva, 1859). It is almost certainly false.
2. Stefan T. Possony, introduction to Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Chicago: Gateway, 1954), pp. vii–xli.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Donald Southgate, “*The Most English Minister . . .*,” (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966), p. 68.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
6. Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London, Constable, 1970), p. 236.
7. Wolfe, p. 41.
8. Mehring, pp. 540–41. It is also interesting to note that, while Marx ridiculed Urquhart as a buffoon and a madman to Engels, he gave Liebknecht, a comparative outsider, the impression that the Scottish agitator was a man of great ability and foresight. See Liebknecht’s *Memoirs*.
9. Quoting Payne, *The Unknown Karl Marx*, pp. 227–28.
10. *The Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: International Publisher, 1969), pp. 88, 91.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 121, 114; quoted in Seigel, p. 227.
12. Marx, *The Secret History of the Eighteenth Century*, in Payne, *Unknown Marx*, pp. 314–15.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
14. Vogt, p. 141.
15. Note that Marx, the “internationalist” and “humanist,” explicitly accepts the genocidal myth that Adolf Hitler would later make reality. First, that the Indo-Germans, or Aryans, are a race, not merely a linguistic group. Second, that non-Aryans can be expropriated, expelled, driven into the tundra to perish. Marx conveniently forgot, as usual, that he, himself, was not an Aryan, but a Jew.
16. Pierre Trémaux, *Origines et transformations de l’homme et des autres êtres, Première partie* (Paris: Hachette, 1865), p. 17. Capitalization, italics, punctuation, etc., are as in the original. The translations of both Trémaux and the Marx-Engels *Briefwechsel* are my own.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 28. Trémaux may have had in mind the partly Australoid tribes of Kerala, such as the Uralis and Kadar.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
20. Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (Cleveland: World, 1962 ed.), p. 395.
21. Trémaux, *Origines*, pp. 107–8.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 283. Of course, there is no resemblance between Neanderthal skulls and the crania of monkeys. Possibly, Trémaux had monkeys confused with anthropoid apes. Even so, he was still wrong.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 426–28.
25. Engels to Bebel, November 17, 1885. Wolfe, p. 68. While the quoted letter was written after Marx's death, Marx and Engels held similar opinions about Balkan peoples.
26. Trémaux, *Origines*, pp. 420–21.
27. "So you see, phrenology is not the base art Hegel imagined." Marx to Kugelmann, January 11, 1868.



**Part III:**  
**Foundations of**  
**Quicksand**

## Fundamental Fallacies: The Proletariat

By his mid-twenties, Karl Marx had already failed in at least two careers. He had failed as a poet and dramatist because his creative writings, as I have shown, were volcanic outpourings of hatred and destructiveness without affection, tenderness, sensuousness, love, sexuality, or serenity. His inability to experience normal positive human emotions poisoned both his writings and his life. His poetry and drama struck a discordant monotone that not only created repugnance in the reader's mind, but, far worse, boredom.

His second attempt at a career was to serve as a sort of fifth columnist inside the theology department of a German university where he would indoctrinate his students with atheism and "give medieval religion and politics their last blow. . . ."

In his third and final career he would attempt to create a philosophical system, almost entirely from borrowed materials, which would "prove" the inevitability of the violent destruction of the existing order of society and which would "predict" the inevitable manner in which that cataclysm would occur. Needless to say, the *leitmotif* in these superficially different undertakings was to validate Marx's need to envision and luxuriate in *a total revolution of nihilism*.

By a *revolution of nihilism*, I mean one which is engineered, not to create, but to destroy; not from love of anything or anybody, but from hatred of everything and everybody; not from the desire to help raise up the poor and oppressed, but from a thirst to grind down the rich and the powerful.

This generalized destructiveness is much more common than one might at first suspect. During the first decades of the present century, these nihilist, death-oriented types were to be found at least as frequently in the ranks of the extreme revolutionary right as in those of the extreme revolutionary left, but the decisive defeat of nazism has eliminated this choice. In the Red Brigades and their

counterparts throughout the modern world, we find highly educated young people, generally of upper-class or upper-middle-class origin, who have no positive program for society whatsoever except for a few generalized slogans, but whose dedication to death and destruction is abundantly proved by the mindless murders they perpetrate, often against perfectly innocent people.

Psychiatry is full of theories of what causes this sort of destructive personality, none of which seem to be based on solid evidence. I have no hypotheses to offer about the *causes* and *character structure* of revolutionary nihilism; I merely assert the obvious and readily observable fact that there are a large number of people whose entire lives are twisted, distorted, and warped by the generalized need to destroy and who derive one of the few pleasures that life offers them by either perpetrating these acts of destruction or by visualizing and gloating over them.<sup>2</sup>

### The Proletariat as Battering Ram

Marx found in Hegel the doctrine that every thesis produces its absolute antithesis. Transforming the Hegelian system from an idealistic to a materialistic one, Marx envisaged the proletariat as the absolute negation of capitalist or bourgeois society. As early as 1845, Marx wrote in *The German Ideology*:

When the proletariat announces the *dissolution of the existing social order*, it only declares the *secret of its own existence*, for it is the *effective* dissolution of this order. When the proletariat demands the *negation of private property*, it only lays down as a *principle for society*, what society has already made a principle for the proletariat. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Harping on the same theme, Marx and Engels wrote three years later in *The Communist Manifesto*: "The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

What Marx is saying is that the proletariat must be the antithesis of capitalist society, and therefore its executioner.

Thus, he begins with the strange assumption that history moves in accordance with his version of the Hegelian dialectic. Having decided to accept this hypothesis without any attempt at verification, Marx devoted the remaining forty years of his life to attempting unsuccessfully to fit the facts into it.

The reason I began this chapter with a reaffirmed emphasis of Marx's destructiveness is that it is the only rational explanation of this procedure. A dispassion-

ate and reasonable scholar would have paused at precisely this point. He would have recalled that when a scientist develops a working hypothesis, his next step is to test it against the evidence.

In Marx's case, the first questions he might have asked himself, if he had been interested in establishing the truth or falsity of his general theory, could have been these: Does man's history invariably represent a succession of class struggles in which one class emerges victorious, the other vanquished? Is the result of class war invariably determined by technological levels of production? That is to say, do "the more progressive classes," those better able to master the new forces of production, always win? Does this process apply to all societies? If there are exceptions, can this theory nevertheless accommodate them?

If Marx had asked himself these questions dispassionately, he would have had to answer all of them in the negative. Consider the transition from "classical society," in which Marx held that the private slave-owners were the dominant class, to that of European feudalism. Was this change accompanied by an advance in the productive levels of the Western economy? Quite evidently, not. The transition from the technologically advanced Mediterranean civilization and economy of the Roman Empire under the Antonines to the brutish, famine-ravaged, plague-ridden, intellectually primitive, superstitious, barely literate and manor-bound Europe of the Dark Ages was by any rational criterion retrogression.

In fact, Marx in effect admitted that the raw data of history couldn't be crammed into the Procrustean bed of his Hegelian system when he dealt with Asian civilizations. He simply solved that problem by declaring in a lordly fashion that the Asiatic civilizations had no history! "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history," he pontificated in an article for the *New York Daily Tribune*.<sup>5</sup> "What we call its history, is but the history of the successive invaders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society."

He had similar views about China: "The Oriental empires always show an unchanging social infrastructure, coupled with unceasing change in the persons and tribes who manage to ascribe to themselves the political superstructure."<sup>6</sup> Marx did not favor his readers with similar judgments about Japanese society, history, and civilization; he simply ignored Japan. Perhaps he considered it beneath his notice. The record does not provide us with answers.

Now the point of all this is not that Marx's scholarship, knowledge, and culture were more superficial than he pretended, although that is true. The fundamental point is that he swept aside the civilizations of Asia, not to mention Indo-America, because he couldn't fit them into his schematic system. One is really appalled at the intellectual arrogance of a man who would dismiss out of

hand the Aryan invasions of India, the emergence of caste, the religious struggles, the developments in architecture, law, philosophy, medicine, and mathematics—a man who would sweep all this aside with the complacent ethnocentric verdict: “Indian society has no history.”

Another basic question a professional social scientist or historian might have asked himself was a bit more complex. Let me phrase it this way: Let us forget about Asian civilizations and assume (as Marx did toward the close of his life) that his great discovery that the history of all societies is fundamentally one of class struggles applies only to Western civilization. Now, if this is so, does it follow that one of the contending classes must be the negation of the other? By “negation” in this sense, we mean that one class is the opposite of its rival in its basic conditions of life, institutions, relation to social production and private property, culture, etc.

Well, the *prima facie* answer would be: Of course not, that is rubbish.

During his lifetime, Marx had witnessed gradual transfers of power in England from the *ci-devant* ruling landed aristocracy to the rising industrial capitalist class. Did the two contending classes have opposite systems of law, philosophy, parliamentary institutions? Did they have opposite attitudes toward marriage, child-rearing, education, careers, patriotism, literature, art, music, religion? Obviously not. There were some differences, but there was a far more important continuity. The transfer of power from one class to another was a gradual encroachment and was never total. Often enough, one of its symptoms was the marriage of impecunious aristocrats into rising merchant and industrial families. Any attempt to apply the Hegelian rigmarole of thesis-antithesis-synthesis to any previous class struggle in history would have shown it to be ludicrous.

And yet Marx persisted in viewing the proletariat as the absolute negation of the bourgeoisie. This was the core element of his entire philosophy. Why did he spend a lifetime trying to build a philosophical system on the quicksand of this implausible premise?

## Historians versus Doomsday Seekers

I believe the fundamental point is that Marx had little or no interest in explaining what processes actually occurred in history and why they did so. His attitude toward history and science was essentially comparable to that of those religious sectarians who prove to their own satisfaction that the world will come to an end at a precise date. They accept all the evidence in favor of that theory and reject all that is contrary to it. They make prudent preparations for Armageddon. When the day passes, they go back to the drawing



board to discover their error and come up with a new Doomsday.

The analogy, of course, is that Marx was not interested in history at all. One of the most mendacious things he ever said about himself was that nothing human was alien to him. Practically everything human was alien to him. His all-consuming, obsessional interest in history was the coming revolution, and like the Doomsday prophets, he made prediction after prediction, hoping against hope that upheaval, disaster, world war, chaos, and terror would come within his lifetime.

The Marxian system or systems can, I believe, best be understood as successive attempts to squash the evidence of history into a catastrophic formula that satisfied Marx's own peculiar psychic needs. Actually, Marx hadn't really invented the system. He had relied heavily on a group of writers who favored the established preindustrial order with its guild system, usury laws, restriction of people to the trades of their fathers, rigid class distinctions, and hierarchy based on birth and landed estates. Both Shlomo Avineri and Robert Tucker have provided illuminating evidence of the extent of Marx's intellectual debt to the romantic reactionaries who did all within their power to embellish the poverty and stagnation of the old preindustrial system and to magnify the very real horrors of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

These romantic reactionaries had their counterparts in other countries. "The sole advantage possessed by the white Slaves of Europe," wrote Sarah M. Maury, "... is that they have permission to change each naked, hungry and intolerable bondage for a worse." Or, as Carlyle put it: "Free labor means work or starve. Slave labor means work or be flogged." John C. Calhoun argued that in every "wealthy and civilized society . . . one portion of the community . . . lives on the labor of the other." He preferred the "more direct, simple and patriarchal" system of plantation slavery, in which the sick, aged, and infirm were cared for, to the impersonal and heartless wage slavery, as he saw it, of the North.<sup>8</sup>

Marx's attitude toward this stagnant preindustrial European society was both nostalgic and ambivalent. Avineri summarizes it fairly:

Marx's description of medieval Europe echoes some of the romantic notions prevalent at that period in Germany: Marx feels that the Middle Ages produced an integrated way of life, in which "the life of the people was identical with that of the state"; but, Marx adds, this was so because medieval man was an utterly unfree individual. If the Middle Ages were a "democracy," "they were a democracy of unfreedom."<sup>9</sup>

This perceptive summary leaves unanswered what Marx meant by freedom and whether or not he really favored it. One supposes that both Hitler's Germany

and Stalin's Russia could fairly be described as "democracies of unfreedom"—that is to say, they were totalitarian despotisms apparently supported by majorities of their subjects.

Marx assumed that the proletariat was destined to displace the capitalists as the ruling class in modern societies. Why could it not do so in an evolutionary fashion, through increases in political power corresponding to higher wages, improved status, and greater wealth? This was the pattern of displacement characteristic of other power shifts in previous societies. Moreover, it was the process which was actually occurring in the modern, technologically advanced nations of the western world.

Marx rejected this possibility because it would have destroyed the vision of catastrophe and general destruction that he contemplated with such prolonged and perverse pleasure. Let me emphasize that this is by no means an original discovery about Marx. The German economist, Werner Sombart, and the Russian former Marxists, Sergei N. Bulgakov and Mikhail I. Tugan-Baranowsky, noted that Marx had "no heart, no love, no sympathy for human suffering. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Riazanov, of course, indignantly denied this verdict, but was forced to concede that "not all aspects of human nature were equally accessible to him."<sup>11</sup>

Marx *had* to prove the catastrophic alternative. His successive efforts to do so would involve him both in untenable and illogical basic premises and tampering with the evidence.

## The 1844 Manuscripts

Let us consider Marx's first attempt to make his case, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. He had the good sense not to publish this during his lifetime, as did his alter ego, Friedrich Engels, after his death. Or perhaps no publisher for this frequently turgid document could be found. It first saw the light in 1932 and was immediately hailed by the devout as a new revelation of the "humanistic" Marx. Having gone through the disheartening experience of discovering how many of Marx's published theories and predictions were demonstrably wrong, they seized on this obscure tract as a means of rehabilitating their idol.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, if one is to prove that the proletariat will inevitably break its chains and launch a successful world revolution, he should first prove that under capitalism this proletariat faces a dismal and inescapable future of increasing misery. In 1844, Marx had not as yet evolved his bizarre economic theories. How was he going to prove increasing misery?

Marx turned to the ultimate authority, Adam Smith, whose classic, *The*

*Wealth of Nations*, had been published in 1776. Marx began boldly with the assertion: "The ordinary wage, according to Smith, is the lowest compatible with common humanity, that is with cattle-like existence."<sup>13</sup>

Now if one turns to Adam Smith, it becomes quite clear that he didn't say this. For example: "In Great Britain the wages of labor seem, in the present times, to be evidently more than what is precisely necessary to enable the laborer to bring up a family."<sup>14</sup> Part of the evidence Smith adduced for this proposition was that wages were higher in England than in Scotland though provisions were more expensive in Scotland. In England, summer wages are higher than winter wages. Wages also vary with the worker's skills, the responsibility placed upon his shoulders, "the ease or hardship" of the work, the likelihood of steady employment, etc.

Marx then analyzed the horrible condition of the working class in "a society in which wealth is increasing." Raising wages "gives rise to *overwork* among the workers. The more they wish to earn, the more they must sacrifice their time and carry out slave-labor, completely losing all their freedom in the service of greed." This shortens their lifespan, Marx tells us, and asserts that "in an increasingly prosperous society . . . the big capitalist ruins the small. . . ." Since small capitalists are driven into bankruptcy, they become laborers, the supply of labor thus increases, and wages fall. "Consequently, a section of the working class falls into beggary or starvation."

Even worse, classical economics "tells us that the worker . . . must sell himself and his humanity."<sup>15</sup> His triumphant conclusion is that rising productivity through increased division of labor "impoverishes the worker and reduces him to a machine."<sup>16</sup>

These bizarre assertions are buttressed with footnote references to Adam Smith, but, of course, Adam Smith never uttered these absurdities. What he said about the country of rapidly increasing wealth *par excellence*, namely, the United States, was: "Labor is so well rewarded there that a numerous family of children, instead of being a burden, is a source of opulence and prosperity to the parents."<sup>17</sup> What Adam Smith was saying was that, as long as output is rising faster than population, wages will increase, whereas, if population increase is rampant, but real national income is stagnant or declining, wages will sink to the subsistence level or below it.

But Marx *had* to falsify Adam Smith's views to preserve his theory of inevitable revolutionary upheaval. To put contemporary history inside the Hegelian framework, the working class had to be presented as the absolute negation of the bourgeoisie. This meant that the proletariat, on the morrow of the successful world revolution, would negate the philosophy, law, religion, culture, and social mores of bourgeois society. But these institutions, traditions and intellectual

constructs were nothing more nor less than the total heritage of civilized man. Hence, in the 1844 manuscripts, Marx envisages a state of affairs which he calls "unthinking communism," which is to prevail under the proletarian dictatorship until all classes disappear and presumably the state "withers away" and man enters the promised land of utopia.<sup>18</sup>

What would this new society really be like? Marx tells us that it would "disregard talent" and "negate the personality of man in every sphere. . . ." Its dominant principle would be "envy and the urge to reduce things to a common level. . . . Crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and of this levelling-down proceeding from the preconceived minimum."<sup>19</sup> What Marx envisaged was the "negation of the entire world of culture and civilization, the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the crude and *poor* man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not even reached it."<sup>20</sup>

In short, what Marx foresaw, was the triumph of envy and spite, the destruction of culture and civilization. Though expressed in philosophical language, it had certain similarities with the parataxic thirst for death and destruction one finds in the lurid prose of Frantz Fanon and in the nihilist praise of Fanon by Jean-Paul Sartre.

### The Prostitution of Women

One of the absurd charges levelled against the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was that they proposed to "nationalize women." (This was a complete misreading of the character of Lenin and his associates. They were not libertines, but death-obsessed fanatics. Of the many crimes which Lenin committed against the Russian people during the five years in which he wielded power, perhaps the most revolting was his order to the Nizhni-Novgorod Soviet in August 1918 to "apply mass terror immediately, to execute and exterminate hundreds of prostitutes, drunken soldiers, former officers, etc."<sup>21</sup> Thus, the sovereign remedy of extermination was to be applied to all who failed to live up to Lenin's puritanical standards. The idea that drunkenness should be punished by death was a new discovery in revolutionary law. The inclusion of prostitutes in the categories to be wiped off the face of the earth was peculiarly shocking when one considers that the famine, typhus, and misery which the Bolsheviks had inflicted on the Russian people had driven hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of women into prostitution as a sole means of survival.)

But if Lenin never favored universal prostitution, Marx apparently did. One of the most fascinating things about these *Economic and Philosophical Manu-*

*scripts of 1844* is what they have to say about the status of women under communism: "In the same way as woman is to abandon marriage for general prostitution, so the whole world of wealth, that is, the objective being of man, is to abandon the relation of exclusive marriage with the private property owner for the relation of general prostitution with the community."<sup>22</sup>

Note that this proposal has nothing to do with free love and it definitely does not give Karl Marx a niche in the pantheon of women's lib. Woman remains an object, chattel, a piece of private property. Under bourgeois marriage, Marx tells us, she was bought by an individual man and became his private and exclusive property. Under the proletarian dictatorship, which negates all private property, woman becomes the property of the entire male community for its unrestricted sexual pleasure.

The same theme is expressed in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) where Marx says that the earthly family "must be theoretically and practically destroyed."<sup>23</sup> And in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels charge the bourgeoisie with "having reduced the family relationship . . . to a purely money relationship."<sup>24</sup>

Where did Marx get the idea that marriage under capitalism consisted of the reduction of women to the purchased property of their husbands? Even the most cursory knowledge of European history should have convinced him that this was false. Certainly, women were denied equality and basic rights in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. But their status had advanced enormously from that which had prevailed prior to the Industrial Revolution. To give only one example, the much maligned English Puritans fought long, hard, and with eventual success to give women the right to choose their husbands. Before that, they had been given in marriage for property reasons.

Before writing these historic generalizations, had Marx considered the case of his own family? Did he believe that his mother had been bought as chattel by his father? Did he imagine that he had purchased the hand of Jenny von Westphalen? An even more intriguing question is where he derived his vision of the reduction of women to the status of enforced prostitutes. There was not a scintilla of evidence that the European working class, or even its small socialist minority, wanted anything of the sort. They were more likely to be staunch supporters of monogamous marriage.

Marx's interest in a future society in which all women were relegated to compulsory prostitution was probably related to some of his neurotic and sexual hang-ups. He was not only a poor provider, but a wretched husband in almost every sense of the word. He prolonged his university studies for seven years, during which time he remained engaged to Jenny von Westphalen. During this entire period, they were physically separated and hence unable to have any sexual



life. When they finally married after this hard and protracted separation, they honeymooned in Jenny's mother's house at Kreuznach, where Marx "barricaded himself behind a mountain of books." In these months, instead of engaging in unrestrained sexuality, Marx read 20,000 pages of serious books and took 250 pages of notes.<sup>25</sup>

In letter after letter, he complained to Engels about his wife's illnesses, neuroses, bouts of depression and suicidal melancholy. There was hardly ever any acknowledgment that her misery was caused by his conduct. "Blessed is he who has no family," he wrote Engels on June 21, 1854. He told his friend on May 7, 1867, that he dreaded returning home to London because of "family lamentations and inner conflict. . . ."

He collected and memorized pornography in a small way. While Engels was certainly no prude, he indicated to Marx that he could do without the latter's quoted French verse on the torments of gonorrhea. On the other hand, Marx was prudish, prim and proper and even quick to blush when anything even vaguely sexual was mentioned in the presence of ladies.<sup>26</sup>

The strange illusion that Marx had any sympathy with the movement for women's rights is probably based on a letter he wrote Dr. Kugelmann on December 12, 1868, in which he said "great social changes are impossible without the female ferment."<sup>27</sup> What he really thought about the matter was revealed by his clash with Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin, two American suffragettes and women's rights pioneers who had also campaigned vigorously for civil rights for the Negro and who had experimented with utopian socialist communities. The two sisters edited the *Woodhull & Claflin Weekly*, one of the few American periodicals with any English-speaking circulation which published Marx's contributions. They had a group which had joined Marx's International Working Men's Association (the First International). The break came in 1871. The *Woodhull & Claflin Weekly* for October 15 urged that the struggle for political equality for women be given priority over "more radical reforms." Marx reacted with irrational rage. He demanded and obtained the expulsion of Victoria Woodhull's Section 12 from the International. Not content with this, he delivered a crass personal attack on the two feminist leaders and their supporters at the May 1872 meeting of the General Council of the First International. The incoherent English and abusive language of the resolution indicate beyond shadow of a doubt that Marx was its author: "15 October 1871 was published in the journal of Woodhull (a banker's woman, free-lover and general humbug) and Claflin (her sister in the same line) an *Appeal of Section No. 12*, founded by Woodhull, and almost exclusively consisting of middle-class humbugs and worn-out Yankee swindlers in the Reform business."<sup>28</sup>

Victoria Woodhull was living openly as the mistress of a New York financier,

whom she had incidentally converted to many of her feminist and socially radical views. Whether the source of Marx's fury was that she was the companion of a member of the hated class of bankers or that she had not bothered to marry him, the record does not reveal. But since Marx treated his banker-uncle, Lion Philips, with deferential courtesy, it is reasonable to assume that what really outraged him was the open practice of extramarital love. What does seem clear is that every manifestation of the incipient movement for equal rights for women went against Marx's grain, whereas the vision of a society in which all women were transformed into prostitutes held a perverse fascination for him.

### Intimations of Abnormality

If Karl Marx was shocked and enraged by the free-love relationship between Victoria Woodhull and her banker-friend, he may have been fascinated by less normal and healthy manifestations of *eros*—specifically incest. At least, this is the hypothesis advanced by the distinguished sociologist and political philosopher Lewis F. Feuer:

Primitive society, too, raised for Marx questions of sexuality in history, in particular the status of incest. This theoretical problem coincided in his own personal life with a crisis in his relations with his beloved younger daughter, Eleanor, whose career and love choices he opposed. Eleanor sustained several nervous breakdowns. The interpretation of primitive society became a domain of Marx's fantasy life, in which the irrational sources of his own Promethean myth came close to the surface.<sup>29</sup>

Feuer elaborates this theory. He points out that the Russian socialist scholar Maxim Kovalevsky gave Marx a copy of the American pioneer work on anthropology, *Ancient Society* (1877), by Lewis Morgan. Engels concluded from this volume and from the studies of Pacific Coast Indians by H. H. Bancroft that "false conceptions of nature" were the basis for primitive societies and that it "would surely be pedantic to try and find economic causes for all this primitive nonsense." In other words, primitive social organizations didn't fit into the schematism at all. Man's fall from this state, Engels averred, was due to "the lowest interests—base greed, brutal appetites, sordid avarice, selfish robbery of the common wealth. . . ."<sup>30</sup> How these evil emotional forces erupted in this nonoppressive, primitive communistic society, neither Marx nor Engels bothered to explain.

But the aged Marx was more fascinated with the sexual aspects of this putative

stage in social evolution. Feuer tells us that "Marx was especially concerned to insist that in the primitive innocence, sexual incest had been the rule. If Engels liked to dwell on pristine free love, Marx was rather drawn to the delights of incest. When Richard Wagner doubted that brother embraced sister as bride, Marx replied in 1882: 'In primitive times, the sister was the wife, and *that was moral*.'" <sup>31</sup>

This stress on *incest* as the general rule in primitive societies is contrary to the evidence. Incest tabus constitute a major portion of enforced tribal law in almost every preliterate society. That Marx should have imagined that sexual incest was the rule tells us more about Marx than about ancient societies. His visions of incest and enforced general prostitution of women suggest deeper layers of psychological disturbance or derangement than most biographers suppose.

When the 1844 manuscripts first appeared, some of the faithful hailed them as proving that Karl Marx was indeed a humanist. Perusal of the text will convince the reader that this assertion is sheer humbug. Stripped of its barbarous Hegelian verbiage, what Marx had to say about the future society was simply that the abolition of private property and the cash nexus would end human alienation and enable man to lead a truly human, social existence. Other than the problem of human alienation—to be discussed later—these brief paragraphs are practically devoid of content. They are written in lifeless and inchoate prose.<sup>32</sup>

Marx seems to have had little or no interest in the shape of his future Communist utopia. But he had a very real interest in the destructive phase of the revolutionary process and he was able to describe vividly and powerfully man's descent into a hell on earth, where his gods would be envy, spite, and greed, where all talent would be ground down to dust, and where the entire fabric of civilization would be annihilated.

## Notes

1. Moses Hess to Berthold Auerbach, *MEGA*, I, 1 (2), 260.

2. Consider, for example, *The Wretched of the Earth* by the Martinique-born Negro psychoanalyst-revolutionary, Frantz Fanon (London: Penguin, 1967): "The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and blood-stained knives which emanate from it [p. 27]." The native revolutionist is "the enemy of all values and in this sense he is the absolute evil . . . the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality [p. 32]." Fanon conceded that the African intellectual shuns this revolutionary element of tribal peasants and shanty-town thieves because he "is terrified by the void, the degradation, and the savagery he sees there." See Nathaniel Weyl, "Envy and Aristocide

in Underdeveloped Countries," *Modern Age*, Winter 1974, pp. 39-52. How does one characterize people like Fanon clinically? Are they criminal psychopaths? Or are they simply normal people with politically unpopular opinions? And, if they are normal, do they remain normal if, like Idi Amin or Jim Jones in Guyana, they acquire the power to transform their genocidal dreams into reality?

3. *The German Ideology*, in Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (London: C. A. Watts, 1963), 86-87.

4. *Early Writings*, 59.

4. Marx-Engels, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), I, 44, 46, 51.

5. Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India," *NYDT*, August 8, 1853. For a valuable collection of Marx's articles on the so-called Third World, see Shlomo Avineri, *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968).

6. Article in *Die Presse*, July 7, 1862. Avineri, p. 9.

7. Robert S. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961) is a classic critical work. Tucker emphasizes Marx's enormous debt to Lorenz von Stein's 1842 study, *Der Sozialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs*, a work commissioned by the Prussian government. Stein's book contains many of Marx's seminal ideas. Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) points out that Marx also borrowed heavily from other proaristocratic critics of modern capitalism such as Adam Müller and Franz von Baader. He shows, for instance, that Marx's theory that factory labor imposes alienation on the worker derives from Müller, who wrote that "man needs a many-sided, even an all-rounded sphere for his activity . . . [but] the division of labor (as now practiced) . . . cuts up free man into wheels, cogs, cylinders and shuttles, imposes on him one sphere of activity . . . [p. 55]."

8. For all these quotations, see Nathaniel Weyl and William Marina, *American Statesmen on Slavery and the Negro* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1971), p. 155.

9. Avineri, *Social and Political Thought*, p. 20, citing *MEW*, I, 234.

10. Quoting the summary of their views in Arnold Künzli, *Karl Marx, eine Psychographie* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1966), p. 298.

11. *Ibid.*, quoting Riazanov.

12. For an admission by a devout Marxist of the possibility that all of Marx's conclusions might be wrong, see the observation concerning George Lukács already quoted in chapter five.

13. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, III, 235.

14. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New Rochelle: Arlington House), I, 81, 112-25.

15. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, III, 237-39.
16. *Ibid.*, 240.
17. Smith, I, 77.
18. For obvious political reasons, the Soviet Marxists maintain that Marx was not talking about the proletarian dictatorship at all, but about the primitive communism of people like Philippe Michel Buonarotti and "Gracchus" Babeuf. To my mind, Robert Tucker has shown conclusively that Marx was talking about the proletarian dictatorship.
19. The Communist editors of the *Collected Works* point out in a footnote (III, 295) that the expression "raw communism" does not correspond to the German text. The word Marx used was *Kommunist*. The accuracy and scholarly integrity of the editors, however, is generally in pleasant contrast to the falsification of Marx's writings by some previous socialist editors.
20. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, III, 295.
21. Rolf H. W. Theen, *Lenin* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1973), p. 158.
22. *MEGA*, III, 112.
23. The German phrase is "*theoretisch und praktisch vernichtet werden.*" The Communist Party publication, *A Handbook of Marxism*, issued under Stalin (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 230, falsifies the text to read "theoretically criticized and radically changed in practice." Fellow-travelling liberals unfamiliar with German were given their Marxism with sugar coating.
24. The official translation of *The Communist Manifesto* by Samuel Moore, edited by Friedrich Engels, distorts and prettifies this passage. The Moore version, first published in 1888 in London, will be found in such standard compendia as Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed., *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 50, *Marx* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), pp. 413-34.
25. Künzli, p. 317.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 300-301.
27. Marx, *Kugelmann*, p. 83.
28. Padover, p. 411.
29. Feuer, p. 21.
30. As quoted by Feuer, *idem*.
31. *Ibid.*



32. Here is one example, chosen more at less at random, of Marx's enthusiastic description of man's Communist future (*Collected Works*, III, 297): "This *material*, immediately *perceptible* private property is the material perceptible expression of *estranged human* life. Its movement—production and consumption—is the *perceptible* revelation of the movement of all production until now, i.e., the realization of the reality of man."

Either Marx or Engels once remarked about this manuscript that they had consigned it to "the gnawing criticism of the mice." In short, they realized that most of it was gibberish.

This is not the view of modern pro-Marxist academic critics. For them, the more obscure the text, the greater glory in extracting some sort of meaning from it. Nobody can make a living teaching a course on Francis Bacon because Bacon thought and wrote with such clarity that anyone of normal intelligence can understand him.

The natural scientist attempts to express highly complex ideas as simply as possible. The social scientist—particularly if he is a windbag and a fraud or if he is the disciple of one—is engaged in the opposite process. His task is to explain simple ideas, or even nonideas, in as complex and confused and confusing a manner as is humanly possible. A social scientist whose system is a logical monstrosity would do well to write as obscurely as he can and to invent entirely new words for old ideas, even where the old words do adequately. Thus, the professors who master his verbiage and his style will have a vested interest in perpetuating his fallacies and his reputation will remain untarnished generation after generation.

# 14

## A Marxian Principle Examined

"No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed," Marx wrote in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*. The productive forces of societies grow until they reach a point at which they "rebel against the mode of production which they have outgrown."<sup>1</sup>

This sweeping generalization about the entire history of mankind has a certain appearance of profundity, but, as someone once said after sitting through a play by Maurice Maeterlinck, "there is less here than meets the eye." Both Marx and Engels were extremely fond of grandiose assertions of this sort which have no precisely definable meaning and which cannot either be proved or disproved. They were first presented by Marx and Engels as part of "our theory." But as the years passed and "our theory" failed to win converts among trained social scientists and historians, what might originally have been advanced as hypotheses magically became "laws . . . immanent laws . . . universal laws . . . absolute laws . . . coercive laws . . . infallible laws . . . compulsory laws . . . natural laws which work with iron necessity toward inevitable results."<sup>2</sup>

One can sympathize with the reaction of George Macaulay Trevelyan, one of the most distinguished British historians of the first decades of the twentieth century, to this sort of thing. He wrote in *Clio Rediscovered*: "When a man begins with the pompous formula—'the verdict of history is'—suspect him at once, for he is merely dressing up his opinions in big words."

Let us, nevertheless, look a bit more closely at Marx's assertion that no social order ever perishes before "all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed."

I am not entirely clear as to the precise meaning of the qualifying phrase "for which there is room in it," but let us assume that what Marx had in mind was

realistic possibilities in terms of extant scientific knowledge, technological levels, institutions, legal system and religion.

Did the Roman Empire in the West exhaust all its "productive forces" before sinking into the technologically, economically, socially, and culturally more primitive system of the manorial and feudal order of the European Dark Ages? I see no reason whatsoever to assume this. Consider mathematics, for example. The Greeks and Romans had a number system which was so cumbersome that ordinary multiplication and division were difficult operations. What if they had invented or otherwise obtained our so-called Arabic (actually Indian) number system with its concept of zero and hence of negative and imaginary numbers? Since the Greeks and Alexandrians were already so far advanced mathematically that their Islamic successors were unable to understand what they were doing, it seems reasonable to assume that, given an efficient decimal system with zero, they could have developed calculus and logarithms.<sup>3</sup> This would have had enormous positive repercussions on Graeco-Roman navigation, astronomy, and hence far-reaching implications for discovery. Greeks or Romans might have discovered America, exploiting its mines and developing its plantation economy! Had these mathematical techniques been available to the Greeks and the Romans, the engineering, architecture and industrial arts of ancient civilization would have been radically transformed. The same could have applied to the technology of weaponry and warfare. Conceivably, the *Pax Romana* could have lasted indefinitely.

Consider a few other historical might-have-beens. The Romans regarded invention, except in the field of warfare, as the business exclusively of slaves. Hence, they did not devote their ablest minds to this or, for that matter, to business and the professions. There was no inherent reason for the perseverance of this snobbish, patrician attitude. The Greeks were singularly free of it. Had the Romans changed their attitude in this respect, the productive forces at their disposal would have been significantly increased. Or consider the odd fact that neither the Greeks nor the Romans ever developed an efficient harness. Consequently, their draft animals were partly strangled. Nor were nailed iron horseshoes in general use. This enormously decreased the traction power at the disposal of the Graeco-Roman world and hence limited agricultural production.

Modern historians disagree as to the primary causes of the eventual downfall of the Roman Empire in the West, but, to the best of my knowledge, none of them takes Marx's theories seriously.

One of the contributory causes is believed to have been the exhaustion of the known silver mines of the world with consequent currency debasement, inflation, retreat from the money economy into barter, and the reversion from the comparatively private enterprise economy of the centuries of growth to the authori-

tarian socialism of Diocletian and his successors. This factor is stressed as the crucial element by Professor Michael Rostovtzeff. A more recent theory, that of Professor William H. McNeill, is that a confluence of historic forces exposed the Roman population in the early Christian centuries to a devastating sequence of epidemics, of which the most lethal was bubonic plague. These spread from Asian areas where they had become endemic and comparatively harmless to the Mediterranean world where they struck with raging virulence.<sup>4</sup>

The merits of these different hypothesis need not concern us here. Their authors have carefully assembled the evidence in support of their theories and elaborated the probable processes by which they may have produced the effects imputed to them. Marx did nothing of the sort. His method of "proof" was bare assertion and incessant reiteration. He advanced large and sweeping hypotheses in such vague and ambiguous language that they became closer to incantations than to scientific theories. Since he was, as I have already indicated, untrained in science and scientific method, he seems to have proceeded on the tacit assumption that civilizations behave in the same fashion as pregnancies. If one accepts that strange view, then obviously birth of the new order can only be expected after a variety of physiological processes have reached the necessary preliminary state.

Quite a few cyclical philosophers of history have constructed their systems on a similar premise. The belief that history is "organic" seems to be a German disease. One thinks above all of Oswald Spengler, whose immensely erudite and gloomy magnum opus enthralled the Lost Generation that grew up in the shadow of World War I. Spengler predicted that Western civilization would descend to its doom in a long paroxysm of wars, revolutions and totalitarian dictatorships.<sup>5</sup>

There were, however, several differences between Spengler and Marx. Spengler specifically repudiated "the principle of causality" as applied to history. He never claimed to be a scientific historian and, in fact, advanced arguments, based on Goethe's writings, for using what he called the principle of entelechy, which corresponds more or less to the French concept of *élan vital*. Marx, by contrast, while ignoring scientific method, proclaimed that his philosophy of history was the *only* scientific one. Spengler covered all the culture-civilizations of history in his system, no doubt selecting and distorting the evidence to do so. Marx took the easier road of dismissing the misfit civilizations as "without history."

For reasons that remain something of a mystery, while almost all of Marx's predictions turned out wrong, Spengler's were often accurate. Lenin, Mussolini, Franco, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao seemed to represent the caesarism that he saw looming in the future. The belief that the ruling classes of the West would lose their conviction that they had the right, the duty, and the mission to govern more

backward peoples has apparently been confirmed by events. The prospect that the West would be battered to pieces by a combined assault from its external proletariat (the hungry masses of the Third World) and its internal proletariat (those drifting and rootless masses who are subjects of a civilization without having inwardly absorbed its values) also seems realistic.

Perhaps the only one of Spengler's major predictions that has not been even partially verified by history is that Russian communism would prove a merely transitory phenomenon. Spengler believed that the next great culture-civilization to renew the spiritual life of mankind would emerge from Russia. It would be deeply Christian, in his opinion, and would be the sort of world foreshadowed in the works of Dostoevsky.

## Notes

1. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Duehring* (New York: International Publishers), p. 302.
2. Schwartzschild, p. 127, based on citations from *Das Kapital*.
3. Herbert Westren Turnbull, *The Great Mathematicians*. This history is the one reproduced in James R. Newman, ed., *The World of Mathematics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), I, 75-168. Turnbull observes: "After the death of Pappus, Greek mathematics and indeed European mathematics lay dormant for about a thousand years." As for the Arabs, they served as custodians and translators of surviving Greek manuscripts, but "lacked the genius and originality of Greece and India." They were skillful in "practical computation and the making of tables," but "great tracts of Diophantine algebra and geometry left them quite unmoved." Pappus and Diophantus were Alexandrian Greeks of the fourth century B.C. The next great original mind in mathematics, other than the Indian inventors of our number system, Arya-Bhata and Brahmagupta, was Leonard of Pisa (1175-1230).
4. William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 116-66.
5. Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1919-22. Translated as *The Decline of the West* (New York: Knopf, 1926-28, 2 vols.).



# 15

## Fallacies: The Toy Train Dooms Capitalism

In 1850 or 1851, Karl Marx cross-examined a young revolutionary and would-be disciple from Germany named Wilhelm Liebknecht. The questions were searching since Marx was always on the alert for the least symptom of heresy from his doctrines. A toy train had recently been constructed and exhibited for the amusement of Londoners. This event gave Marx an opportunity to dazzle his credulous and fanatical young disciple with his scientific knowledge and his ability to perceive the entire course of world history from seemingly small events. As Liebknecht tells the story:

Soon we were on the field of Natural Science, and Marx ridiculed the victorious reaction in Europe that fancied it had smothered the revolution and did not suspect that Natural Science was preparing a new revolution. That King Steam who had revolutionized the world in the last century had ceased to rule, and that into his place a far greater revolutionist would step, the electric spark. And now Marx, all flushed and excited, told me that during the last few days the model of an electric engine drawing a railroad train was on exhibition in Regent Street. "Now the problem is solved—the consequences are indefinable. In the wake of the economic revolution, the political must necessarily follow, for the latter is only the expression of the former." In the way that Marx discussed this progress of science and mechanics, his conception of the world and especially that part later on called the materialistic conception of history became so clearly apparent that certain doubts I had hitherto entertained vanished like snow in the sun of spring.<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of our general knowledge of Marx's acquaintance with science and technology, we can assume that he had only the vaguest conception of how electric power was generated and transmitted. Nor is there any reason to suppose that he had analyzed the probable consequences of the supplanting of steam by

electrical power. If he had done so, he might have realized that the change was, on the whole, unfavorable for the sort of proletarian upheaval which he envisaged. Marx had conceived of a remorseless, inescapable trend by which more and more workers would be concentrated in huge factories, confined by the division of labor to the most routinized and soul-deadening repetitive manual operations, and disciplined into the potential army that would rise in wrath and overthrow its oppressors. This extremely simplified and naive portrayal of the future of the private enterprise economy would be repeated again and again, with incredibly tiresome monotony, throughout Marx's voluminous writings. He describes the process of consolidation and militarization in *The Communist Manifesto* as follows:

Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of laborers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army, they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they the slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State, they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the over-looker, and above all by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The more openly this despotism proclaims gain to be its end and aim, the more petty, the more hateful, and the more embittering it is.<sup>2</sup>

This vivid picture is, as the reader will probably have perceived for himself, much closer to the realities of the Soviet forced labor camps and their equivalents in other "people's republics" than to the modern factory in free-enterprise economies. But let that pass. The much more significant question is where Marx got this peculiar conception of the inevitable course of industrial development under capitalism? He got it partly from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, but this 1776 masterpiece was scarcely a reliable guide to the economic course of the nineteenth century. He also got it partly from reactionary German writers, such as Lorenz von Stein, whom I have already cited, who painted industrial capitalism in the darkest possible colors to contrast it with the supposedly idyllic "patriarchal" employer-employee relationships which had prevailed under the rule of the landed aristocracy.

Marx also read the famous British Parliamentary Blue Books which, as Bertram D. Wolfe aptly observed, "testify to the awakening conscience of the whole of the British industrial society. They remind us forcefully that the dark picture Marx paints of early industrialism is the picture of an age that was already ending before he began his work."<sup>3</sup> In other areas, as I shall show in the next chapter, Marx deliberately substituted obsolete for current statistics on such matters as

the course of wages because the early data made his theories seem plausible, whereas the latter data refuted them.

Marx never bothered, as far as we know, to actually go through a factory, though Engels could easily have arranged for him to do so. Nor did he often bother, in his long correspondence with Engels, to try to really learn anything about the technological changes of the Victorian era and their economic implications. In other words, he was one of those purely bookish and verbal intellectuals who deliberately barricade themselves from observing or trying to manipulate the world of things. He was a word-man in the worst sense of that term. If he had not insulated himself from the real world, he could easily have learned from people better informed than he that the economic consequences of the shift from coal power to electricity would be the reverse of his prediction. Steam power meant the belt and conveyor system in factories, binding the tempo of work to the speed of conveyor belts or assembly lines. The electric motor would be progressively miniaturized until it could be built into the individual tool or machine, introducing an element of flexibility into the tempo of work imposed on the individual operative. It would also give a new lease of life to factories which had been too small for the efficient use of steam power transmitted to machines by conveyor belts or similar devices. The electric motor would also help restore small industry, taking such varied forms as the New York garment trade sweatshop, the family farm in the Corn Belt, and, almost a century later, a vast burgeoning of do-it-yourself economic operations and specialized mini-power enterprises.

Marx's belief that this was the last change in the character of the technological age under capitalism was equally gratuitous. A few other developments lay concealed in the mists of futurity. Petroleum and natural gas would displace coal. The railroad would yield to the internal-combustion-engine-driven car. Highway arteries would displace rails in significance. Aviation would revolutionize peacetime transportation and warfare. The reaction motor and nuclear power lay in the future. The even vaster technological revolution of computer programming, automation, and cybernetics would change man's mode of living in ways that nobody in Marx's era could have imagined. And in communications, the telephone, radio, and television would have almost equal impact.

Marx is not to be faulted for failing to foresee these developments. But he is to be condemned for excluding the possibility, to be more exact, the probability, of the sort of unpredictable scientific and technological change that would make all his predictions absurd. Jules Verne was actually a greater realist than Karl Marx. Some of Verne's predictions seem to us childish from our own vantage point, but men like Verne—and long before him Cyrano de Bergerac

—understood the decisive importance of the new, the unpredictable, and the incredible in shaping the future. By contrast, Marx simply projected trends which had already ceased to operate into the future. In this sense, wild dreamers, like Verne and H. G. Wells, were the true revolutionaries, whereas the book- and word-men, like Marx and his intellectual ancestor, Plato, were the true reactionaries. Both feared the unpredictable and therefore sought to exorcise it from their systems, though they did so incidentally for quite different reasons. In Plato's case, as far as we can reconstruct the events of twenty-five centuries ago, the dominant motivation seems to have been the yearning of a champion of the dying aristocratic order of status to stifle the growth of a vital, dynamic, and expanding mercantile system under Athenian leadership. Therefore, Plato preferred the stagnant, mindless militarism of slavery and status represented by Sparta and sought to perpetuate this sort of society in *The Republic* and *The Laws*.<sup>4</sup>

Marx's fears, hatreds and resentments seem to have been more complexly motivated. His repudiation of dynamic, growing capitalism may have sprung primarily from his hatred of his own Jewish origin, though the underlying reason for his intense anti-Semitism remains obscure to me.<sup>5</sup> He had been brought toward communism by reading and absorbing the critiques of capitalist society written by German defenders of the dying order of guilds, usury laws, and dominant landed gentry. As a snob and social climber, Marx had married into the aristocracy and probably imagined himself part of it. Finally, his fear of the novel and the unexpected was part of his fear of life itself—a fear revealed by his habit of insulating himself from almost every aspect of life that was not verbal and bookish.

He repeated *ad nauseam* throughout almost all his writings the dogma that capitalism must reach its full developmental potential before the proletarian revolution could blow it to bits. He said this so often that it seems unnecessary to quote his rhetoric on the subject. A corollary was that the socialist or communist revolution could be expected in the country or countries where capitalism was furthest advanced and not in backward places like Russia. This corollary caused a torrent of controversial literature among Russian socialists, Menshevik and Bolshevik, as to whether their nation would have to pass through a transitional period of capitalist development before a proletarian dictatorship could be established. Lenin settled the issue theoretically in his 1917 monograph, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, by arguing that one had to interpret Marxism as measuring the world economy as an integrated whole in terms of its ripeness for revolution.<sup>6</sup> Once the stage of overripe maturity had been reached, the proletarian revolution would break out in that country (or countries) which served as the weakest link in the capitalist chain. Lenin settled the matter

practically in a much more significant way. Aided by vast and continuing subsidies from the Imperial German Government, he and his small party seized power and consolidated their dictatorship.

The aspect of the spread of Marxism that seems somewhat absurd in retrospect is that all the socialist factions accepted Marx's fundamental and erroneous proposition from which the corollary derived. They accepted the dogma that capitalism would reach a specific maximum of development and that that maximum could be gauged and determined. In short, they swallowed whole Marx's ill-conceived and ill-considered analogies between human societies and the life cycle of organisms and pregnancy.

Marx recognized that the potential of modern science to increase the wealth of the world was enormous. He also recognized that capitalism was the most successful form of social organization that the world had ever seen in harnessing science to production, in stimulating change, in opening up entirely new vistas of potential plenty. Why should the harnessing of all these forces for vastly increased production lead to the increasing misery of the proletariat and hence stimulate it to violent revolution? We have already examined his first efforts to answer this question in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

Here we shall look briefly at what he had to say about the matter in the *Communist Manifesto*. In the next chapter, I will deal as briefly as I can with his final effort to prove cataclysm—the specious arguments he advanced in *Das Kapital*.

In the *Manifesto* Marx wrote: "Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman."

This is on the assumption that all factories remain on an assembly-line basis, that all work is minutely subdivided, that the steam-powered conveyor-belt system enables only large operations to survive and that all workmen must keep pace with the conveyor. All these assumptions were being swept aside at the time Marx wrote. The shift from steam to electric power presaged a new direction. But this sort of novelty did not dovetail with the master's obsession with violence and doom and so he ignored it. Moreover, Marx was not only largely ignorant of matters of technology, but he evinced no desire to acquire a thorough mastery of the subject.

To continue the quotation where we left off: "He [the worker] becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance, and for the propagation of his race."

The word *hence* is out of place because the second sentence doesn't follow



from the first. But then logical thinking was not one of Marx's strong points. The subsistence theory of wages, which Marx quotes here, was taken straight from David Ricardo and Adam Smith. However, Adam Smith had many elaborate qualifications to the theory, all of which Marx ignored because they didn't fit into the Procrustean bed of his theory. Even as early as 1848, there was no evidence that skilled work was being obliterated or that real wages were falling. The old skills of the handicraft workers were being destroyed in those areas where mechanization took command, but a new highly skilled class of industrial workers was arising and this class was receiving pay way above the subsistence level. Moreover, the wage trend would be upward for the rest of the century and on into the succeeding century.

To continue with the paragraph without omissions: "But the price of a commodity, and also of labor, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases."

Again, the word *therefore* is out of place because the second sentence does not follow in any way logically from the first. Why should wages fall as work becomes more disagreeable? (One might expect them to increase.) In his earlier unpublished 1844 manuscripts, Marx implied that this wage drop was a discovery of Adam Smith. But in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith was careful to state the precise opposite. By 1848, *The Wealth of Nations* was too well-known on the European continent for Marx to risk falsifying it. So he simply made his dogmatic assertion without giving any evidence supporting it, perhaps in the hope that his readers would be too ignorant or too fanatical to analyze his anathemas logically.

To continue, again without omission: "Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labor increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increase of the work enacted in a given time, or by increased speed of the machinery, etc."'

The only trouble with these assertions is that they are untrue. If they were true within any industry at any point in time, then the plants with less machinery, and hence lower productivity, would have paid higher wages than the more modern and more mechanized ones. But if they had done so, they would have gone bankrupt. Anybody with a modicum of intellectual integrity and common sense would have doubted this assertion at once and would have checked it out, either by talking to factory owners or by comparing wage statistics in different sorts of factories. Marx didn't do this because he wasn't interested in finding out what was really happening in the economic world. He was interested in constructing a theory of inevitable catastrophe that would be plausible enough to form the basis for a movement that could bring him and his followers to dictatorial power.

If the assertion I have just quoted was supposed to refer to processes in time, then it was equally false. As the mechanization of industry advanced in Europe, productivity rose, and real wages tended to rise with them. The exception to this rule was the wiping out of categories of formerly skilled and privileged artisans, whose hand labor had been displaced by machine labor. But this process had already run the most painful portion of its course by the time Marx sat down for his final effort to prove his theories of increasing misery and inevitable revolution.

Two final comments:

Marx made no effort to prove statistically, either in *Das Kapital* or elsewhere, that the great industrial concerns were driving the little ones to the wall and forcing the lower middle class into the ranks of the proletariat. The reason he avoided this was that, during the decades when he slaved over his economic theories, the data showed precisely the opposite. Marx must have been familiar with these statistics because he spent a large part of his life in the reading room of the British Museum devouring economic reports. Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that we are dealing with a case of plain fraud and outright falsification.

About half a century after Marx's death, the British economist Colin Clark made several interesting analyses of the world economy, based on an enormous amount of statistical analysis. He divided the economy into three sectors: primary, secondary, and tertiary production. Primary production comprised agriculture, fishing, and mining. Secondary production was essentially manufacturing and transportation. Tertiary production comprised all services. People who manipulated things were in either primary or secondary production. People who served, dealt with, or manipulated people were in tertiary production. Clark discovered that, in the early stages of economic growth, real income tends to vary positively with the ratio of secondary to primary production. But as the economy advances into modernity and toward the high-technology plateau, the crucial index of real income and productivity is the proportion that tertiary production bears to total output.<sup>8</sup> In other words, quite contrary to Marx's simplistic analysis, the highest-productivity and wealthiest societies are those which devote the largest proportion of their manpower to providing services—whether as free professionals, government officials, domestics, custodians, or engineers, technicians, scientists, or artists.

There was no way on earth Marx could have known that that would be the approximate shape of things to come for at least the next century. His sin was not ignorance, but arrogance. He could not have known the future, but he could have known that it was unknowable. He should have been wise enough to avoid ignorant dogmatism and, one might add, honest enough not to falsify evidence to fit fallacious theories.

## Notes

1. Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx: Biographical Memoirs* (Chicago: Kerr, 1901), pp. 57–58.
2. Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated by Samuel Moore, (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1954), p. 28.
3. Wolfe, p. 326.
4. The classic source for this interpretation of the later writings of Plato is Popper, vol. 1.
5. Künzli and Feuer, in works I have already cited, have proffered ingenious psychiatric explanations of Marx's pathological attitudes.
6. London: Martin Lawrence, 1933.
7. Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 26. The Samuel Moore translation is in wretched English, but since it is the official one, I have stayed with it.
8. Colin Clark, *The Conditions of Economic Progress* (London: Macmillan, 1940).

# 16

## The Specious Economics of "Das Kapital"

Karl Marx's supreme intellectual contribution, Engels hoped, would be to prove by the laws of classical economics that the capitalist system was doomed and that it would inevitably be succeeded by a Communist system. This would give the revolutionary movement a foundation in reality rather than in hope, in the "laws of motion" of capitalist production and their inescapable outcome, rather than in the ethical aspirations of reformers. To do this, Marx had to prove the proposition that, with every increase in the productivity of capitalist society, the misery of the proletariat would rise, the consolidation of industry in the hands of a few great capitalists would advance, and the conditions for a revolutionary explosion would be enhanced.

Marx had asserted these propositions in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (as I have pointed out), using as his authority Adam Smith, whose ideas he misrepresented and falsified. The same cataclysmic view appeared in *The Communist Manifesto* and in other of Marx's writings, but the propositions were always stated dogmatically without giving any evidence in their support.

Marx realized that he would have to do better than this if he were to arm his revolutionary followers with what they imagined was an invincible theory. He made the supreme attempt in *Das Kapital*.

### The Labor Theory of Value

The foundation necessary for all the other propositions that Marx intended to demonstrate was the labor theory of value—that is, that the rate at which goods exchange is determined by the amount of socially necessary labor-time embodied

in their production. This proposition was also fundamental to the Marxian system for propagandistic reasons: if labor was the source of all value and yet the laborer was paid little more than a subsistence wage, then it followed that he was being continually robbed by the capitalist class and the greater the productivity of labor, the more flagrant the theft.

Let us forget for a moment about Marx's incongruous habit of shifting his role in the same chapters of the same book from that of supposedly dispassionate economic analyst to that of outraged Hebrew prophet. For the present, let us just look at the economic argument. Marx starts with the obvious assertion that for anything to have exchange value, it must have use-value—in plain English, that goods cannot be sold if nobody has any use for them—and went on to assert that the fact that one commodity exchanges for another at a more or less fixed rate must mean that they have something in common. This is a clumsy and misleading way of putting the matter. What it reveals is that Marx's training was in the humanities, law, and metaphysics and that he knew next to nothing about scientific method.

Given his classical-to-medieval saturation with metaphysics, he began by asking the wrong question. What he was asking is what is the "essence" of economic value. That is about as fruitful as asking: what is the "essence" of electricity? Science is not interested in essences; it is interested in finding out how processes occur and what their causal and quantitative relationships with other processes are. In short, it is interested in behavior. An analysis of value (or prices) should rather ask how prices behave under different circumstances and what forces influence them, in what direction, and to what extent.

But let us proceed with the next "logical" step in Marx's argument, which was to assert that the thing that commodities have in common that makes them exchange at one price rather than another cannot be related to their usefulness, because utility is diverse—that is to say, things are used for different purposes and have different characteristics that make them useful. As he puts it: "But the exchange of commodities is evidently an act characterized by a total abstraction from use-value."<sup>1</sup>

The sentence I have just quoted contains the first major logical error. Marx is using the terms *use-value* and *utility* in several different senses and never seems to be clear in his own mind about the nature of these differences. Thus, it is true that the physical properties of objects that make them useful or desirable to consumers will vary from one object to the next and cannot be the element that determines the prices they sell for. But *utility* is homogeneous from one commodity to another when it is measured by the amount of money (or other goods in a barter economy) that consumers will sacrifice in order to get specific quantities of the goods they want to buy.



There is also an implied assumption in Marx's quest for the essence of value that this unknown must be a single characteristic, quality, or attribute. And, of course, this is not necessarily the case. If he had thought in terms of simple algebra, rather than metaphysical entities, he might have asked himself: What variables determine prices (or values)? And if he had answered, supply and demand, Marx could have proceeded to the further statement that demand is a function of utility and quantity.<sup>2</sup>

Marx's final and most appalling logical vault was to reason that, all else having been excluded, goods must exchange in proportion to the amount of socially necessary labor-time embodied in their production. Now it happens that there is a name in logic for this particular fallacy. It is called the excluded middle. You cannot conclude that an object belongs in class A simply because you have proved it does not belong in class B unless you have also proved that A and B together exhaust all possibilities. If I show that a certain quadruped is not a cat, it does not follow logically that it is a hedgehog. And if Marx had really demonstrated that value was not based on utility (which, of course, he had not), it still would not follow that it must be based on labor-time. It might equally well have been based on many other things—scarcity, for example. Or it might have been based on a combination of variables.<sup>3</sup>

Where did Marx go from the labor theory of value? He proceeded triumphantly into an ingenious and original series of false inferences and bad prophecies from his theory of value and from the unwarranted assumptions he attached to it. He asserted that wages would almost always be at the subsistence level. It followed (or Marx imagined that it followed) that the profits of the capitalist class consisted of the "surplus value" wrung from the sweat of the exploited proletarians. The aggregate of this surplus value was the difference between real national income and the portion of that income necessary to keep the workers alive in health good enough to do their jobs and to keep them virile and fertile enough to produce children who would in turn become workers.

Why did Marx adhere to this theory that, with the progress of the capitalist economy, not only would wages remain at the bare subsistence level, but that there would be increasing pauperization of labor? He did this because it was a necessary building block in his vision of worldwide class war, general destruction, and holocaust. Unfortunately for him, however, the industrial world had entered into a period of more or less sustained prosperity and increasing real wages by about 1850. This upward surge was interrupted by periods of economic crisis and depression, but the general trend would be one of marked and massive amelioration.

The workers were not being pauperized. Their living standards were improving significantly. Even a pro-Marxist economic historian like Hobsbawm con-

cedes that between 1850 and 1870 world trade rose 260 percent, skilled labor was approaching the living standards of the lower middle class, and "between 1867 and 1875 all significant legal obstacles to trade unions and the right to strike were abolished with remarkably little fuss."<sup>4</sup>

Marx coped with these disagreeable facts that contradicted his visions of general catastrophe in characteristic fashion: he either suppressed the evidence or falsified it. Bertram D. Wolfe wrote in 1967:

Significantly, though his study of British statistics goes up to 1866, his study of public health reports up to 1865, of the reports of the factory inspectors up to 1866, Marx has not one word to say on the movement of wages in England after 1850! Indeed, there is no serious study of the movement of real wages at all. The first edition of *Das Kapital* was completed in the summer of 1867. A second German edition was issued in 1873, and Marx took advantage of the fact to make revisions and corrections, but changed not a word on the movement of wages. Just before his death, he prepared a third edition which Engels issued posthumously in the year of his death, 1883. On this matter, still silence. Nor did the materials he left for Volume Two and Volume Three break the silence. That silence speaks louder than words.<sup>5</sup>

Even if the economic theories of *Das Kapital* were not unworthy of serious consideration by anyone with either theoretical or practical knowledge of the subject, this intellectual dishonesty of the book's author should have placed it in a sort of limbo. Other social and natural scientists have suppressed and falsified evidence to lend spurious support to their erroneous theories, but they have usually been rewarded by the contempt and ostracism of honorable scholars and, in at least one case, that of Paul Kammerer, have been driven to suicide.

The crowning absurdity of the first volume of *Das Kapital* was the supposed law of the falling rate of profit. Marx divided capital into two categories, fixed and variable. Fixed capital was dead capital; it was the product of prior labor and took such forms as machinery and raw materials. Variable capital was living capital; it was the unique and only source of profit. This profit or surplus value came from the difference between the value contributed by the workers employed by an industrialist and the wages paid this same labor.

Marx's great "discovery" was that variable capital, or labor, was the sole source of profits (or, as he called it, surplus value). Now if the ratio of surplus value to variable capital was uniform, it followed that, with every proportionate increase in fixed capital, the rate of profit must fall. But the nature of capitalist industry has been to increase mechanization, hence a rise in the proportion of dead, profitless fixed capital to living, exploitable variable capital. From this it

followed that, as capitalism advanced, the profit rate would fall. And in their mad scramble for survival, the capitalists would oppress the starving workers to and beyond the breaking point; the long-hoped-for revolution would erupt.

Now if this theory were true in the simple form Marx stated it in volume one (which is essentially the way I have just summarized it), certain strange economic conclusions follow. The wise investor would search for industries with a high ratio of variable to fixed capital, since only the former was the source of surplus value. Shoeshine parlors, diners, and barber shops would seem ideal because virtually all the capital involved there is exploitable wage labor (variable capital). For the same reason, such industries as airlines, automobile plants, and telecommunications systems should be avoided.

Marx was almost certainly aware of the fact that absurd conclusions of this sort followed from his theory. Hence, in the second and third volumes of this enormous, uncompleted work, he talked about averaging out profit rates among industries. This left the reader with essentially a simplified version of Adam Smith's and David Ricardo's economics plus a prediction of impending doom.

### The Stupendous Discovery

At first, Karl Marx believed that his law of the falling rate of profit was a prodigious discovery. In the *Grundrisse*, the vast, chaotic manuscript which Marx probably wrote in 1857–58, which was never published during his lifetime, but which was disinterred in this century to “prove” that Marx was a humanist, Marx called the falling rate of profit hypothesis “in every respect the most important law of political economy.” And in a letter to Engels, dated April 30, 1868, he hailed it as “one of the greatest triumphs over the asses’ bridge of all previous economics.”<sup>6</sup>

By the time Marx got around to the second and third volumes of *Das Kapital*, he began to realize that capitalism was not tottering, that the knell of doom was not about to sound, and that the fires of revolution were not about to consume the world economy. Things were not working out in accordance with his theories and predictions. He began to hedge and waffle on his prophecies. He wrote that there was a “counterbalance” to the tendency of profits to fall which “more or less paralyzes its effects.” There were “counter-effects” which “hamper, retard, and partly paralyze” the fall in the rate of profit.<sup>7</sup>

By the time he was toiling over the third volume of *Das Kapital*, Marx had transformed this epochal law, this Copernican discovery, this key to the inevitable downfall of the system to the destruction of which he had dedicated his adult life, into a mere “tendency,” a tendency to which, he sorrowfully conceded, there

were many exceptions.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the theoretical system which he had created was crashing about his ears, and Marx had the intelligence to be aware of that fact. The authoritarian, mentally rigid Engels either did not realize the true situation or else considered that *Das Kapital* would serve its function if it convinced the devout that it had proved capitalism's doom. Christianity does not depend upon whether Jesus actually walked on water, nor is the power of Islam dependent upon whether the Prophet's views about astronomy are compatible with modern science.

### The Fate of "Das Kapital"

The first volume of *Das Kapital* appeared in 1867 and was at first ignored by reviewers. The loyal Engels tried to puff the book by reviewing it for a variety of publications, most of which turned down his contributions. Marx offered to dedicate the work to Charles Darwin, but the latter politely declined. In 1868, a brief notice appearing in the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* characterized Marx's views as "pernicious," but he was faintly praised for "plausibility" and "vigor of rhetoric."

Marx's predictable reaction was to blame the hostile world for his own inadequacies as an economic theorist: "The gang of liberal and vulgar economists will, of course, try, as much as possible, to do harm through their well-tested means, the *conspiracy de silence*."<sup>9</sup>

As the silence of the academic and scientific world persisted, Marx came down with massive attacks of a variety of disorders, mostly psychosomatic, such as carbuncles, liver troubles, and bronchitis.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1871, William Stanley Jevons solved the value problem once and for all by creating marginal utility and marginal productivity economics. This approach was discovered independently by Karl Menger in Vienna and Léon Walras in France. For serious economic thinkers, all that remained to do, in so far as the value problem was concerned, was to delve into the mathematically treacherous analysis of imperfect competition and polypoly. Vilfredo Pareto would refine the mathematical system and others would add insights and corollaries, but, as far as microeconomics was concerned, Jevons, Menger, and Walras had closed the book.

(I can recall as a young man with shaky and rudimentary mathematical training picking up for the first time William Stanley Jevons's masterpiece, *The Theory of Political Economy* [1871]. Using nothing more advanced than first-year college calculus, Jevons gave the reader the same immediate awareness of certainty that competent mathematical students tell me they obtained from reading

Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. Reading Jevons for the first time, my reaction was somewhat similar to Thomas Henry Huxley's when he first read Darwin's *Origin of Species*: "The only thing I don't understand about the theory of evolution," Huxley is said to have remarked, "is why I didn't think of it myself.")

I have seen no evidence that Marx ever read Jevons, Walras, or Menger, though he was completely conversant with German, French, and English, and all these books appeared when Marx was in his fifties and still mentally vigorous. It seems to me entirely possible, in fact probable, that Marx did read at least one of these volumes. Had he done so and if he knew one-tenth of the mathematics he claimed to know, it seems reasonable to suppose that he would have seen that he had been on the wrong track, as far as economics is concerned, all his life. This sort of awakening would do much to explain the pessimism and aversion with which he reacted to the task of completing *Das Kapital*. If there were inklings of this sort of illumination and recognition, Marx would probably have confided them to Engels. And we know that Engels was an authoritarian who did not hesitate to destroy correspondence which put Marx in a bad light. But this is, of course, speculation.

The only reference I have been able to find to Jevons in Engels's writings is a letter he wrote F. A. Sorge on February 8, 1890, in which he denounced the Fabian Socialists as "a dilettante lot of egregiously conceited mutual admirers," some of whom believe in "the rotten vulgarized economics of Jevons, which is so vulgarized that one can make anything out of it—even socialism."<sup>11</sup> When one is confronted with a new scientific system that one either can not understand or can not refute, the good Marxist habitually settles the matter with abuse.

In Great Britain, Marxian economics had a bad time. Volume one of *Das Kapital* was translated into English by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling and appeared in 1887. George Bernard Shaw, at the time an ardent Fabian socialist, was at first carried away by the book and wrote an enthusiastic review, whereupon, Philip H. Wicksteed, an exponent of Jevonian economics, wrote a rejoinder in the socialist periodical, *To-Day*. Since Shaw, unlike Engels, did not believe that he knew all the answers in all the social sciences, he joined "a private economic circle to which Wicksteed acted as instructor, and sat at his feet for some years until he had the Jevonian theory of value at his fingers' ends."<sup>12</sup> Shaw then joined the fray by writing articles in the socialist press, explaining the errors of Marxian economics. Engels was unwilling to take part in the controversy, but Hyndman, the anti-Semite and advocate of Nordic imperialism who led the tiny Marxian band in England, or at least a part of it, retorted with articles which demonstrated his inability to understand Jevons's argument.<sup>13</sup> Shaw closed the fruitless argument with his unintelligent antagonist by noting that Hyndman was a man who believed he "had nothing more to learn" and who was "a baby in



the value controversy, and a remarkably petulant baby.”<sup>14</sup>

On the European continent, the economic fallacies of *Das Kapital* were decisively refuted in a short volume called *Karl Marx and the Close of His System*, published by Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk in 1896. Böhm-Bawerk was one of the founders of the Austrian school of economics, a professor of economics, and a man who served as Finance Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>15</sup>

It is symptomatic of the leftward tilt of our times that this masterly analytic volume is almost unobtainable in English. Instead, students read infantile stuff like Robert Heilbroner's work on "the worldly philosophers," which devotes a great deal of space to Marx because of his "social relevance," while admitting that his economic theories were "wrong." Well, Adolf Hitler was also "socially relevant," if we mean by that nebulous term that his writings had an impact on history. But nobody gives *Mein Kampf* a full chapter in a history of economic thought. If the Nazis had won World War II, perhaps Hitler would have been accorded that honor.

Be this as it may, the edition of Böhm-Bawerk's classic that I have was published by Augustus M. Kelley in New York in 1949. The publisher saw to it that the book had an introduction by Marxist economist Paul M. Sweezy and was followed by turgid defenses of Marxian economics by the faithful. Nonetheless, we are grateful to Kelley for having made this masterpiece available to English readers.

Finally, a personal anecdote. When I was an economics student at the London School of Economics graduate school, I was active in a revolutionary society called the Marxist Club. Unfortunately, however, most of us believed that Marx's economics was nonsense. This did not profoundly affect our political convictions because we believed that all the great successful mass movements in history were based on doctrines that were riddled with absurdities. In my own case, I had been impressed with Georges Sorel's book *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908) in which he argues that a "social myth" is always necessary to stir large numbers of people into decisive political action. We thought, however, that it was barely conceivable that there might be more to Marx than met the eye, and we asked the Central Committee of the British Communist Party to send us their outstanding economist for a private, off-the-record discussion. The representative appeared and gave the exposition that one might have expected. We then questioned him for about an hour and showed him why we believed that everything he had said was illogical or contrary to the evidence. Very badly flustered, he said to us in effect: "I can't answer your objections, but I must believe that the fault is my own ignorance. Will you let me go home and study Marx, and then, when I have found the answers, come back and talk to you again?" We were all of us impressed with his decency and straightforwardness and gladly agreed to his

proposal. But, as we had expected, he never showed up again, and the British Communist Party never bothered to send us a substitute, even though some of the then-members of the Marxist Club were destined to have careers that would profoundly influence the economic policies of future British governments.

### The Faithful

But if *Das Kapital* fared so badly among the economically educated, it had a very different fate among the self-educated workers and the growing legions of revolutionaries. Bakunin began to translate the first volume in 1868. Though he never completed the task, a Russian edition appeared. In time, it would be available in almost all the languages of the civilized world. What were the secrets of its success and of its massive influence on history? A primary appeal of the work to the faithful was that it contains moral denunciations and exhortations, lurid prose, Old Testament anathemas, all of this inextricably mixed with the sort of ponderous algebraic analysis that one would expect from a clumsy but diligent child. Money, Marx informs us, "comes into the world with a congenital bloodstain on its cheek, capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore with blood and filth."<sup>16</sup> The worker, not only lives by the sweat of his brow, but has to eat with his daily bread "human perspiration mixed with the discharge of abscesses, cobwebs, dead black-beetles, and putrid German yeast. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these lurid, sanguinary, and revolting characterizations of the economic system, there is a theological analogy: The primitive accumulation of capital "plays in Political Economy approximately the same role as original sin in theology." When the artisans of the old guild system fall into the toils of capitalism they "become sellers of themselves only after they have been robbed of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."<sup>18</sup>

From a scientific standpoint, this mish-mash of analytical reasoning, penny-dreadful prose, and the maunderings of Hebrew prophets is, of course, absolutely intolerable. When a man picks up a textbook on missile trajectory, he does not expect to find himself wallowing in bloody descriptions of the consequences of atomic warfare. As an economist, a scientist is supposed to explain dispassionately how economic processes operate and how they are interrelated causally with other processes. He may have strong moral convictions and he has the right and duty to voice them—but elsewhere, on the soapbox, on the pulpit, or in debate or discussion.

But his injection of moral denunciations was deliberate. It was a means of focussing the hatred of the faithful against the existing institutions of the society in which they lived. Perhaps more importantly to Marx, it was a means of giving voice to his own hatreds, his own misanthropy, his own sense that his life was drab and miserable. Thus, he gave a focus to the devout. He also gave them the illusory assurance of inevitable victory. This prophetic guarantee of final victory occurs throughout this vast and tedious work. Perhaps its most famous expression is:

Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.<sup>19</sup>

All this was heady and intoxicating stuff. The revolutionary zealots believed that the doctrines expounded in the first volume of *Das Kapital* had conclusively proved the impending self-destruction of the hated private enterprise system. They were blissfully unaware of the gaping holes in the argument. It seems never to have occurred, even to some of the more intelligent ones, that the crucial law of the falling rate of profit would make it more profitable to run a chain of hot-dog stands than to build and operate oil refineries.

The first volume of *Das Kapital* appeared in German in 1867. The second was issued by Engels, after Marx's death, in 1885. The third volume appeared in 1894. The final portion of the work, the four volumes on *Theories of Surplus Value* found the light in 1905–1910 under the editorship of Karl Kautsky.<sup>20</sup>

This enormous time-lapse between the publication of the first and the final volume, an interval of almost half a century, was providential. The naïve believed that Marx had proved the inevitability of communism in the first volume. Even some fairly intelligent socialists and Communists shared that view, not because they were devoid of normal critical ability, but because they wanted to believe and therefore suspended the process of critical analysis. For the perceptive few who saw that the whole theory was shot full of holes, the answer would always be that the mystery will be resolved in the next volume. And by the time the entire seven volumes were in print, only the tiny minority with strong stomachs and blinding faith would read the work in its entirety.

Marx himself had strong psychological blocks against completing even the first volume. This was probably because he was acute enough to realize that his theoretical edifice was built on quicksand. He referred to his work in economics significantly as “this shit.” He allowed trivial projects and unproductive journalistic vendettas—such as his screeds against Lord Palmerston and his denuncia-

tion of Karl Vogt—to deflect him from what was supposed to be his crowning life achievement. In addition to his many and multiple illnesses and his pressing debts and chronic poverty, Marx would find other reasons for delaying completion.

Appropos of the first volume, he wrote Engels on June 18, 1862, that he was expanding the work because “the German dogs value a book by its cubic content.” When volume one finally appeared in 1867, he wrote Kugelmann that “the completion of my second volume depends chiefly upon the success of the first.”<sup>21</sup> By March of the following year he was even less optimistic. The second volume, he wrote Kugelmann on March 6, 1868, “will certainly never appear if my health does not improve. . . .” He added: “If I did not have these two damned volumes to produce (and in addition to look for an English publisher) which can be done only in London, I would go to Geneva, where I could live very well with the means at my disposal.”<sup>22</sup>

More evidence of the same sort could easily be cited, but it would simply underline the point. Marx used expressions like “this economic shit” too frequently in his correspondence for anyone to imagine that he took joy or pride in the monstrous edifice that circumstances had compelled him to continue erecting. Most writers, except the most miserable hacks, take pleasure in their work. One year after the appearance of the first volume of *Das Kapital*, Marx wrote his daughter, Laura: “Dear child, you must surely imagine I am very fond of books, because I am always bothering you about them at inconvenient times. But you are wrong. I am a machine condemned to devour books and then to hurl them transformed onto the dunghill of history.”<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

1. In this chapter, wherever possible, I shall paraphrase Marx rather than quote him in this economic argument. The reason is that Marx’s exposition is extremely bad writing, long-winded, and pompous. Since everything I am summarizing is in the first chapter of *Das Kapital*, volume one, the reader can verify the accuracy of the paraphrases without any trouble.

2. In this chaotically reasoned chapter, there is an implication that price (or value) cannot be determined by utility because very useful things, such as bread, sell cheaper than comparatively useless ones, such as diamonds. When the other variable, quantity, is introduced, this apparent paradox vanishes. When one has enough money to buy all the bread one can eat, the utility of more bread becomes infinitesimal and that of diamonds (if one’s wife or mistress craves them) may become high.

3. If Marx had really read Aristotle, as he claimed to have, he should have recognized an excluded middle when he saw one. And if he had really studied mathematics, as he alleged, it is difficult to see how he could have failed to grasp the fact that many processes are functions of more than one variable. Of course, for the computer-trained generation Marx's efforts at logical reasoning are ludicrous. But my point is that his thinking was fallacious even in terms of conventional Aristotelian logic and ordinary algebraic conceptualization.
4. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London: Weidenfelt and Nicholson, 1975), pp. 34, 37, 223. Hobsbawm can be considered a witness for the defense. He is sufficiently Marxist to have been approved as one of the contributing editors of the *Collected Works*. This English edition is being issued under the combined auspices of the central committees of the Communist parties of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union.
5. Bertram D. Wolfe, *Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1967), p. 323.
6. *Grundrisse*, English edition, pp. 748, 750. Quoted in Seigel, p. 336.
7. Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1967), III, 235-39.
8. For a detailed discussion of all the ways Marx tried to wriggle out of the cul-de-sac into which illogical reasoning and Alice-in-Wonderland economic thinking had driven him, see Seigel, pp. 336-47.
9. Marx to Victor Schily, November 30, 1867. Padover, p. 363.
10. Padover, pp. 365-66.
11. W. O. Henderson, *The Life of Friedrich Engels* (London: Frank Cass, 1976, 2 vols.), II, 681. Engels' comment is interesting because it reveals that he really didn't understand what science was about. His test of an economic system was whether it could serve as propaganda for or against socialism. Like other real scientists, Jevons was not primarily interested in this. His business was to predict economic phenomena, not to proselytize for one or another economic system.
12. Richard W. Ellis, ed., *Bernard Shaw and Karl Marx* (New York: Georgian Press, 1930), pp. vii-viii.
13. Hyndman called the Anglo-Boer War "the Jews' war . . . worse than the Dreyfus case . . . an abominable war on behalf of German-Jew mineowners and other interlopers." He believed that socialism should be based "on the common interests and affinities of the great Celto-Teutonic peoples in America, in Australia, and in these islands and possibly in Germany." He was "quite content to bear the reproach of Chauvinism. . . ." See Henry Mayers Hyndman, *The Historic Basis of Socialism in England* (London, 1883), pp. 194n., 433.
14. Ellis, pp. 177, 181-82.



15. The German title is *Zum Abschluss des Marxschen Systems*.
16. Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961–62), I, 760.
17. *Ibid.*, I, 249.
18. Marx, *Capital* (Chicago: Great Books), I, 355.
19. *Ibid.*, I, 837.
20. The German title is *Theorien über den Mehrwert*.
21. October 11, 1867. Marx, *Letters to Kugelmann*, p. 51.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64. By this time, Marx was getting 350 pounds a year from Engels regularly. He was able to live well in England, but he could have lived better in Geneva. It is interesting that he was seriously considering abandoning *Das Kapital* in order to enjoy a higher standard of living.
23. *MEW*: XXXII, 545; translated by Payne, *Marx*, p. 414.

## Karl Marx as Humanist

It has become fashionable in leftwing literary, philosophical and pseudoreligious circles to claim that Karl Marx was a humanist.<sup>1</sup> His humanist vision of the world, we are told, is to be found primarily in bits and pieces of his earlier writings, most of which he decided not to publish. Marx's reasons for allowing these documents to gather dust in manuscript form must be a matter of surmise. We know that, in some instances, he decided that they were written in an obscure Hegelian jargon that had fallen out of fashion and was largely unintelligible to those he wished to convert. In other cases, the manuscripts were preliminary drafts of work that was never finished. Some of these writings were probably never published because, as he matured, Marx discarded some of the ideas they contained. Others are virtually unreadable and probably could not have found a publisher during their author's lifetime.

The obscurity and the other defects of these writings give them a certain allure to some academicians: difficult writings require interpreters. And this sort of interpretation can open doors to profitable and academically honorific careers. The ability to understand these arcane philosophical or pseudophilosophical productions also serves to differentiate the academic elite of Marxism from mere proletarian Marxist *hoi polloi*.

In chapter five, I quoted Edmund Wilson's sharp and pointed rejoinder to the assertion of Marxian pundit David McLellan that nobody could really understand the thought of the master who had not plowed through an enormous unpublished volume entitled *Grundrisse*, which can be characterized briefly as chloroform in print. If Marx's philosophy rests on a manuscript which he never thought worth publishing, Wilson observed, there must be something wrong with it.

## What Is Humanism?

Humanism is one of those lovely words that has a variety of nebulous meanings and connotations, that conveys an impression of benevolence, and that can no more be pinned down than a mirage.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it simply as "belief in the mere humanity of Christ." While the *OED* is deemed by scholars the ultimate authority on the English language, it was first published in 1898 and revised some thirty years later. The *OED* definition may well correspond to what Marx had in mind when he used the term *humanism* or *humanist*.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1961 edition) considers humanism to be "the attitude of mind which attaches primary importance to man and to his faculties, affairs, temporal aspirations and well-being, often regarded as characteristic of the Renaissance in Western Europe. The Greek and Roman classical writers regularly distinguished the human, or humane, on the one hand, from the bestial and the divine. . . ."

The *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (unabridged, 1967) gives two main definitions: "any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values and dignity predominate" and "devotion to the study of the humanities."

The definition in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (unabridged, 1961) is substantially the same, but adds this more detailed statement: "a philosophy that rejects supernaturalism, regards man as a natural object, and asserts the natural dignity and worth of man and his capacity to achieve self-realization through the use of reason and scientific method. . . ."

Marx's thought has some of these characteristics. Obviously, he rejected the supernatural. Nor can anyone doubt that he was addicted to a literary culture. It is also true that he regarded "man as a natural object" and that he attached primary importance to "human interests," but these are views shared by the great majority of educated and intelligent human beings in the modern world. He may have believed in "the natural dignity and worth of man" in some metaphysical sense—that is to say, when he contemplated what mankind could become—but he regarded the majority of existing, real, actual mankind with scorn or hatred. This is clearly shown in all his writings and applies to his judgments of classes, nationalities, races, and individuals.

Marx was not one of those who sought man's "self-realization through the use of reason and scientific method. . . ." Neither the Hegelian dialectic nor Marx's dialectical materialism, which he derived from it, had anything in common with science. In Marxist societies, science has invariably been chained to the irrational

dogmas of the dialectic, creating situations comparable to those which the Inquisition imposed on sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain. Marx never believed in free inquiry, and free inquiry is the necessary and indispensable condition of human liberation through the use of reason.

If to be a humanist is to be a free spirit believing in the power of reason, in free debate and in free inquiry, then Marx stands out as one of humanism's greatest modern enemies.

## Marx Considered as a Humanist

Getting away from these dictionary definitions, what reasons are there to consider that Marx was a humanist in any meaningful sense of the word? He asserted that he was on at least one occasion. In 1843, he wrote Arnold Ruge, proposing that they jointly establish a philosophical and literary journal, the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, which would combine the best critical thinking of the intelligentsia of the two countries. It must avoid narrow dogmatism, Marx insisted. This applied particularly to the "dogmatic abstractions" of communism. "This communism is itself separate from the humanist principle," Marx wrote Ruge.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for the young Marx at least, the narrow and fanatical zealotry of the Communist faith which he would later espouse was quite incompatible with a truly humanist attitude.

In the same *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, which he launched with Ruge in 1843, Marx observed: "Religion is only the illusory sun that revolves around man so long as he has not yet begun to revolve around himself."<sup>3</sup>

The idea that Marx was struggling to express here is that religious belief makes man look for imaginary perfection in some supernatural being instead of striving to achieve that perfection himself. The argument is borrowed in toto from Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. Hence, even if the analysis had any validity, it would hardly cast a radiant light on Marx's own philosophy. Further, Feuerbach's and Marx's criticism had merit as applied to pathologically masochistic forms of Christianity and other religions in which man was conceived of as degraded by his physical existence. As a general criticism of either Christianity or religion in general, it was little more than dialectical acrobatics.

Marx enthusiastically accepted Feuerbach's demand that religion be extirpated, but he disagreed sharply with the latter's view that, once an atheist world had been attained, mankind would enjoy a truly human and brotherly existence. That idyllic state of affairs could not arise, Marx asserted, until man succeeded in ending his own alienation from his fellow man.

At this time—around 1843—Marx was still groping for a general explanation

of human alienation. He regarded this as a condition common to most of mankind. Never a careful observer of other people's attitudes, motivations, behavior and aspirations, Marx imputed to society at large what he introspected in himself. He disagreed with Feuerbach's vision of a godless world of brotherhood. Much more would have to be destroyed. Other institutions must pass under the guillotine. Great upheavals, as yet more or less inchoate in Marx's evolving philosophy of nihilism, would be needed. As yet, the central element in the coming cataclysm was not seen as social revolution nor was the proletariat clearly delineated in the role of executioner. But the significant need for destruction ran through Marx's writings. Thus "after the earthly family is seen to be the secret of the holy family, one must proceed to destroy the former both in theory and in practice."<sup>4</sup>

The same recurrent theme of man's progress through hell to utopia appears in successive versions of the Marx morality play. Mankind must pass through the infernos of total war, class struggle to the death, a dictatorship of the proletariat in which envy rules, civilization crumbles, and woman is forced into prostitution in order to enter the Promised Land of Communism. Here "human alienation" magically ceases.

Even Robert C. Tucker, who is more critical and perceptively acute than most students of Marx, takes some of this promised-land rhetoric at face value. What Marx actually says is that, once private property is destroyed, "religion, the family, the state, law, morality, art, science, etc. [which] are only particular *modes* of production" become "transcended," whatever that may mean, and assume a "*human, i.e. social, existence.*"<sup>5</sup>

Now when this is translated into ordinary, intelligible English, it is obviously rubbish. It is not true that art, science, the family, and all these other basic institutions of civilization are simply corollaries of the capitalist mode of production. Marx makes this irrational assertion because it provides him with a plausible justification for desiring their "transcendence," that is, their destruction. He goes on to say that "private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is ours only when we have it" and he expands this thought to assert that our greed for possession makes us incapable of appreciating the aesthetic, sensuous, and other qualities of these objects.<sup>6</sup>

These assertions may have been true insofar as they referred to Marx's own attitudes toward the sensuous life, but there was no reason to project his personal neuroses on the rest of the human race. If Marx had taken the trouble to observe the conduct of the rich, he might have realized how remote his psychological theories were from reality. Did he really imagine that the great American and European robber barons of his time were so consumed by greed that they were unable to enjoy their possessions? Was he unaware of the fact that many of them



were connoisseurs of vintage wines, beautiful women, art masterpieces, and all the other sensuous and sensual pleasures that wealth can buy? How could Marx have believed in these theories unless he lived in a cocoon world of his own creation, totally insulated from the society of his day?

McLellan tells us that the proof of Marx's humanism is contained in the *Grundrisse*. But when we look at this turgid volume, we find mostly platitudes and thin gruel. Marx tells us that under communism, "work cannot become a game, as Fourier would like it to be . . ." and certainly Lenin and Stalin proved to the Russian masses that this was indeed the case. But, Marx adds, under socialism, the worker will have free time, and this free time "which includes leisure time as well as time for higher activities—naturally transforms anyone who enjoys it into a different person. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

A profound thought indeed! Capitalism was providing the workers of the industrialized nations with more and more free time when Marx wrote this stuff, but, since that fact did not correspond with his dogmas, Marx ignored it. What is ridiculous about this passage is the implication that the capacity of workers to acquire and enjoy leisure depends on socialism. Obviously, it depends on the prevailing levels of science and technology and the way in which they are applied to production and distribution. Writing more than a century before Marx, Montesquieu perceived this. In the chapter on Negro slavery in *The Spirit of Laws*, he observed: "No labor is so heavy but it may be brought to a level with the workman's strength when regulated by equity, and not by avarice. The violent fatigues which slaves are made to undergo in other parts may be supplied by a skilful use of ingenious machines. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

"Marx's conception of ultimate communism is fundamentally *aesthetic* in character," Tucker writes. "His utopia is an aesthetic ideal of the future man-nature relationship, which he sees in terms of artistic creation and the appreciation of the beauty of the man-made environment by its creator."<sup>10</sup> This is certainly a beguiling theory, but the reader will find no convincing evidence for it anywhere in Marx's writings. All that can be dredged up are a few ponderous assertions about social versus individual attitudes toward existence, which are, of course, favorable to the former and pejorative toward the latter.

Marx was unwilling or unable to use his imagination to project any of the dimensions of that glorious future society toward the attainment of which he had dedicated his entire life. I suggest that the reason for this perceptive failure was that the whole utopia business bored him to death. He was imaginative enough when he forecast death and destruction and the dehumanization of mankind in the agonizing future conflicts which he claimed to foresee. But he had a real interest in destruction and apparently derived pleasure from conjuring up visions of the doom that awaited the races, peoples, classes, and individuals whom he

hated or envied. He was not able to write convincingly about his socialist utopia because, unlike Sir Thomas More, there was no love for mankind in his heart.

While any comparison of Marx with Hitler is unfair to the former, it is interesting that the distinguished British historian Trevor-Roper characterized the picture Hitler drew of his future Germanic utopia as "narrow, materialist, trivial, half-baked, disgusting."<sup>11</sup> Hitler was not interested in imagining utopias either. He was a man of death. His consuming passions were destruction and slaughter.

Marx's "inhumanism" was felicitously portrayed by Professor Halle as follows:

The extremism of Marx, represented as well by the line of Marxist tradition that passes through Lenin, has always been extraordinarily callous to the sufferings of real human beings; and there is no doubt that Marx, himself, occasionally revelled in the dream of wholesale massacres, with blood flowing in the streets. One is tempted to believe, uncharitably, that his consistent opposition to improving the lot of the workers by progressive reforms, rather than by violent revolution, had at least some of its roots in this dream. Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung, although not representing Marx's thinking in other respects, have been representative of him in the same lack of concern for real people, in their disposition to cure the evils of society by subjecting actual flesh-and-blood to suffering and death on a scale that no one else in history except Hitler has ever approached.<sup>12</sup>

## Character, Lifestyle, Humanism

Let us leave the sacred writings for a moment and consider the man. Was Karl Marx a man of the Renaissance? Was he a humanist as that word is generally understood?

Marx lived during a period of exciting revolutionary changes in painting, sculpture, and music. In French painting, for example, his life-span stretches from the period of David and Delacroix to that of Manet. His life also coincided with the passionate controversies between the traditional romantics who followed Brahms and Schumann and the iconoclasts whose idol was Wagner. Was Marx stirred by these aesthetic explosions? Does his correspondence tell us of his excitement at visiting galleries and art shows, attending symphonic concerts, participating in any way in the rich, sensuous, aesthetic life of Paris or London?

Not a bit of it. The vast corpus of public and private writings he left behind him shows an almost total dearth of interest in any of the visual or acoustic arts. He seems to have been almost totally impervious to nature. There are no descriptions of, or reactions to, mountains, lakes, gardens, scenic beauty. If there is

birdsong around him, Marx seems deaf to it. He was not an amateur naturalist. He had no interest in living things unless he could harangue or lecture them or argue with them, except for his interest in children and perhaps a brief, flickering interest in some of his children's pets.

But he used to love to romp in the country with his children. Did this not show an appreciation of nature? Not according to Liebknecht, who took part in some of these excursions. Marx would walk to Hampstead Heath for exercise, sometimes carrying an infant, but once arrived, he would sit down and read the newspapers he had brought with him. Of course, poverty had something to do with these limitations, but Marx was poor for only about twenty years of the sixty-five years he lived.

Marx's aesthetic side consisted of impressive familiarity with classic Greek and Roman writers, with Shakespeare, Goethe, and some of the novelists of his own day. He had an exceptionally good memory and was able to quote accurately in several languages. He was also good at inventing stories for children, partly because these stories mirrored some of his own psychic conflicts and partly because he retained certain childlike characteristics all of his life. In other words, his cultural interests were exclusively verbal. To view him as an aesthete or as a man who struggled all his life to create for mankind an aesthetic utopia is absurd in view of his almost total disinterest in music, architecture, painting, sculpture, the dance, and the other nonverbal arts.

Marx was certainly not a humanist in the sense of being a man of the Renaissance. Renaissance men prided themselves on their versatility and many-sided achievements. They sought to develop in themselves all human potentialities, ranging from scientific discovery to painting, sculpture, epicurean tastes, physical and sexual prowess, and the soldierly virtues. The gentlemen and ladies of the Renaissance, moreover, were usually fastidious about their personal appearance.

Marx was not really a versatile man at all. He once described himself as a person compelled against his will to devour books in order to excrete writings that hardly anybody read. He spent much of his leisure time in personal argument and drinking bouts. He was described by contemporaries as unwashed, dirty in appearance, a man who did not bother to shave or change his linen, who lived with indifference in surroundings of grime and disorder, and who apparently took no pride in his personal appearance.

One final point about the "aesthetic" Marx. One gets the impression that he was one of those people who are almost totally insensitive to color. According to Rorschach Test analysis, insensitivity to color almost always means emotional and sensuous dearth. That is to say, it denotes people who are simply incapable of experiencing the sensuous, and therefore the aesthetic, world.

## Notes

1. By "pseudoreligious circles," I mean people who pretend religiosity in order to propagate their pet secular ideologies as variants of Christianity or some other faith. This was something which Marx attempted to do when he unsuccessfully sought a position on the faculty of theology at Bonn. The objection is not to atheism or agnosticism; it is to hypocrisy.
2. Padover, p. 173.
3. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*. Hegel's word is *Recht*, which means both "right" and "law."
4. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*. There is an interesting discussion of Marx's alienation and so-called humanism in Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), p. 101.
5. *MEGA*, III, 115.
6. *Ibid.*, III, 118–19.
7. Of course, this Marxian picture of the compulsive, acquisitive capitalist would appeal to the envy of the flawed and neurotic intellectuals and the deprived manual workers who would eventually flock to his banner.
8. Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 148–49.
9. Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), XV, 8.
10. Tucker, pp. 157–58.
11. H. R. Trevor-Roper, ed., *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1944* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953), p. xx of Trevor-Roper introduction.
12. Louis J. Halle, "Marx: His Death and Resurrection," *Encounter*, January 1970, p. 76.

## Theories of Alienation

For decades, the complex edifice of the Marxian system has been crumbling under the impact of critical analysis. This has added enormously to the problems of those leftist intellectuals who feel the compulsion to rediscover Marxism or else to perform the Lazarus-feat of raising it from the dead. Marx's economic theories are so totally wrong that they are simply irrelevant to serious economic analysis and even the Soviet planners ignore the sacred writings.

The philosophical fundament of Marx's "scientific socialism" is, as everybody knows, a transformation of the Hegelian dialectic. But unhappily, Hegelianism, whether erect on its feet, turned on its head, or flat on its rump, remains pseudological nonsense and pretentious flimflam.

Marx's historical writings have proved, for the most part, to be ingenious partisan and propagandistic attempts to explain away the failure of his followers to achieve their purposes and the unwillingness of Clio to move in the direction commanded by the master. They are significant as illustrating the Communist view of what happened in the nineteenth century. Needless to say, almost all of Marx's predictions turned out to be wrong.

Yet the need to believe remains and seemingly becomes more powerful for each generation of rootless, rebellious, flawed, and redundant intellectuals. The reasons for this need to both believe and destroy, to talk humanism and to act out hate, to preach freedom and impose slavery are multiple and complex. Here all that need be said is that, in their frantic effort to find a living and relevant Marxism, social scientists of the left from Erich Fromm to Martin Heidegger have seized on Marx's concept of human alienation. Existentialists and "Christian" theologians who disbelieve in the divinity of Christ have joined hands in this holy work.



## The Misty World of Alienation

An incredibly large literature has cropped up recently on this topic, most of which is repetitious, nebulous, boring, and somewhat incoherent. Since *alienation* is rather peripheral to our central concern, I shall treat the topic briefly. Marxist thinking on alienation is so closely related to the bizarre theory that Marx was really a humanist that this chapter inevitably meshes into, and perhaps overlaps, the one on the latter topic. Finally, I shall emphasize, as Tucker and other ideologically uncommitted political scientists already have, that Marx's concept of the capitalist class as demonically driven and alienated from life had very little to do with the economic realities of either his age or the ones that followed it.

That concept was a projection of Marx's own compulsions, obsessions and neuroses. The demon-driven man, struggling joylessly to prove his superiority to all humanity, was not your typical Victorian capitalist; it was Marx himself. This inwardly tormented man often imagined that he was a reincarnation of Prometheus, who brought the fire of enlightenment to man and was punished by Zeus by being chained to a mountain where an eagle tore out his liver by day and it grew again by night. But the fire was not enlightenment and the devouring eagle was a creation of Marx's own psyche. Perhaps Marx was closer to a reincarnation of Sisyphus. The latter's punishment was to concentrate all his energies, all his attention, and all his being on rolling a huge stone up a mountain, which then rolled down on him, forcing him to begin the process anew.

Marx wrote as early as 1844 that "all is under the sway of an inhuman force." At this stage, he believed that private property was not "the cause of alienated labor, but in reality its consequence."<sup>1</sup> Later, he would reverse this view. The important thing is not the varying ways in which Marx elaborated this theme, but the fact that it remained central to his entire philosophy during his entire life.

At first, alienation to Marx had only the loosest possible connection with economics. Seigel points this out clearly. Thus, in *The Holy Family*, Marx makes the absurd statement that "the determination of value is entirely fortuitous and need have no connection either with the costs of production or with social utility."<sup>2</sup> All the laws of economics can be derived from the two concepts of alienation and private property, he alleged in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

With increasing chronological maturity and greater preoccupation with economics, Marx began to treat alienation somewhat differently.

## The Alienated Proletariat

Wage labor is alienated, according to Marx, because the product of man's labor is stolen from the worker by the capitalist. He asserted that men realize their potentialities by shaping natural objects according to their will and their imagination. In the manorial, or guild, economy, as portrayed by those reactionary apologists for the landed aristocracy who had such a powerful influence on Marx's thought, the craftsman supposedly made his product in its entirety. Out of this integral relationship to the productive or creative process, he achieved a pride of workmanship and a sense of wholeness.

Historically, this was a sentimentalized picture. Division of labor existed in the manorial system. Moreover, the immense majority of working people were peasant drudges, condemned to labor as dull and spiritless as that of their yoked oxen.

The guild craftsmen were destroyed by capitalism and the money economy, according to Marx's scenario. Division of labor increased productivity by confining each laborer to a single, repetitive operation. The worker never saw the finished product, never shaped it as a whole, never owned it, never took pride in it.

Another facet of proletarian alienation was what Marx called "commodity fetishism." He elaborates this idea in some detail in *Das Kapital*. His basic point is that "the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labor affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products."<sup>3</sup> That is, men work for money, not for the direct purpose of shaping useful objects out of inanimate matter. Money dehumanizes the productive relationship. It also dehumanizes man's relationship to man. He relates to his fellow, not as a producer, but as a seller or buyer of labor-power.

In addition to all this, Marx expatiates at various times and places on those supposedly ineluctable laws of capitalism that will grind the workers down into unbearable poverty, destroy the small manufacturers, create giant, militarily organized factories in which the starving proletarians will be mere dehumanized cogs, and so on and so forth. The increasing misery of the working class must lead to its mental and moral debasement. It follows logically that the proletarian revolutionary triumph will inevitably create an inferno for mankind over an indefinitely protracted transitional period. As I have already pointed out, Marx depicted the Communist proletarian-dominated state in 1844 as a regime characterized by hatred of civilization, crude and limitless violence, and the exploitation of the talented by the envious. In 1850, he told his handful of working-class followers:

You will have to go through 15 or 20 or 50 years of civil wars and international wars, not only in order to change existing conditions, but in order to change yourselves and to make yourselves fit for political domination.

The present generation was too debased—and much of that debasement was due to alienation—to create a just new world. Like Moses, it would never set foot in the promised land. “It has not only a new world to conquer, it must go under, in order to make room for the men who are fit for a new world.”<sup>4</sup>

Now for a few critical comments. I have already shown that Marx’s law of progressive impoverishment is theoretically wrong and that it was refuted even by the statistical data available to him at the time. Nor need we waste time refuting Marx’s conception of a future capitalist technology in which the workers were relegated to the performance of minute, mindless, repetitive tasks. Everybody knows that things have not turned out that way.

What remains and is of some interest is Marx’s assertion that men become alienated when their relationships to each other are determined by the economic roles they play, by the cash nexus, by money. There was some excuse for this view at the dawn of Macedonian power around 300 B.C. when all technology was primitive and the source of power was muscle. In comparing slaves and proletarians, Aristotle found the life of the former preferable: “For the slave shares in his master’s life; the artisan is less closely connected with him, and only attains excellence in proportion as he becomes a slave.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is better to serve a human being than a thing.

The direct relationship of man to man, the supposed antithesis to the alienation of the money economy, actually involved limitless oppression and unbridled cruelty. Men were condemned by birth to subordination and this subordination affected every aspect of their lives. Capitalism, arising out of the division of labor and the advance of technology, changed this state of affairs and caused a giant advance toward increased human freedom. Man’s progress toward freedom, Sir Henry James Sumner Maine observed, is measured by the transition from status to contract.

Thus, the sort of *alienation* that Marx was condemning was a guarantor of human freedom. When men’s economic relationships are based on the roles they play in the business of earning a living (the rule of contract, as Maine would call it), laws and customs protect both sides. The worker is protected by social legislation and collective bargaining contracts. The employer is, or should be, protected against wildcat strikes and sabotage which violate these collective contracts. At a more trivial level, supermarket customer and supermarket checkout girl are protected by their roles against rudeness, insolence, violence, and being obligated to listen to each other’s opinions. In this sense, their relationship is one of

*alienation* and this sort of alienation protects the privacy of each against intrusion by the other. But if they wish to establish a different sort of relationship, one that has nothing to do with their economic roles, either or both are free to do so.

By contrast, in the manorial and guild system, status determined all relationships. The master was master everywhere, the servant always a servant. The preindustrial aristocratic model of a supposedly nonalienated society, for which Marx had such an evident nostalgic attachment was a model of unfreedom. The peasant would always have to stand aside and be spattered by the mud of his master's carriage. Where there were patriarchal situations characterized by benevolence and concern on the part of the master, care of this sort was largesse by the master, not the legal right of the servant. Here again, when Marx seemed to be arguing in favor of humanist goals, he was actually embellishing relationships of permanent subordination and arbitrary and unlimited domination.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Marx's denunciations of capitalism and the money economy as a source of human alienation ignored the fact that the crucial element of change was the Industrial Revolution which substituted fossil-fuel power for animal and human muscle power and which created the system of interchangeable parts. Did Marx intend to abolish the technological progress of the nineteenth century and revert to the yoked ox and the blacksmith's forge? Of course not!

And in his diatribes against money, particularly in his screed, *On the Jewish Question*, what did he propose as an alternative? Barter? Or an Inca-like barracks state in which the entire regimented working force deposits the product of its labor into a common pool and the dictatorship distributes the product according to its fancy? This seems to have been the sort of quasi-Marxian society which the Reverend Jim Jones established in Guyana and which ended in 1978 with the murder-suicide of its 900-odd subjects.

## The Alienated Capitalist

Robert S. Tucker has written so wisely and well on this subject that I can do no better than quote him:

The compulsion that transforms free creative self-activity into alienated labor is the compulsion to amass wealth. Marx portrays it in his manuscripts as a maniacal obsession with accumulation of capital, a veritable fanaticism of appropriation of the world of created things, a lust for money. He entitles it greed (*Habsucht*), and ascribes the concept of it to political economy: "The only wheels that political economy sets in motion are *greed* and the war between the greedy—competition."<sup>7</sup>

Tucker continues: "This all-embracing passion of greed is seen by Marx as the 'utterly alien power' or 'inhuman force' (*unmenschliches Macht*) that holds sway over the whole of human existence."

Marx also believed:

"The less you eat, drink and read books . . . the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your *capital*."<sup>8</sup>

One could go on and on with quotations of this sort, but it would be pointless. They serve to stress the fact that Marx really knew next to nothing about the realities of the capitalist world in which he led a marginal and secluded existence in the reading room of the British Museum. The great captains of industry were not the misers he depicted, though a few of them were niggardly fellows. They certainly did not find it advantageous to abstain from thinking and reading books, and still less from making love. Marx is the first observer of the Gilded Age to conclude that the railroad tycoons, the steel barons, and the master financiers of that period restricted their consumption of food and liquor. But to continue ridiculing these absurdities would be a waste of time. What is significant about this monstrously inaccurate caricature of the capitalist mentality is, as Tucker observes, "that Marx drew inspiration from the inner depths of his own being in portraying the 'inhuman force.'"<sup>9</sup>

There is no implication here that Marx was a miser, that he delighted in accumulating wealth, or anything of the sort. That would be quite absurd. His obsessions and compulsions were of a different nature, but they too created a neurotic, driven human being whose perceptions and experience of life were focussed along an extremely narrow beam, who was flogged forward by the demons within him which he himself had created, and who was in fact an almost perfect example of that "alienated humanity" which he believed he perceived in the Victorian capitalist class.

Otto Rühle, a charter member of the German Communist Party, wrote a biography of Karl Marx in 1928 which is fascinating because the author perceives Marx as an alienated neurotic with "an intensified sense of inferiority."<sup>10</sup>

Rühle's analysis, which seems to be largely Adlerian, is interesting enough to summarize or quote at some length. The three main formative elements in Marx's neuroses, Rühle maintains, were his "persistent ill health . . . , his Jewish origin, . . . and his position as a first-born child."<sup>11</sup> Ill-health threatened his career and physical existence. He experienced his Jewish origin as a social stigma. As the first-son of a Jewish family, brilliant achievements were expected of him, but at the university "he shirked his lectures, avoided examinations, procrastinated the choice of a profession—these being typical manifestations of profound discouragement."<sup>12</sup>



The lower the self-esteem, the higher the aim. . . . Throughout life, Marx remains the young student, who is afraid of disappointing others through the inadequacy of his achievement, and therefore sets himself aim beyond aim, piles task upon task. He cannot escape the voices calling after him: 'You must show what you can do! Must climb! . . . Must be the first!' This will-to-conquest and this urge-to-superiority dominate all the phases of his existence as worker and fighter."<sup>13</sup>

Without referring to Marx's theories of alienation, Rühle, in this passage, has given an excellent characterization of Marx as a man driven by neurotic ambition. He believes that Marx's digestive disorders explain the fact that he was "depressed, capricious, spiteful, discontented . . . full of suspicions . . . unable to enter into sympathetic relations with others . . . isolated, embittered, always on edge, ever ready to scratch." In addition, he sees Marx as a hypochondriac, a man "incapable of regular intellectual work which would have nourished the whole man," a person with "no profession, no office, no regular occupation, no dependable means of livelihood."<sup>14</sup>

Periods of complete idleness would alternate with times when

by day and by night, he devoured whole libraries, heaped up mountains of extracts, filled thick manuscript books, left behind him piles of half-finished writings. *Yet in all this work, he had as little pleasure as he had at his meals; he groaned, cursed, deplored his fate, described himself as a slave of the intelligence, martyred his family.*<sup>15</sup>

Thus, the mystery of Marx's theory of capitalist alienation is explained. The alienated man was Marx himself.

## Notes

1. *MEGA*, III, 91-92.
2. Seigel, p. 294.
3. Marx, *Capital*, I, 31 (Great Books of the Western World edition).
4. Quoted in many places, including Marx-Engels, *The Cologne Communist Trial* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 251.
5. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1260a.

6. When Erich Fromm came to the United States as a quasi-Marxist German-Jewish refugee from Nazi oppression, he published a bestseller on psychology called *Escape from Freedom*. This book lifted Marx's ideas on alienation and commodity fetishism from *Das Kapital* without giving credit to their author. Fromm enthusiastically endorsed them and argued that freedom is an intolerable burden for most people. This is, of course, a view that is popular with elitists who believe they know what is best for the masses.
7. Tucker, pp. 137–38, quoting *MEGA*, III, 81–82.
8. *MEGA*, III, 130, emphasis in the original. Marx quoted Shakespeare in support of this silly theory about entrepreneurial motivations, specifically *Timon of Athens*. Timon was no modern captain of industry nor did Shakespeare live in the capitalist age. If Marx failed to quote Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, the probable reason was that his knowledge of English literature was limited.
9. Tucker, p. 141.
10. Otto Rühle, *Karl Marx, His Life and Work* (New York: Home Library, 1943), p. 379.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 372.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 378.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 380–81. I reserve judgment on Rühle's belief that Marx's numerous physical afflictions may have been psychosomatic and on the three reasons he gives for Marx's inferiority complex. But the portrait of Marx as neurotic that emerges seems to me compelling and basically true.

**Part IV:**  
**Inner Torment and**  
**Destructiveness**

## The Kinkel Affair, A Study in Baseness

Eighteen forty-eight was the year of revolution throughout Europe. It had no coherent ideology of its own, but it had a style and a romantic aura that would make it seem to the educated youth of Europe "the springtime of hope." Beards, broad-brimmed hats, tricolors, and barricades were the order of the day. The programs for which men like Gottfried Kinkel, Robert Blum, Richard Wagner, Carl Schurz, and Mikhail Bakunin fought—and in many cases died—ranged from the nationalism of oppressed small Slavic peoples, to pan-German imperialism, to democratic and constitutional reforms, to the wild theories of utopian socialists and anarchists, to the visions of Marx and other extremists. The dominant currents were democratically endorsed nationalism, representative government on the English or American model, abolition of special privileges and onerous discrimination against Jews and other minorities. As for the sort of people who fought for and led the revolution in Germany, Hobsbawm has pointed out that 68 percent of the delegates to the Frankfurt Assembly were government officials. This was a movement of educated people. Its main impetus came from civil servants, professionals, and students.<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 to give a socialist ideological direction to the uprising, but their appeal "had no influence on the revolts which were then spreading on the Continent."<sup>2</sup>

The conduct of the two leaders of "scientific socialism" during this revolutionary epoch is not without interest. Engels spent crucial months of the struggle in a walking tour of the peaceful French countryside, "enjoying the sweetest of grapes and the loveliest of girls" and writing Marx about "peasant idiocy." His dull-witted and hagiographic biographer, Gustav Mayer, asked himself: "How could Engels pass his time in such peaceful meditation when he knew that the

cause to which he was sworn was being decided?" When stupid people ask themselves questions, they generally come up with assinine answers. Mayer decided that the reason Engels spent this period with peasant wenches was that "he was so fundamentally modest that he never believed his presence to be an essential factor in making or hindering great events." By this sort of reasoning, only military geniuses are under an ethical obligation to risk their skins for their convictions.

Later, it occurred to Engels that, if none of the Marx group of Communists fought, they might all be later accused of cowardice. He went to Elberfeld to fight, but was asked to leave town by the Committee of Public Safety because "his presence might give rise to misunderstandings of the nature of this movement." In other words, the insurgents were democrats, not Communists. Engels finally did take part in a few skirmishes before the revolution was finally squelched.

Marx did no fighting. When the Belgian government had given him asylum, it had done so on condition that he give his word of honor that he would not meddle in Belgian politics. Marx broke his word. With the inheritance he had received from his mother, he bought "daggers, revolvers, etc.," with which to arm German workers in Belgium.<sup>4</sup>

Marx was expelled. He took his wife, their maid Lenchen, and their three children to Paris, the center of the revolution, where his main activity was to sabotage the organization of a German legion to march across the Rhine and join the democratic revolutionary forces. He also drafted a short program which he called *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*, which was interesting principally because it made the peasants slaves of the state. Point seven declared that feudal estates would become state property. Point eight transferred all mortgages on peasant holdings to the state. Point nine provided that the rent peasants paid landlords would now be paid to the state.

Marx proceeded from Paris to Cologne where he edited *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. Censorship and Marx's journalism drove the well-financed paper to the verge of bankruptcy, and Marx and his family were expelled from Prussian territory in May 1849. He had sunk about 7,000 talers of his own money in his latest journalistic venture and the family was by now penniless except for Jenny's silver, which she managed to retrieve from pawnshops, and Marx's library which he left behind with a friend.

They returned to Paris where they spent the miserable summer of 1849 in dire and excruciating poverty. In July, a police official informed Marx that he was expelled from Paris and would be exiled to the department of Morbihan in Brittany. Hysterically, he wrote Engels on August 23, 1849: "I have been sent to the Department of Morbihan, the Pontine Marshes of Brittany. You under-



stand that I shall not enter into this thinly disguised attempt at murder. Thus, I am leaving France."

It is true that there were some marshes and heaths in the Morbihan area, but there were also fjords and the birth rate there was substantially higher than the death rate. It seems most improbable that the French Government was enough bothered by Marx to want to murder him. What is much more likely is that they regarded him as an extremist, a troublemaker, and a pest and thought that in Brittany, which was almost unanimously Royalist and ardently Catholic, nobody would listen to him.

Thus, Marx's participation in the 1848 revolutions, as in subsequent affairs of the same sort, was distinctly inglorious from a military standpoint. He never in his life manned a barricade, hurled a bomb, or fired a gun in anger. The closest he came to any of these martial exploits was to buy arms so other people could fight and perhaps die for his convictions. I emphasize this, not because I consider physical courage the greatest of all human virtues, but because of the relevance it bears to Marx's conduct toward a man who again and again risked his life for his beliefs. This man was Gottfried Kinkel.

### More Character Assassination

In the summer of 1852, Marx and Engels wrote a venomous attack on the expatriate leaders and militant veterans of the defeated 1848 revolution, which they ironically entitled *Heroes of the Exile*.<sup>5</sup> The victims of their virtiolic pens were, for the most part, men of little importance then and far less today. For example, a certain Rudolph Schramm is described as "a rowdy, loud-mouthed, and extremely confused little maniken,"<sup>6</sup> whose borrowed life-motto was "I would rather be an impudent windbag than be nothing at all." Nor did Marx and Engels refrain from physical characterizations and racial slurs. The "sly, stupid" expression of Gustav Struve went with his "half Slav, half Kalmuck" features.<sup>8</sup> "Ferret-face" Arnold Ruge had "Pomeranian-Slav features," etc.<sup>9</sup> A man with that sort of physiognomy was, of course, addicted to "shameless meddling."<sup>10</sup>

As for Moses Hess, the man who had converted both Marx and Engels to socialism (and whose wife Engels had seduced), they made the lying charge that his party "made common cause with the Prussian police," in short, that they were spies.<sup>11</sup> Carl Schurz, who was on the threshold of a distinguished career in the United States as a supporter of Lincoln, crusader against Negro slavery, Civil War general, newspaper publisher, U.S. senator, and cabinet officer, was brushed aside as "Machiavelli Schurz."<sup>12</sup>

Those 1848 revolutionaries who had not followed the doctrines and ideological nostrums of Marx and Engels (and practically none of them had) were the "refuse of mankind." They were not heroes and martyrs of a lost cause, but worms who had been "saved by the counter-revolution."<sup>13</sup>

## Marx and Dickens on Kinkel

I have quoted enough of this so that the reader will have gleaned that Gottfried Kinkel was destined to be treated with the same venomous scorn as all the others. But who was Gottfried Kinkel?

The son of a clergyman, he went to the University of Bonn where, according to Charles Dickens, "he greatly distinguished himself in various branches of learning and obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy." An eloquent preacher, "his oratory being considered as brilliant as his reasonings were convincing . . . he was chosen as a teacher of theology in the University of Bonn." He then turned his attention to aesthetics and published a work on "ancient and medieval art" which met with "unparalleled success and applause."<sup>14</sup>

He earned no salary for his teaching at Bonn, but was in line for a professorship in theology which would have given him and his small family a decent livelihood. However, he searched his conscience and decided that, "since the purity of religion would best be attained by a separation of Church and State," he could not honorably accept the post. (This conduct is an interesting contrast to Marx's unsuccessful scheme to get appointed to the same department of theology to use his chair to preach atheism.)

The "humanist" Karl Marx hated Kinkel because "he comes to terms with Christianity on the level of lyrical and declamatory sentimentality . . . that is to say, he presents a Christ who is a 'friend' and 'leader,' he seeks to do away with formal aspects of Christianity that he proclaims to be 'ugly' . . ."<sup>15</sup> What Marx objected to most strenuously was that Kinkel wanted to liberalize Christianity and to return mankind to the teachings of Jesus. Marx wanted to destroy the Christian religion root and branch.

When the 1848 revolution broke out, Kinkel not only enjoyed various "honors and emoluments," but had finally been installed as "a salaried Professor in the University of Bonn." He was happily married to a remarkable and brilliant woman, a fine pianist who had been a favorite pupil of Mendelssohn. The couple worked thirteen hours a day, according to Dickens, and still found time to give private Mozart concerts, and to bring up their three small children. By joining the revolutionary forces, Kinkel not only risked losing his life either in battle or on the scaffold, but also the entire future of his wife and his children. Neverthe-

less, neither he nor Johanna hesitated for a moment. Believing, according to Dickens, that Prussia should have a constitution like that of England, Kinkel became the "head of the popular party in Bonn" and was elected to the Berlin parliament. "He sides with the Left, or democratic party," Dickens wrote; "he advocates the cause of the oppressed people and the poor; he argues manfully and perseveringly the real interests of all governments in granting a rational amount of liberty. . . ." <sup>16</sup>

### **Combat, Treason Trial, Hard Labor**

The forces of democracy and of reaction soon came into violent military collision. Kinkel resigned his professorship to "join those who wield the sword, and peril their lives in support of their principles." He proceeded to Baden to defend the new German democratic constitution. "His patriotic wife consents, and in the evening he takes leave of her and of his sleeping children." Kinkel led a military band of insurgents into action, but they were outnumbered and dispersed. He then went to Kaiserslautern where, according to the malicious account of Marx and Engels, "he continued to earn his living by hawking around his ideas about freedom and the people's paradise among the peasants of the region. . . ." <sup>17</sup> Rucksack on his back, he went out every day to talk to the peasants about the social and revolutionary movement of the day, becoming, according to Marx and Engels, "a common partisan . . . mostly engaged in marauding." <sup>18</sup>

Marauding! Well, partisans do live off the land. The dispassionate observer might ask himself what Marx and Engels were doing while Kinkel was sharing the hardships of small, poorly trained volunteer detachments. Engels, as we have already noted, was spending much of the time wandering through the peaceful French countryside, tumbling peasant girls. And Marx was facing the ghastly ordeal of possibly being sent to Morbihan, where he might conceivably have contracted malaria. Marx's hysterical reaction to the minor inconveniences he was exposed to by the French authorities and his shrill complaints that the French government was plotting to murder him—all this contrasts unpleasantly with the unfeeling and inappropriate sarcasm that he showers on the head of a man who possessed real courage and manliness enough to face death for his beliefs.

(Here a brief aside. Even objective biographers, such as Padover, have taken seriously some of the twaddle Marx wrote about admiring "strength" above every other quality in a man, considering that happiness was "to fight" and misery "to submit." Yet it seems plain that this was window dressing, that he

had no physical courage himself and had more envy than respect for others who possessed it.)<sup>19</sup>

When Kinkel was wounded severely in the head and taken prisoner, Marx wrote sarcastic and scornful passages about this which I shall spare the reader. Facing the death sentence for treason, Kinkel told the court, according to Marx, that he "repudiates any connection between his activities and the filth and the dirt that, as I well know, has lately attached itself to this revolution." (The reference to filth was evidently directed at people like Marx, Engels, and Bakunin who joined the ranks of the democratic forces in order to carry out programs of proletarian dictatorship or destruction of religion and the family.)

Kinkel was sentenced to twenty years fortress confinement. This was changed to ordinary prison at hard labor. His food was wretched. His sole daily task was to spin wool. He was allowed no books and deprived of family visitations. He was not allowed to write, except for one monthly letter to Johanna. Dickens and other enlightened Europeans considered the sentence barbarous and the conditions of imprisonment unworthy of a civilized nation. That "one of the ornaments of the scholarship and literature of modern Germany" should be "clothed in sackcloth, with shaven head," denied access to his children, and utterly isolated from any intellectual communication seemed to most decent Germans and Englishmen of the day savage and inhumane.

Marx dissented. He sneered at the revolutionary prisoner: "... just as formerly he had appeared with the emblem first of the rucksack, then the musket and then the lyre, now he appears in association with the *spinning wheel*."<sup>20</sup>

### Kinkel's Escape

In February 1850, Johanna Kinkel wrote Carl Schurz, one of her husband's students and a young man who had played a valiant role in the 1848 revolutionary fighting then living in exile. For him to set foot on Prussian soil was to face instant execution for high treason. Her letter was a plea to Schurz to return to Berlin in disguise and rescue her husband from the Spandau penitentiary.

Johanna Kinkel had evidently realized that this twenty-one-year-old student had remarkable qualities of courage, discretion, and organizing ability. Without telling his family anything about his plans, Schurz accepted the assignment and proceeded to Berlin, putting his head in the lion's mouth, and actually succeeded in the incredibly difficult feat of rescuing Kinkel and smuggling him out of Germany and into England. Both men behaved throughout the ordeal with ingenuity and fortitude. Carl Schurz told the story of the escape, which still makes fascinating reading in his autobiography, which was published only after

enough time had elapsed so that the prison officials who had helped him could not face reprisals. In his concluding paragraph, Schurz says:

The extravagances which I had to read in German papers and to hear in the constantly enlarging circles of our acquaintance in Paris, disquieted me seriously. What I had done appeared to me as nothing so extraordinary. . . . Moreover, in every company in which I showed myself I was asked time and again: 'How did you succeed in carrying out this bold stroke? Tell us.' Inasmuch as I could not tell the whole truth, I preferred to tell nothing. New legends were invented which, if possible, were more fantastic than the old ones. This was so oppressive to me that I became very much averse to going into society. . . .<sup>21</sup>

How did Marx view this classic prison escape? Did he express the generous admiration that one brave man gives another? Not at all. He sneered at Kinkel for exploiting his newly acquired fame and frequenting the society of "aesthetic Jews" in London. Schurz's role was that of a "little intriguer with great ambitions and limited achievements." He accused them of "sacrificing some poor devil of a warder." Did Marx oppose in principle assisting in the escape of unjustly imprisoned freedom fighters because of solicitude for their jailers? So it would seem, but the charge also happened to be a lie: Schurz protected his accomplices.

There is a small, rather amusing footnote. Glancing idly through indexes of volumes two and three of the Marx-Engels correspondence for references to the great painters, sculptors, architects, and composers of the age—for Marx was a humanist, or at least so his academic toadies continually inform us—I was rewarded with one reference. The reference was to Beethoven. I turned eagerly to the indicated page hoping for some profound Marxian insight into the relationship between music and civilization. What I found was a roar of rage because somebody or other had listed both Beethoven and Kinkel as eminent Germans. Incidentally, mere philistines, such as Carl Schurz and the Kinkels, did have cultural interests. One of the few stumbling blocks in the friendship between Johanna Kinkel and Carl Schurz, for instance, was that he could not praise Wagner without arousing her passionate dissent.

## Notes

1. Hobsbawm, p. 13.
2. Padover, p. 250.



3. Mayer, p. 103-4.
4. Jenny Marx, *A Short Sketch*. See Payne, *Unknown Marx*, p. 121.
5. Published in the compendium, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Cologne Communist Trial* (New York: International Publishers, 1971). The German title is *Die grosse Männer der Exil*.
6. Marx and Engels loved to stress the "littleness" of other people.
7. Marx-Engels, *Cologne*, p. 169.
8. *Ibid.*, 170.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 109. The reader may recall Marx's vulgar and snickering letter about Sybille Hess, quoted in chapter eight, and Engel's approval of it. This simply stresses the fact that sexual relationships with women were of minor importance emotionally to Engels and that he was devoid of loyalty toward former mistresses. His emotional life was centered on Karl Marx.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
14. This and subsequent quotations of the same sort are from Charles Dickens, "Gottfried Kinkel: a Life in Three Pictures," published in the weekly periodical, *Household Words*, November 2, 1850, and reprinted in Marx-Engels, *Cologne*, pp. 277-85.
15. Marx-Engels, *Cologne*, p. 151.
16. Dickens, *Cologne*, p. 282.
17. Marx-Engels, *Cologne*, p. 162.
18. *Ibid.*
19. These answers come from Marx's responses to a parlor game called "confessions," which he played in Holland on April Fool's Day, 1865. The replies were the false persona Marx presented to the world. For the text, see Padover, pp. 627-28.
20. Marx-Engels, *Cologne*, p. 163. Had Dickens been allowed to live into the century in which Marx's theories ruled a third of the world, he would have realized that the conditions of Kinkel's imprisonment were mild and humane in comparison with what communism would impose.
21. Carl Schurz, *Autobiography of Carl Schurz* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), pp. 67-93.

## Feuds and Vendettas

That Marx quarreled with practically everybody who refused to acknowledge his authority and accept his theories as absolute truth is perhaps too well known to require extended comment. Certainly, an enumeration of the feuds and vendettas that constituted such a large part of his political life would be, not only pointless, but unpleasant. Hence, we shall examine only a few salient examples, but first a few generalizations about the sort of people on whom Marx vented the full blast of his envious and spiteful nature.

Those he loathed with the most incandescent hatred and on whom he vented his utmost fury generally fell into one of several categories. One of these was successful Jews. As I have already shown he loathed Jews and Jewishness. When the Jews in question succeeded in areas where he himself had failed, hatred was married to envy and the result was a parataxic disgorging of venom. His perfidious conduct toward Lassalle and his childish animadversions concerning the nose of Moses Joseph Levy are good enough examples to cover the field.

Some Jews got off rather lightly. In his old age, Marx had friendly relationships with Heinrich Graetz, author of a multivolumed *History of the Jews*, which treated its subject from a religious standpoint and was considered a classic in its day. Graetz was of Sephardic (Spanish or Portuguese) descent and hence belonged to what was then considered the aristocracy of Jewry. His career had little in common with that of Marx, and hence his scholarly success did not rouse Marx to anger and malicious spite. Similarly, Marx treated Disraeli with condescending irony, but he never suggested, as he did with Lassalle, that his ancestors had hybridized with "niggers" or that he was a "bounder" and a "little kike." But then Disraeli was also of Sephardic origin and a member of the Primrose Club.

Marx in time also came to respect the German Iron Chancellor, Otto von

Bismarck, because of the latter's ruthless use of wars of aggression to bring about German territorial expansion.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Bismarck considered communism an ultimate form of human enslavement and a system that should be rejected by all civilized men played only a secondary role in Marx's and Engels's attitude toward him.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, Marx's attitude toward Napoleon III was one of unadulterated scorn and loathing. He was a "foreign adventurer" (could not the same epithet have been applied to Marx?), who had risen to power on the shoulders of "the *Lumpenproletariat*" and upon "the bayonets of a drunken soldiery whom he had bribed with brandy and sausages."<sup>3</sup>

Marx poured ridicule and invective on Louis Napoleon's head. He considered him a dolt and a strutting fool who had provided the world with a burlesque version of the achievements of Napoleon I. One of Marx's triumphant witticisms was to refer to him as Boustrapa (an allusion to the fact that he had made three unsuccessful coups d'état in BOUlogne, STRAssburg and PARIS). Nor was it beneath the great man's dignity to expatiate on the unfortunate fact that the Empress Eugénie suffered from involuntary and compulsive flatulence in public, a misfortune which Marx described with joyful spite in a letter to Adolf Cluss, dated March 25, 1853.

Marx hated Napoleon III because the latter was considered a radical, the champion of universal suffrage, of the common people against the privileged few, and of French glory as against the decades of French humiliation that had followed Waterloo. His hatred was almost invariably concentrated on those political leaders and writers who either were, or appeared to be, social reformers, advocates of democracy, social Christians, or people of that sort. It was no doubt comforting to Marx's bruised ego to believe that Louis Napoleon had seized power in France because he bribed drunken soldiers with brandy and sausages. It did not explain the fact that in the elections following the suppression of the June uprising in Paris, 5.4 million Frenchmen voted for Napoleon as against less than 2 million for all the other candidates combined. Nor did it explain the fact that, after his coup d'état in December 1851, 7.4 million Frenchmen voted him dictatorial powers while only 641,000 opposed the grant. Nor did it explain the fact that Napoleon consistently rolled up impressive majorities in precisely those proletarian districts of Paris which had supported the 1848 revolutions.

Marx unfortunately never took to heart Lucian's observation that historical figures are not prisoners on trial. The business of the real historian is to attempt to explain why certain events occurred. Nor does it ever seem to have occurred to Marx that, if Napoleon III was the miserable, shabby little charlatan that he depicted, the really interesting historical question was how he managed to rule France for twenty years.

This question did occur to Alexis de Tocqueville. The great French political philosopher was not an admirer of Napoleon III because he thought the latter lacked audacity. De Tocqueville also believed that the emperor's years as an impoverished conspirator had accustomed him to dissipations which "deadened and degraded even his ambition." Yet, Napoleon "was vastly superior to what his preceding career and his mad enterprises might very properly have led one to believe of him. . . ."

De Tocqueville's masterly and dispassionate analysis gives one insight into the sort of man Napoleon III was. Marx's polemical "histories" of the French revolutions of 1848 and of the eighteenth Brumaire are merely the angry denunciations of a man who had hoped to win power for himself and for his band, but had not even come within sight of it.

What is perhaps most remarkable about Marx's myopic vision of French events in the late 1840s is that he failed utterly to realize that the main driving force of the revolution was nationalism in its modern, and sometimes terrifying, forms. This failure to see the obvious derived in part from Marx's bookish belief that nationalism would vanish with the world-wide triumph of the capitalist system. Adam Smith had also tended to think this, but then Smith wrote back in 1776! Unable to fit events into the Procrustean bed of his class-war theories, Marx descended to gutter interpretations and cheap slander. He attributed momentous events to the fact that drunken soldiers can be bribed with sausages. He tried to shrink the hated Napoleon III into dwarfish dimensions by dwelling on the involuntary abdominal rumblings of his empress.

Let me turn now to two of the men Marx abused and hated and to another whom he always treated with either silence or respect.

### **Karl Grün**

Karl Grün was a friend and comrade of Marx from university days. He developed a largely humanistic approach to society which he called "true socialism" and which appealed to the benevolence of all men and women of good will regardless of class. Marx's "virulence" against Grün, in Padover's judgment, was "probably also rooted in fierce personal jealousy, fed by hate and malice, traits which, according to such men as Michael Bakunin and Karl Heinzen who first admired and later detested him, he [Marx] always showed toward actual or potential rivals."<sup>4</sup>

Marx lashed out at Grün in *The German Ideology* (1846), a prolonged polemic against all socialists and radicals who deviated from the emerging Marxian doctrine. After this, on May 5, 1846, Marx wrote Proudhon to "denounce to you

M. Gruen of Paris . . . a cavalier of the literary industry, a type of charlatan who . . . attempts to conceal his ignorance in pompous and arrogant phrases. . . . Moreover, this man is *dangerous*. Thanks to his impertinence, he *abuses* the acquaintance that he has formed with renowned authors in order to put himself on a pedestal. . . .”<sup>5</sup>

Proudhon replied with an appeal to Marx’s “calmer judgment.” He pointed out that Grün was an impoverished refugee with a wife and two children to support who was trying to earn a living by writing. Another socialist of the more decent sort, Hermann Ewerbeck, protested to Marx that Grün was doing good work among the German artisans in Paris for the common cause, and “beseeched” Marx to recognize his opponent’s positive qualities.

All this fell on deaf ears. In October 1846, Engels wrote Marx from Paris, where he had gone at Marx’s orders to destroy Grün’s influence among the workers, that their enemy “has done a tremendous amount of harm” by injecting “daydreams, humanist aspirations, and the like” in the minds of the workers. Since Grün was advocating “peaceful plans for inaugurating universal happiness” instead of relentless class war, he must be extirpated. Engels carried out his mission as lord high executioner, leaving the little workers’ movement that Grün had helped create a shambles.<sup>6</sup>

### Mikhail Bakunin

Mikhail Bakunin, the father of revolutionary anarchism, came from the Russian landed gentry. Unlike Marx, who never risked his hide for any of his beliefs, Bakunin participated actively as a combatant in the 1848 revolutions in Germany. In Dresden, where he fought on the barricades side by side with Richard Wagner, he was able to make his escape, but was captured shortly thereafter. Imprisoned in Saxony, turned over to Austria, and after that to the czarist regime, he spent years immured in the dread Fortress of Peter-and-Paul, emerging prematurely aged, toothless, and looking to his family like a living corpse. He returned to Europe and continued the revolutionary work to which he had dedicated his life.

On July 6, 1848, *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which Marx not only edited but totally dominated, published this innocent little item:

With reference to Slavic propaganda, we were informed yesterday that George Sand is in possession of papers seriously compromising the reputation of a Russian exile, M. Bakunin. They represent him as a tool or a newly-engaged Russian agent who is chiefly responsible for the recent arrests among the unfortunate Poles. George Sand has shown these papers to some of her friends.

George Sand had not shown these papers to anyone for the simple reason that they did not exist. She wrote an indignant letter to *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, stating that the entire story was a fabrication. Marx published her statement and used the occasion to allege that he had conducted himself like an honorable man: "We have thus fulfilled the duty of the press to watch public characters rigorously, and at the same time we have given Mr. Bakunin an opportunity to dispel a suspicion which certainly had been raised in Paris in certain quarters."<sup>7</sup>

Despite this pharisaical recantation of a baseless slander, Bakunin admired Marx intellectually and at one time started to translate the first volume of *Das Kapital* into Russian.

When Marx started the First International, Bakunin emerged as his major opponent for leadership. Toothless and afflicted with the scurvy he had contracted in Russian dungeons, Bakunin was nevertheless an immense, towering giant of a man, a speaker of great magnetism, a professional revolutionary whose primary appeal was to the intellectual youth of all nations and to the outcast rabble of unskilled workers—*Lumpenproletariat*, Marx would call them—of such comparatively backward countries as Russia, Spain and Italy. Since he was an aristocrat and a bohemian, he mixed easily with all classes and all component elements of mankind. He had none of Marx's bourgeois priggishness, pretentiousness, snobbishness, or avidity for money.

The doctrine Bakunin preached was that the State in all its forms was the chief enemy of human freedom. He believed in an anarchist society based on absolute equality and on the voluntary cooperation of all except the privileged classes. At times, he spoke and wrote as if he did not believe in the extermination of the privileged classes to which he himself belonged by birth. At others, he proclaimed himself the heir to Stenka Razin and to the leaders of the French *jacquerie*, a fourteenth century peasant uprising which attempted to liquidate the landed gentry. Bakunin was probably the author of *The Revolutionary Catechism*, that monstrous recipe for total nihilism which was previously attributed to Bakunin's friend and comrade Sergey Genadievich Nechayev:

The revolutionary enters the world of the state, of the classes and of so-called culture, and he lives in this world only because he has faith in its speedy and total destruction. He is not a revolutionary if he feels any sympathy for this world. He must not hesitate to destroy any position, any place, or any man in this world—all must be equally detested by him. All the worse for him if he has parents, friends and loved ones; he is no longer a revolutionary if they can stay his hand."<sup>8</sup>



Bakunin was the sort of figure who could have inspired the Weathermen and the Italian Red Brigades—and probably also the Cambodian Khmer Rouge—had he lived a century or so later.

Marx fought with tooth and claw for control of the First International against the rising and powerful anarchist opposition, and he and Engels assailed Bakunin for his “Russian cunning.” Marx wrote Engels that he trusted no Russians and that Bakunin and his followers were “Cossacks,” and called Bakunin’s efforts to organize the anarchists into a coherent group “shit.”

In 1870, Marx resorted to the unscrupulous and degrading tactic of denouncing Bakunin because, although a foreigner, the Russian had placed himself at the head of the revolutionary uprising in Lyons! Yet shortly before this, Marx had showered praise on foreign revolutionists, such as Frankel and Dombrowski, who had placed themselves in the leadership of the Paris Commune. Thus Marx, who had propagandized for revolution almost all his adult life, but had never had the courage to fight for his convictions—and had on such occasions as his expulsion from Paris in 1849 conducted himself in a way that most men would consider contemptible cowardice—snarled at the heels of a man who believed in the principles he preached and who risked death repeatedly by fighting for them.

Marx won the battle for control of the International, primarily because he had rich friends who paid the travel expenses of the delegates he needed to give him a majority. Bakunin lacked such connections.<sup>9</sup>

## **Bakunin on Proletarian Dictatorship**

Bakunin was one of the first to recognize that the slogan of dictatorship of the proletariat was a public relations phrase to mask dictatorship by a small band of professional revolutionary intellectual zealots.

“If the proletariat is to become the ruling class,” he asked, “whom is it to rule?” He replied that, since the majority of the working class lacked education, training or the ability to rule anybody, the proletarian regime would actually be that of a “privileged minority.” He continued:

That minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps of *former* workers. And these, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will look upon the entire world of manual workers from the heights of the State. They will no longer represent the people, but themselves and their own pretensions to rule the people. Whoever has any doubt about that does not know human nature.<sup>10</sup>

He added the thought that, in such a new society, it was probable that the industrial proletariat would lord it over the peasants, and that the Germans would lord it over and oppress the Slavs.

### **Auguste Blanqui**

But there was one revolutionary other than Engels whom Marx never subjected to insult, scorn or opprobrium. This was the French conspiratorial terrorist Auguste Blanqui. Of middle-class origin, Blanqui developed a hierarchical organizational system characterized by "military discipline and blind submission to orders. . . ." Each leader of each small group knew and reported to and obeyed only one member of the small group directly above him in the hierarchy. As a result of an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the French government, Blanqui was sentenced to death, but this was commuted to life imprisonment. The government's reason for leniency was that Blanqui betrayed his organization and his comrades to the French Minister of the Interior a week after his arrest. These declarations, the so-called Taschereau Document, were made public after the 1848 Revolution in France. Even Blanqui's followers "were inclined to give credence to the accusations of treason implied in the document."<sup>11</sup>

Let me close this chapter with the impressions of Tocqueville when Louis Auguste Blanqui addressed the Chamber of Deputies during the French Revolution of 1848:

It was then that I saw appear, in his turn, in the tribune, a man whom I have never seen since, but the recollection of whom has always filled me with horror and disgust. He had wan, emaciated cheeks, white lips, a sickly wicked and repulsive expression, a dirty pallor, the appearance of a mouldy corpse; he wore no visible linen; an old black frock-coat covered his lean, withered limbs; he seemed to have passed his life in a sewer and to have just left it. I was told that it was Blanqui.<sup>12</sup>

This is an extraordinarily accurate pen portrait of the necrophile, the sort of pathological personality who is death-oriented and death-obsessed. I believe that it is not accidental that Marx respected and admired him.

## Notes

1. Wolfe, pp. 22–24, 52–53.
2. Speaking before the Reichstag on September 17, 1878, Bismarck observed: "If every man has to have his share allotted to him from above, we arrive at a kind of prison existence where everyone is at the mercy of the wardens. And in our modern prisons, the warden is, at any rate, a recognized official, against whom one can lodge a complaint. But who will be the wardens in the general socialist prison? There will be no question of lodging complaints against them, they will be the most merciless tyrants ever seen, and the rest will be the slaves of these tyrants." Not a bad prediction of the shape of the things to come in the Soviet world.
3. The *Lumpenproletariat* was Marx's term for that unemployed, unskilled rabble, plus the dregs of bohemia, which supposedly sold out the working class and served as the paid and venal soldiery of their oppressors. This was Marx's characterization of the French National Guard, which put down in blood the uprising of Paris workers in June 1848. But all this was simply Marxian mythology. According to a careful recent study, the National Guard "was a cross-section of provincial communities, including workers, peasants, artisans, and factory workers, although with a relatively high proportion of proprietors and members of the liberal professions." Roger Price, *The French Second Republic, A Social History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 189. Alexis de Tocqueville, who was an eyewitness to, and a participant in, these same events drew similar conclusions.
4. See Padover, pp. 212–13, for a classic description of this entire sorry episode.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Schwartzschild, pp. 99–100.
7. Max Nomad, *Apostles of Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), p. 157.
8. For the full English text see Robert Payne, *The Terrorists* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1957), pp. 21–27.
9. Schwartzschild, pp. 378, 383–84.
10. Nomad, pp. 198–99.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
12. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1893, 1949), p. 130.

# 21

## "We Have No Compassion"

From June 1, 1848, until its final suppression on May 19, 1849, Marx edited *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* from the safe haven of Cologne. The racist views that Marx and Engels voiced through this medium and their strident demands for wars of extermination against the despised Slavic peoples have already been treated.

The paper had barely been launched when radical Paris workers erected barricades in a suicidal attempt to overthrow the liberal democratic regime which the French people had established four months previously. On June 27, 1848, Marx commented on this second uprising with his usual calm objectivity:

*Paris Bathed in Blood; the Insurrection growing into the greatest revolution that has ever taken place, into a revolution of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie . . . the victory of the people is more certain than ever. The French bourgeoisie has dared to do what the French kings never dared—it has itself cast the die. The second act of the French revolution is only the beginning of the European tragedy.*<sup>1</sup>

All these predictions turned out to be wrong. The uprising of the Paris workers in June 1848 was crushed decisively in a few days and order was restored. The main force that put down the rising was the Garde Mobile, an organization mainly of unemployed young workers recruited by the democratic regime which had overthrown the Louis Philippe monarchy in February. According to an objective modern historian, the members of the Garde Mobile

owed their new lives to the Republic and . . . fought in its defense with a fury inflamed by the struggle itself. . . . They were thus as much workers as any generation at their age had ever been and . . . in terms of social composition the Garde Mobile could not be clearly distinguished from the Parisian lower classes.<sup>2</sup>

If the Garde Mobile bore the brunt of the savage battles which smashed the barricades and drowned the leftwing workers' uprising in blood, the reserve force that came to its support poured in from all the rest of France. Tocqueville and other observers were impressed by the fact that tens of thousands of volunteers from all classes in society took up arms and converged on Paris to defend the republic against what was regarded as a minority of subversives and extremists. Provincial loathing and distrust of the violent revolutionary temper of a large section of the Parisian working class was a heritage of the Reign of Terror of 1793. In many sections of the country, Paris itself was hated and regarded as an alien excrescence. The fact that the insurgent workers consisted to a large extent of foreigners resident in Paris and the further fact that they were influenced by the revolutionary doctrines of people like Proudhon and Blanqui (though hardly at all by those of Marx) added to the ferocity with which the uprising was put down.

Marx had to demonstrate that the June uprising had been a true people's revolution and that it had been suppressed by a conspiracy of evil forces. On November 7, 1848, Marx assured his readers that "*lazzaroni, Lumpenproletariat*, hired and armed—were used against the working and thinking proletarians." Another reason the Paris insurgents were defeated was that "the people, who are unorganized and poorly armed, are confronted by all the other social classes, who are well-organized and fully armed." Enraged at the defeats of the revolutionary cause to which he had devoted so much of his literary energy and in which he had invested such a large proportion of his paternal inheritance, Marx announced: "*We have no compassion and we ask no compassion from you. When our time comes, we shall not make excuses for the terror.*" There was "only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be *shortened*, and *that way is revolutionary terror.*"<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Marx favored relentless terror entirely on humanitarian grounds.

His paper was supported by the usual sort of "advanced" thinkers in the business community. Although these people considered themselves liberals, Marx was able to use the *NRZ* to attack freedom of speech and freedom of the press.<sup>5</sup>

The collapse of revolutions that might have swept Marx and his tiny faction from obscurity to power made him search for scapegoats and turn his rage upon them. This fury was mingled with an optimism that had so little relationship to reality that it can be characterized as delusional. In the November 7, 1848, article just quoted, he predicted that the military suppression of the Paris uprising and other revolts of the same sort would bankrupt the governments of Europe and this bankruptcy would be followed by total revolutionary triumph:

Assuming that *arms* will enable the counterevolution to establish itself in the whole of Europe, *money* would then kill it in the whole of Europe. European *bankruptcy*, *national bankruptcy* would be the fate nullifying the victory. Bayonets crumble like tinder when they come into contact with the salient "economic" facts.<sup>6</sup>

Reading the back issues of *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in relation to what was actually happening at the time, one has the strange feeling that Marx was almost totally blinded by his delusional view of the world. Thus on November 12 and 14, 1848, Marx informed his readers that "*the crowing of the Gallic cock in Paris will once again rouse Europe. . . . In Paris, the greatest struggle ever known in history is taking place. The bourgeoisie is leagued with the lazzaroni against the working class.*"

What was this titanic struggle? France had returned to peace. Electioneering was in progress. In that winter, 5,434,000 Frenchmen would vote for Louis Napoleon, 1,448,000 for the reactionary Cavaignac, and 37,000 for the radical Raspail. The titanic struggle that Marx was reporting was a minor riot caused by a few hundred hotheads that had been put down with no trouble. He concluded his article with the brilliant suggestion that all Germans should refuse to pay taxes. "*No taxes are due to a government that commits high treason,*" that is to say, one that declined to turn over power to his supporters. If everybody refused to pay taxes, Marx argued, all the governments of Europe would fall. Conceivably so. But the recommendation was grandiose because he had few readers and little influence on events.

Champions of Marx sometimes allege that he hated Russia and the other Slavic peoples solely because he believed czarism was the fountainhead of European reaction and the chief obstacle to a European revolution. This is simply untrue. If Marx was impartial in anything, he was impartial in his hatreds. They were general. On January 1, 1849, Marx branded England as the center and fountainhead of world counterrevolution. He predicted: "*A European war will be the first result of a successful workers' revolution in France. England will head the counterrevolutionary armies. . . .*" His joyous prediction for the New Year: "*The table of contents for 1849 reads: revolutionary rising of the French working class, world war.*"<sup>7</sup>

One reads this sort of thing with continuing amazement. How could a man who had almost invariably been wrong about the future continue to make these preposterous predictions as absolute certitudes? Perhaps the psychiatrist is better able to answer this question than the historian.

In the last issue of the paper, that of May 19, 1849, Marx's alter ego peered into the chicken entrails and revealed the future. The French army, he informed



his readers, "has declared for the revolution," an assertion that was not only false, but absurd. Engels continued:

War will come. Paris is on the threshold of revolution. . . . A few weeks, perhaps even a few days, will decide everything, and the French, the Magyar-Polish, and the German revolutionary armies will celebrate their fraternization on the battlefield before the walls of Berlin.<sup>9</sup>

The real state of affairs was somewhat different. The revolution was finished. Marx had thrown away his Prussian citizenship and was now a stateless person. He had squandered his patrimony on a dream. He had a wife and small children to support and was a tumbleweed on the surface of the earth without a business, without a profession, with countless enemies and few friends. All that he had to lose were his delusions.

## Notes

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Revolution of 1848–1849* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). *NRZ* June 27, 1848. Emphasis in the original.

2. Price, p. 185.

3. It will be recalled that Blanqui, the conspirator whom Marx admired, inspired the fastidious and aristocratic de Tocqueville with an overwhelming sense of physical revulsion. As I have pointed out, Blanqui was a coward who betrayed his organization and his comrades to the French police. His supporters were the sort of people one would expect to find behind this type of leader. A charter member of the conspiracy was Alphonse Toussenel, author of *The Jews as the Kings of the Epoch*, the sort of modern, political anti-Semite who influenced Adolf Hitler.

4. *NRZ*, November 7, 1848.

5. *NRZ*, September 17, 1848.

6. *NRZ*, November 7, 1848. Unless otherwise stated, emphasis is always as in the original.

7. *NRZ*, January 1, 1849.

8. *Idem*.

9. *NRZ*, May 19, 1849.

## How Marx Appeared to Contemporaries

The majority of the people who knew Marx and who have left us their impressions of him give a strikingly similar portrait of his character and personality. The dominant note is that of genius eaten alive by envy and hatred. The characteristics most frequently mentioned include malice, overbearing arrogance, unwillingness to tolerate any opinion other than his own, the desire to annihilate his opponents, and readiness to engage in lies and intrigues to achieve his objective. Since there is a considerable consensus of opinion, I shall give only a few examples.

One of the more interesting pen portraits comes from Carl Schurz who met Marx in 1848:

In the course of the summer, Kinkel and I were invited to represent the club at a congress of democratic associations in Cologne. This assembly, in which I remained a shy and silent observer, became remarkable to me in bringing me into personal contact with some of the prominent men of that period, among others, the leader of the communists, Karl Marx. He could not have been much more than thirty years old at that time, but he already was the recognized head of the advanced socialist school. The somewhat thick-set man, with his broad forehead, his very black hair and beard and his dark sparkling eyes, at once attracted general attention. He enjoyed the reputation of having acquired great learning, and as I knew very little of his discoveries and theories, I was all the more eager to gather words of wisdom from the lips of that famous man. This expectation was disappointed in a peculiar way. Marx's utterances were indeed full of meaning, logical and clear, but I have never seen a man whose bearing was so provoking and intolerable. To no opinion, which differed from his, he accorded the honor of even a condescending consideration. Everyone who contradicted him he treated with abject contempt; every argument that he did not like he answered either with biting scorn at the unfathomable ignorance that had prompted it, or

with opprobrious aspersions upon the motives of him who had advanced it. I remember most distinctly the cutting disdain with which he pronounced the word "bourgeois"; and as a "bourgeois," that is as a detestable example of deepest mental and moral degeneracy he denounced everyone that dared to oppose his opinion. Of course the propositions advanced or advocated by Marx in that meeting were voted down, because everyone whose feelings had been hurt by his conduct was inclined to support everything that Marx did not favor. It was very evident that not only had he not won any adherents, but had repelled many who otherwise might have become his followers.

From this meeting I took home with me a very important lesson: that he who would be a leader and teacher of men must treat the opinions of his hearers with respect, that even the most superior mind will lose influence upon others if it seeks to humiliate those others by constant demonstrations of his superiority. That public man will be most successful in enlightening and winning the ignorant who puts himself upon their standpoint, not with condescension, but with sympathy.<sup>1</sup>

### **Mikhail Bakunin**

Bakunin, the founder of modern European revolutionary anarchism, combined admiration for Marx's intellect with contempt for his character. "We met fairly often," Bakunin wrote, "because I very much admired him for his knowledge and for his passionate and earnest devotion to the cause of the proletariat, although it always had in it an admixture of personal vanity; and I eagerly sought his conversation, which was witty so long as it was not inspired by petty spite—which, unfortunately, happened very often. But there was never any real intimacy between us. Our temperaments did not allow it. He called me a sentimental idealist; and he was right. I called him morose, vain, and treacherous; and I too was right."<sup>2</sup> On another occasion, Bakunin observed: "In his capacity as a German and a Jew, he is an authoritarian from the tip of his head to his heel."<sup>3</sup>

Bakunin asserted that the State was inherently an organ of repression and that the proletarian state which Marx envisaged would be a more repressive agency than anything nineteenth century Europe had experienced. The Marxist "would-be people's State will be nothing else than despotic rule over the toiling masses by a new, numerically small aristocracy of genuine or sham scientists. The people lack learning and so they will be freed from the cares of government, will be wholly regimented into one common herd of governed people."<sup>4</sup> The Marxists "will divide the mass of people into two armies—industrial and agricultural armies under the direct command of the State engineers who will constitute the new privileged scientific political class."<sup>5</sup> In the Marxist system, "the peasant rabble" would form the bottom of the class pyramid. And "from a national point

of view, the Slavs, for instance, will assume, for precisely the same reason, the same position of slavish subjection to the victorious German proletariat which the latter now holds with respect to its own bourgeoisie.”<sup>6</sup>

In the powerful critique of Marx and Marxism which Bakunin wrote in 1872, he charged the Marxist clique with resorting to “odious falsehoods, character assassinations and plots against all who dared to disagree. . . .” He charged that Marx had transformed the First International into a totally undemocratic organization because of “personal vanity, the lust for power, and above all political ambition. . . .” Marx’s goal, he asserted, was a police state empowered to suppress “dangerous thoughts.”

Bakunin added: “Mr. Marx does not believe in God, but he believes deeply in himself. His heart is filled not with love, but with rancor. He has very little benevolence toward men and becomes just as furious and infinitely more spiteful than Mazzini when anyone dares question the omniscience of the divinity whom he adores, that is to say, Mr. Marx himself.”<sup>7</sup>

On a more personal level, Bakunin considered Marx a coward and that “Marx’s habitual weapon” was “not a sword . . . but a heap of filth.” Even after reaching fifty, Bakunin believed, Marx was still consumed by the ambition to head a world dictatorship which would mean “slavery within and interminable war without . . . would paralyze and falsify all the popular movements” and would stultify the creative forces of civilization.

## Ruge, Heinzen and Others

*The Holy Family* (1845) was one of many books which Marx, either with or without Engels’s aid, wrote to denigrate his former associates and comrades, to hold them up to ridicule and to destroy their characters. Arnold Ruge was disgusted at the “spiteful meanness” which Marx displayed in this work toward “a one-time intimate friend—and not one who is powerful and dangerous, but one who is dead.”<sup>8</sup> Ruge was one of the first people to call Marx a “calf-biter,” meaning a polemicist of the Jesuitical or Talmudic sort, who uses sophistic and hairsplitting methods to attack his opponents.

In the early 1840s, Marx had not yet learned to hide his lust for power. According to Schwartzschild, he made it quite plain to his fellow revolutionaries that

tomorrow they would all have to be conquered and pushed aside by him. In his most secret thoughts, he said to Proudhon, to Bakunin, to Weitling, even to the “good fellow” Moses Hess, what he had once been so fond of saying as he sat

over his wine in Cologne: I am going to annihilate you. "Baring his teeth and grinning, Marx will slaughter everybody who blocks his path," prophesied Ruge, who watched him angrily.<sup>9</sup>

Karl Peter Heinzen, a giant who had drifted from medicine to philology, to serving in the East Indies as a merchant seaman, was Marx's assistant on the old *Rheinische Zeitung* in the early 1840s. Heinzen's claim to a niche in some future hall of infamy is that he joyfully foresaw a world in which the techniques of science would be used for the liquidation of entire classes. Paradoxically, he was also a passionate advocate of rights for women. Marx liked him, but the feeling was not reciprocated. In his memoirs, Heinzen paid tribute to Marx's intellect, but added that he was "an untrustworthy egotist and a lying intriguer" who "wants only to exploit others" and was swayed more by envy than "by his own ambition."

After their day's work on the paper, Marx and Heinzen would frequently get drunk on wine. When sufficiently besotted, Heinzen recalled, Marx would turn suddenly on one of his fellow tipplers, announce, "I am going to annihilate you," and repeat the remark over and over again with profound satisfaction.<sup>10</sup>

One of things that most disagreeably impressed Heinzen about Marx was the dirty appearance of his face and clothes. Marx was unusually near-sighted and had to hold newspapers close to his face. The sharp, little cruel eyes seemed to Heinzen to be "spewing out spurts of wicked fire." Heinzen believed that Marx was totally unprincipled, had betrayed his comrades, was responsible for disastrous setbacks, and was eaten alive by the cancer of envy.<sup>11</sup> His detestation of Marx makes him a considerably less reliable witness than the more dispassionate Carl Schurz.

Even if one excludes the idolators Engels and Eleanor Marx-Aveling from consideration, not all the portraits are as savage as that of Karl Peter Heinzen. During the 1850s, the German émigré colony in London was penetrated by hordes of Prussian police spies, some of whom turned out to be accurate observers and acute practical psychologists. One of them, whose report came to light in 1922, apparently visited the Marx household in 1852. He gives a more pleasant picture of Marx than Ruge and Heinzen, probably because he encountered him *en famille*.

Marx was described as of middle height, thirty-four years old but already turning gray, and powerfully built.

Lately he does not shave at all. His large piercing fiery eyes have something demonically sinister about them. The first impression one receives is of a man of genius and energy. . . .

In private life, he is an extremely disorderly, cynical human being, and a bad host. . . . He leads a real gypsy existence. Washing, grooming and changing his linen are things he does rarely, and he is often drunk. Though he is often idle for days on end, he will work day and night with tireless endurance when he has a good deal of work to do. He has no fixed times for going to sleep and waking up. He often stays up all night, and then lies down fully clothed on the sofa at midday and sleeps till evening, untroubled by the whole world coming and going through the room. . . .

As father and husband, Marx, in spite of his wild and restless character, is the gentlest and mildest of men.

The spy goes on to describe the poverty, squalor and disorder of the Marx lodgings.

Everything is broken, tattered and torn, with a half inch of dust over everything and the greatest disorder everywhere. . . .

When you enter Marx's room, smoke and tobacco fumes make your eyes water so much that for a moment you seem to be groping about in a cavern. . . . Everything is dirty and covered with dust, so that to sit down becomes a thoroughly dangerous business.

A chair offered the visitor may have only three legs or be smeared with the children's food, but none of this disturbs Marx.

You are received in the most friendly way and cordially offered pipes and tobacco and whatever else there may happen to be; and eventually a spirited and agreeable conversation arises to make amends for all the domestic deficiencies, and this makes the discomfort tolerable.<sup>12</sup>

The unknown spy saw the more genial and agreeable side of Marx. Since his errand was to obtain information for his employers, it can safely be assumed that he took pains not to disagree with anything his host said and presented himself in the guise of a potential convert to the cause.

## Notes

1. Schurz, pp. 20-21.

2. E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London: Macmillan, 1937), p. 129.



3. Nomad, p. 151.
4. G. P. Maximoff (ed.), *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1953), p. 287.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 288.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 286–87.
7. Sam Dolgoff, ed., *Bakunin on Anarchy* (New York: Knopf, 1972), pp. 292–93, 307, 317, 320. (Mazzini was a devout Christian, Bakunin a militant atheist.)
8. Schwartzschild, p. 108.
9. Schwartzschild, p. 98.
10. Schwartzschild, p. 64, citing the original source (unfortunately not available to me), Karl Heinzen's *Erlebtes*.
11. Payne, *Marx*, pp. 154–55, also citing *Erlebtes*.
12. Payne, *Marx*, pp. 251–52.

## The Revelations of Gustav Techow

The most serious charges ever made against Karl Marx's intellectual integrity were contained in a letter to comrades written by Lieutenant Gustav Techow on August 26, 1850, in order to give to his revolutionary associates in Switzerland and elsewhere a full report of a long and revealing conversation he had had with Marx a few days earlier. These charges are much more than the usual assertions that Marx would stoop to lies, calumnies, blackmail, and intrigue to attain his revolutionary ends. They went far deeper. Techow contended that Marx's whole revolutionary philosophy was a swindle, that he regarded every individual and every class in society with contempt with the sole exception of the aristocracy, and that he had invented his philosophy of dialectical materialism solely to satisfy inordinate ambitions for personal power. Techow was not merely saying that Marx used unsavory means to achieve his ends. He went far beyond that; he asserted that Marx's life from beginning to end was a living lie.

Considering the seriousness of the charge and what is known about the relationship between Techow and Marx in 1850, the reader might have supposed that conscientious Marx biographers, regardless of their political persuasion, would have carefully evaluated these accusations.

This is not the case. Schwartzschild<sup>1</sup> and Payne<sup>2</sup> treat the episode fairly and clearly. Mehring<sup>3</sup> and Rühle<sup>4</sup> misrepresent Techow's charges. Among the more modern biographers, Seigel and Padover do not even mention Techow.

Gustav Techow was a Prussian lieutenant who sympathized with the 1848 revolution and was one of the commanding officers who surrendered the Berlin arsenal when it was attacked by the insurgents. Sentenced to 15 years fortress confinement, he escaped and became one of the two outstanding military leaders

of the revolution in Baden, the other being Marx's enemy and rival for the role of future German revolutionary dictator, August von Willich.

Techow fled Germany and was sent from Switzerland by the revolutionary émigrés there to contact the central organization in London. "Techow arrived in London at the end of August 1850. . . . A few days after his arrival in London, he had a long rendezvous in a *Weinhaus* with Engels, Schramm and me [Marx] until late at night at which we were the hosts."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Marx, in his attempted refutation of the Techow charges, corroborates the fact that they did have a long meeting and that Techow's letter-report, which is dated August 26, 1850, was written within a few days of the event.

Marx and his two associates wanted Techow to serve as their military representative on the London revolutionary committee so they could displace August von Willich and ensure that, in the revolutionary revival which they believed imminent, the Marx faction and not the Willich faction would play the dominating role.<sup>6</sup> As Techow put it:

Wednesday evening, I was with Marx, . . . and . . . together.<sup>7</sup> They put all possible pressure on me, I cannot imagine why, for I can't see what we soldiers can do for them. At the moment certainly, they don't need us. Marx said to me that they urgently need another great military figure to be protected against the one-sidedness of Willich, and asked me without further ado to become a member of their central committee.<sup>8</sup>

Techow complained about a circular that had been published in Leipzig, he believed by the Marx group, which gave the names of revolutionary activists who were thus "compromised and degraded." At this point, Vogt inserted a footnote that the offending publication had been put out by Marx's henchman, Wilhelm ("Lupus") Wolff, and had immediately fallen into the hands of the Hanover police.

Marx said that to create a "broad proletarian party" all "sentimentality" must be cast aside and "not only must all alien influences be excluded, but all people who in any way oppose his group must be bitterly persecuted." He said that all people who looked for positions and honors under present circumstances would be corrupted and become traitors. Marx "for himself wished nothing more than to be eternally in the opposition." He talked about "the old class-shit," an expression which rubbed Techow the wrong way. He asked Techow to state categorically whether he was with him or against him. The latter promised to think things over and come up with a decision shortly.

## The Gist of the Matter

Techow then proceeded to the heart of the matter:

Let me try to give you the gist of our conversation. It is impossible for me to indicate to you the lively exchange of ideas, the rising warmth of the discussion, or to describe to you how Marx himself dominated everything. We drank first port, then claret, that is to say, red Bordeaux, then champagne. After the red wine, he was completely drunk. And that was what I wished because then he would open his heart and reveal himself as he really was. I gained certainty about things that previously had been mere suspicions. Despite his condition, he dominated the discussion right to the very end.

He gave me the impression of both outstanding intellectual superiority and a most impressive personality. If he had had as much heart as brain, as much love as hate, I would have gone through fire with him despite the fact that he not only did not hide his contempt for me, but at the end was quite explicit about it. He is the first and only one of us with the necessary ability to rule and to handle great affairs without losing himself in small ones.

I regret, because of our cause, that this man does not have, together with his outstanding intelligence, a noble heart to place at our disposal. I am convinced that everything good in him has been devoured by the most dangerous personal ambitions. He laughs at the fools who repeat after him his proletarian catechism, just as he laughs at communists of the Willich sort, and also at the bourgeoisie.<sup>9</sup>

The only ones that he respects are the aristocrats, the real ones, the ones who are conscious of their position. To wrest power from them, he needs a force of his own which he finds solely in the proletariat and this is the reason he has created his system. Despite all his assurances to the contrary, perhaps precisely because of them, I left with the impression that personal domination is the end-all of his every activity. Even his old associates are despite their considerable talents well beneath and behind him and should they ever dare to forget that, he will put them back in their places with the impudence worthy of a Napoleon.<sup>11</sup>

Techow continued: "Marx added, officers are always the most dangerous people in revolutions. They always try to take personal power and extend it. From Lafayette to Napoleon, they have produced a chain of traitors and treasons. One must be ready to take care of them with dagger and poison." He went on to say that they have merely military training, are "nothing other than stupid, brutal implements of force," and are unfit to lead revolutions. He added that Techow was one of them.

## Marx's Answer

Marx's rejoinder to these charges is contained in the pages of his tedious book, *Herr Vogt*. The Marx rebuttal is about three times as long as Vogt's original publication, containing the Techow letter. Marx located Techow in Australia and received a letter from him dated April 17, 1860 in which Techow said; "I never had occasion to authorize Mr. Karl Vogt to make use of the letter."<sup>12</sup> Marx expatiates at length on the fact that the letter was published without Techow's consent. This is very probably true, but it constitutes an indirect admission by Marx that the letter is authentic, that is to say, that Vogt quoted Techow correctly. For if Techow had been misquoted, he would have so informed Marx, and Marx would have publicized that fact.

Marx then goes to great length to refute Techow's charge that Marx provoked a duel with his archenemy, Willich, and then had a much younger man, Rudolf Schramm, take his place on the so-called field of honor. Whether Marx's version of the affair or Techow's version is true need not concern us. It is obvious that Marx was stung with the imputation of physical cowardice, a charge that had been made against him on previous occasions.

Finally, he turns to the gravamen of the charge that his whole philosophy is a swindle in which he himself does not believe and which he uses solely to gratify pathological power ambitions—that he despises his Communist and proletarian associates and really admires only the aristocracy.

The first line Marx takes is to ridicule Techow as an ignoramus, who understands nothing of his scientific socialist theories. He points out that Techow has not read his [Marx's] books in which he expounds his doctrines and possibly could not understand them if he tried. But all this is, of course, irrelevant. Techow did not contend that Marx's theories were erroneous. He contended that Marx was a swindler who did not believe in them.

Marx's second line of defense was that he had had only one really long meeting with Techow. "Yet he immediately saw through me and my friends, head, heart and kidneys, and hurried behind our backs to send a psychological pocket characterization of us to Switzerland which was recommended for cautious and secret dissemination among 'friends.'"<sup>13</sup>

But the question was not how well Techow knew Marx, but whether Techow had accurately reported what Marx said.

Marx added with a flourish: "Techow writes a great deal about my 'heart'. Magnanimously, I shall not follow him into this territory."<sup>14</sup>

Marx's rebuttal is not convincing. People reveal things to comparative stran-

gers when they have had too much to drink that they would never dream of saying when sober. Often, they are more ready to bare their hearts to casual acquaintances than to intimates about their most secretly guarded hopes, fears, and feelings. As for Marx's ridiculing Techow's concern about whether he had a noble or ignoble heart, it was characteristic of him that he should consider the whole issue sentimental nonsense. To most people, whether or not a man has integrity is of crucial importance.

Finally, some of the things that Techow alleged Marx told him are too close to the secret judgments which Marx revealed to others on different occasions for us to dismiss them out of hand.

Marx quoted Techow: "More Marx: The army officers in revolutions are always the most dangerous ones, from Lafayette to Napoleon, they form a chain of traitors and treasons. One must be ready to deal with them with dagger and poison."<sup>15</sup> Marx replied that the disloyalty of officers was not one of his original discoveries and that the remedy of poison and the dagger was romantic, archaic, and sentimental.

## The Charges of Karl Vogt

Techow's letter was published in a searing attack on Karl Marx by Dr. Karl Vogt. These charges are usually dismissed offhand by Marx biographers on the grounds that Vogt was an insignificant pedant, an adventurer, a police spy, or something of the sort. Even Saul K. Padover, in his generally excellent and accurate biography of Marx, characterizes Vogt as "a provincial German pedant-politician, teaching geography in Geneva. . . ."<sup>16</sup>

These judgments are inaccurate and unjust. Karl Vogt, at the time a professor of geology, had been "one of the leaders of the left-wing in the Frankfurt Assembly together with Robert Blum; in fact, one of the last acts of the dying parliament had been to appoint him one of the five Reich Regents."<sup>17</sup> In short, Vogt's role in the German Revolution of 1848-49 was considerably more important, more prominent, and more exposed to danger than that of Marx. Vogt collaborated with Louis Agassiz, one of the leading naturalists of the nineteenth century, wrote about half a dozen scientific books, and was one of the main disseminators of Darwin's theory of evolution on the European continent. He discovered the phenomenon of convergent evolution and is cited more than once in Darwin's *Descent of Man*.

His attack on Marx was provoked by the fact that the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, an anti-Semitic paper, had claimed that Vogt was a paid secret agent of Napoleon



III. Vogt assumed that the charge originated with Marx since the London correspondent of the paper was Marx's faithful henchman, Wilhelm Liebknecht.<sup>18</sup>

The accusation was probably correct. When the archives of the Napoleon III's regime were opened after its overthrow, it was discovered that secret payments had been made to a man identified merely as "Vogt." Karl Vogt had had hopes that Napoleon would pursue revolutionary policies and had supported him during the early years of his regime, only to turn against him later. Just as Lassalle had believed that he could transform Bismarck into a socialist chancellor, so many of the defeated insurgents of 1848 had initially supported Napoleon III.

In his 1859 book, Vogt charged that Marx's "sulphur gang . . . provoked police investigation and police persecution" of "hundreds of fine men."<sup>19</sup> He added that Marx had attacked Willich, the military leader of the 1849 uprising in the German Palatinate because Willich wanted to settle down, marry, have children, abandon the revolution and lead a normal bourgeois existence.

Vogt also asserted that Marx's conspiratorial organization was riddled with police agents and possibly in clandestine contact with the police:

Let me say clearly that anyone who involves himself in any way in Marx's political machinations will fall sooner or later into the hands of the police: these intrigues were betrayed to the secret police from the beginning, known to them, and hatched by them at the appropriate time. Meanwhile, the instigators, Marx and Company, sat safely in London.<sup>20</sup>

That the Marx-Engels organization was saturated with police agents was factually correct. The Cologne organization, the only strong group Marx controlled on the Continent, was arrested and put on trial. As for Marx personally, he had unwittingly had dealings with Russian and Prussian police agents in the past and sold one of his books to a Hungarian secret police agent.

## Notes

1. Schwartzschild, pp. 226-27.
2. Payne, *Marx*, pp. 320-22.
3. Mehring, p. 199.

4. Rühle, p. 158.
5. Karl Marx, *Herr Vogt* (Leipzig: Rudolf Liebing, 1860, 1927), pp. 32, 40.
6. Johann August Ernst von Willich was a Prussian lieutenant who had joined the 1848 revolution. As commandant of the Palatinate partisans and People's Guard, he besieged the fortress of Landau. A charge of high treason, carrying death, hung over his head. He was regarded as a revolutionary hero by the Germans who actually fought in 1848–49 and as a dangerous rival for future power in a revolutionary Germany by Marx and Engels.
7. The dots refer to Friedrich Engels and Rudolf Schramm, who were present with Marx. Their names were not given lest the letter fall into the hands of the police.
8. Karl Vogt, *Mein Prozess gegen die Allgemeine Zeitung* (Geneva: privately printed, 1859), p. 141. The Techow letter is at pp. 141–59.
9. It was at about this time that Marx and Engels were referring privately to “the stupid workers . . . the asses . . . the red communist mob.”
10. E is, of course, Engels. Initials were used lest the letter fall into the hands of the police.
11. Vogt, *Mein Prozess*, quoting the Techow letter.
12. Marx, *Herr Vogt*, p. 32.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
14. *Ibid.*,
15. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
16. Padover, p. 324.
17. Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 307.
18. Vogt made this interesting incidental comment: “As an interesting psychological contribution to the Jew-hatred of the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, I note merely that all the people I have named [as important in it] were born Jews.” Vogt, pp. 166–67.
19. Vogt, pp. 140–41.
20. Vogt, pp. 166–67.

# 24

## The Terrorist Phase

When Marx arrived in London as a refugee in August 1849, his first political action was to attempt to reconstitute the Communist League. This meant creating a conspiratorial organization on an international scale composed of extreme leftwing direct-action and anti-democratic elements. His French associates were mainly adherents of Auguste Blanqui. His handful of British supporters came from the far-out left of the moribund Chartist movement. The nature of this conspiratorial organization and the character of its membership were among the reasons for Karl Marx's almost total enforced isolation from the émigré leaders of the defeated 1848 revolution, that is to say, the leaders who had fought for national independence, democratic rights and individual freedom. These men enjoyed international reputations. They ranged from Giuseppe Mazzini in Italy to Lajos Kossuth in Hungary to men like Carl Schurz and Gottfried Kinkel in Germany, to Alexander Herzen from Russia, and to Louis Blanc in France.

Marx believed that a new round of European revolutions was imminent. He decided that he and his supporters had failed to influence events in 1848 because they had concealed their antidemocratic objectives in order to try to flow with the mainstream. As Marx saw it, the bourgeoisie had ignored and betrayed them. The time had come for a drastic transformation of revolutionary strategy and tactics. They must organize along conspiratorial lines as an independent force and a disciplined secret party. The Communists must drive the revolution forward stage by stage toward proletarian power and relentlessly oppose all efforts by the bourgeoisie to end the revolution and reestablish order and stability.

## Marx on Permanent Revolution

In March 1850, Marx disseminated among his small international band of followers an extraordinary document from the Central Committee of the Communist League which is generally known as *A Plan of Action against Democracy*.

The plan states: "While the democratic petty bourgeoisie intend to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less possessing classes are driven from power, until the proletariat has conquered state power" and become strong enough to seize the decisive means of production. "For us, it cannot be a question of changing private property, but only of its destruction, not of glossing over class antagonisms, but of abolishing classes, not of bettering existing society, but of founding a new one."<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the organization, Marx declared, was "the overthrow of all privileged classes," their subordination to the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and the continuation of this class dictatorship in power until communism, "the last organizational form of the human family," is established throughout. Members of the party were obligated to work for these objectives in local groups under the control of an international central committee.

The peasants were considered petty bourgeois, a class doomed to be forced out of existence. The estates on which they work were to be turned over to the state. They were to pay the rents and mortgages, formerly due to the landlords, to the state. They were to become rural proletarians, in effect, on state farms.

In this epochal document, which is very close to the strategy and tactics pursued by Lenin and Trotsky in Russia in 1917, Marx unequivocally endorsed terror and acts of individual assassination: "Far from opposing so-called excesses, instances of popular revenge against hated individuals or public buildings with only hateful memories attached to them, it is necessary not merely to tolerate them, but even to take a leading part in them."<sup>2</sup>

## Political Assassinations?

A program of this sort always attracts desperate men and criminal types. In fact, the recruitment of criminals may be necessary to its implementation. This was certainly the case in the history of the Bolshevik party. The so-called expropriations (in many cases, bank robberies with murder) perpetrated by Stalin and his subordinates in Transcaucasia under the czarist regime were denounced by other socialists as common crimes.

One of the criminal-revolutionaries involved with Marx's Communist League was a French exile named Emmanuel Barthélemy. He was a pathologically violent creature who was believed to have committed several murders. Like Karl Heinzen, he considered that murder and genocide were essential elements in revolutionary action. One of the projects that most absorbed his imagination was the assassination of Napoleon III. He planned to smuggle himself into France, gain access to the French emperor by attending a ball at the Tuilleries, and there kill him either with a dagger or with poisoned bullets.<sup>3</sup> In 1850, Marx broke with August von Willich over the strategy of the Communist League and Barthélemy predictably allied himself with the more violent Willich faction. However, prior to the split between the two leaders, there is reason to believe that Barthélemy may have discussed his plot to murder Napoleon III with Marx. The reason to suspect this is an otherwise enigmatic letter which Marx wrote Engels on December 15, 1854.

That morning, the *London Times* had given a full report on a coroner's inquest which charged Barthélemy with a double murder. The French revolutionary terrorist had called at the house of an acquaintance, accompanied by a woman. According to the maid, the two men had been on a friendly basis. Suddenly, Barthélemy drew a pistol, pressed it against his host's eye and blew out the latter's brains. Barthélemy fled. When a public-spirited citizen seized him, Barthélemy shot the man fatally in his belly. He pistol-whipped another of his pursuers, but was finally captured and subdued. His female companion vanished. At the inquest, Barthélemy refused to reveal his name, his address, his motive for the dual murder, or any other information. The authorities, however, established his identity without much difficulty. Searching his lodgings they found incriminating documents, which were not relevant to the murders and hence were not disclosed to the coroner's jury. They also found that a cavity had been dug in the floor of Barthélemy's lodgings possibly intended for the disposal of a corpse.

On the same day that this report appeared, Marx wrote: "Barthélemy's end is glorious.<sup>4</sup> In yesterday's trial (rather coroner's inquest) it was revealed that significant papers, though not relevant to the murder, had been found at his place. It would have been annoying if papers from the old days had been among them which would have connected us with a fellow, who had bragged that he had 'saved' a bullet for us should he return from Paris."<sup>5</sup>

This letter is rather confusing and Engels' reply sheds no further light on the matter. Evidently Marx and Engels knew that Barthélemy planned to go to Paris to murder the French emperor and feared that "documents from the old days" would reveal their guilty knowledge of that fact. The statement that Barthélemy was reserving a bullet for them *if* he should return to Paris seems a bit odd since,

after killing Napoleon, Barthélemy would be unlikely to escape the French police and still more unlikely to be able to return to London.

## **Karl and Victoria**

Did Karl Marx plan the assassination of Queen Victoria? On the face of it, the question seems so absurd as not to warrant a serious answer. The whole idea conflicts with the mythical Marx figure created by Engels after Marx's death and perpetuated by a retinue of worshipful leftist liberals, fellow travellers and academic sycophants. It conflicts with the picture of Marx as a kindly and loving husband, a valiant fighter for human justice too noble to be involved in anything petty or spiteful, an intrepid scholar who was persecuted by the vicious capitalists, but loved by millions of humble working people, and so forth, and so forth.

In his 1968 biography of Karl Marx, Robert Payne produced substantial evidence that Marx was probably implicated in at least advocating, and perhaps attempting to organize, the assassination of Queen Victoria. This documentary evidence has been consistently ignored by almost all of Marx's later biographers, presumably because it conflicts with the official Marx image so violently that to give it the serious evidential analysis that it deserves would invite savagely hostile reviews from the organized left and would adversely affect book sales and royalties. I find it disheartening that even the dispassionate and scholarly Saul K. Padover chose to ignore Payne's revelations in his mammoth 1978 biography of Marx.<sup>6</sup>

When Marx arrived in London in 1850, the city was swarming with agents of the Prussian government who rapidly and effectively penetrated the revolutionary and terrorist movements of the German exile communities. These agents were under the general direction of Wilhelm Stieber, a German lawyer of humble origins, who was the first person to organize a modern secret service system and whose brilliant intelligence work would ensure the lightning victory of Prussia over the French armies of Napoleon III in 1870.<sup>7</sup> Stieber's methods were to penetrate the revolutionary organizations and recruit activists from their ranks into the police, usually by threats of exposure or offers of financial reward. He relied on massive espionage infiltration—as does the Soviet secret service, which follows Stieber's general *modus operandi*—so that the reports of one group of spies could be checked against those of others.

On May 24, 1850, Baron Otto von Manteuffel, the Prussian minister of the interior, handed a confidential report to the British ambassador in Berlin, General John Fane, Earl of Westmorland. Sixty-six years old at the time, Westmorland was regarded as second rate by some of his associates, but had had a long



and apparently distinguished career in the Napoleonic wars and in the British diplomatic service.<sup>8</sup>

The report, which Payne found in the archives of the Foreign Office, consists of thirteen pages in holograph and is dated London, 2 May 1850. Describing the various revolutionary societies operating in London, it concentrated on the one dominated by "Marx, Wolff, Engels, Vidil" as the most dangerous. The report stated that this organization had a secret apparatus and proceeded:

The secret committee is divided again into two Sections, the one composed of the Leaders and the other of the so-called "Blindmen" who are from 18 to 20 in number and are men of great daring and courage. They are not to take part in disturbances, but are reserved for great occasions and principally for the murder of Princes. . . . Wolff declared in the meeting of the evening before last [which the author-spy said he attended] "The English want what we do, an Orator [of the Chartist Society] has loudly proclaimed, we want not only the Social Democratic Republic, *but something more*. You therefore see (said Wolff), that the English Mooncalf with Her Princely Urchins must go the way we mean to send all crowned Monarchs." Upon which one well-dressed man cried out "You mean hanging, Citizen—another the guillotine."

The month of May or June was spoken of for striking the chief blow at Paris. Before the close of the meeting Marx told his audience that they might be perfectly tranquil, their men were everywhere at their Posts. The eventful moment was approaching and infallible measures are taken so that not one of the European crowned Executioners can escape. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Payne argues for the authenticity of this report on several grounds. For one thing, Queen Victoria is twice referred to as a "Mooncalf." Marx and his circle used this term to characterize monarchs. Writing Marx on December 3, 1851, Engels calls Napoleon III a "moon calf."<sup>10</sup>

Now this is an incorrect use of the term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *moon-calf* as "an abortive shapeless fleshy mass in the womb; a false conception"—this being the sense in which the expression was used on several occasions by Shakespeare and later by Carlyle. Other meanings given are "one born with undeveloped brain; a congenital idiot; a born fool" and "a 'moonning' absent-minded person." None of these meanings applied either to Queen Victoria or to the European crowned heads of the day. Marx's peculiar use of the term reflected either his imperfect grasp of the English language or his abusive style.

We have no means of determining at this date whether the unknown spy's report was accurate or exaggerated to increase his own importance to his employers. Nor have I had opportunity to search British official records of the time to see what Palmerston did about the matter. But the chronology is fairly suggestive.

As the year 1850 advanced, the little terrorist and revolutionary organizations of Germans in both London and Cologne were subjected to increasing saturations of police infiltration and surveillance. The Prussian police report dealing with Marx's alleged proposal to assassinate Queen Victoria had been dated May 2 and handed to the Earl of Westmorland in Berlin twenty days later. If the British government was equally dilatory, at least another month may have passed before action was taken.

The chronology of Marx's conversion from active terrorism in support of an imminent European revolution to quiet scholarship suggests what may have occurred. Sometime in March 1850, Marx had issued his inflammatory *A Plan of Action Against Democracy*, which directed his fellow conspirators to welcome, guide and encourage "popular vengeance against hated individuals"—in plain English, murder. On September 15, 1850, barely six months later, Marx split with the activists in the Communist League on the grounds that the revolutionary tide had ebbed and that any direct action would be foolhardy. He maneuvered to have the command of the organization shifted to Germany where the little revolutionary organization expired.

The reasons Marx gave for this *volte face* were that the influx of California gold and other factors had killed the revolution and a new period of stabilization of capitalism was beginning. The prophecy was for once correct, but Marx's conversion to quiescence was so sudden that it seems suspect.

It would be interesting to know whether Marx was approached officially and told to abandon his terrorist plans or face either expulsion from England or criminal prosecution. A warning of this sort would have been quite in order since he was married to a member of the Prussian aristocracy. The European aristocracy of the Victorian era had an *esprit de corps* and sense of solidarity that transcended national frontiers and which applied even to those of its members who had contracted ghastly marriages with their social inferiors.

When Marx split and destroyed the small revolutionary movement, he was attacked by the activists in their usual terms as a "calf-biter," a pedant, a false prophet, an arrogant intellectual who shirked danger, an intriguer who won factional struggles because he had access to rich friends, a man who attracted police agents the way a dog attracts fleas and in such a way that these agents eventually penetrated and destroyed the real working class groups. Marx and Engels told each other that the isolation in which they now found themselves was a positive advantage and a moral victory. The emigration of the defeated 1848ers, Engels wrote Marx, "inevitably makes a fool, an ass and a scoundrel of anyone who does not withdraw entirely from it. It is indeed a school for scandal and meanness." As for their revolutionary followers, "what do we want with a party, a gang of asses who swear by us because they imagine

that we are the same kind of people that they are?"<sup>11</sup>

Quite a few of the defeated activists went to the United States. Those who remained formed the only really viable revolutionary organization that Marx had created on the European continent—the Cologne group—and this was penetrated by police spies. Its activists were arrested, tried, convicted, and sent to prison.

If the British government credited the report that Marx's group was advocating or planning the murder of Queen Victoria and other crowned heads, why did it not take stronger action? The English liberal tradition and the widespread sympathy for the defeated 1848 revolution militated against that course. Possibly, the British police regarded Marx as more of a talker than a doer and doubted that his group had the organization, ability and courage to make an actual attempt on the British queen. A search in British government archives available to scholars might yield an interesting answer to this question.

## Notes

1. I have used the translations in Nomad, pp. 98–100, and Payne, *Marx*, pp. 240–41.
2. Nomad, p. 100.
3. Payne, *Marx*, pp. 243–44.
4. Although he had studied law at the university, Marx apparently believed that the coroner's verdict was tantamount to a trial conviction for murder.
5. Marx to Engels, December 15, 1864.
6. Saul K. Padover, *Karl Marx, an Intimate Biography* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).
7. Bernard Newman, *Epics of Espionage* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), pp. 31–37; also Wermuth and Wilhelm Stieber, *Die Communisten-Verschwörungen des 19ten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1853; reissued Hildesheim: Olms, 1969).
8. Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington* (London: Panther, 1972), p. 370n.
9. See Payne, *Marx*, pp. 234–35, for full text.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Engels to Marx, February 12, 1851. Until his dying breath, Marx voiced his secret contempt for the workers who followed him. In his last letters, he frequently called his German comrades "bums." On the other hand, Frederick the Great was "a man who thought like a philosopher and behaved like a king." Nomad, pp. 138, 143.

## Marx and Engels: A Symbiotic Union

The lifelong relationship between Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels is one of the most remarkable examples of intellectual collaboration and close friendship in modern history. Most Marx scholars have tended either to assume virtual identity between the two men or else to regard Engels as definitely a subordinate and less creative figure.<sup>1</sup> Throughout his life, Engels did everything possible to promulgate the latter view. In his 1888 preface to an English edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels wrote: "the fundamental proposition which forms its nucleus belongs to Marx. . . ." On another occasion, he observed that Marx could have achieved everything he did without his help. He saw himself as a man destined "to play second fiddle." A biographer comments: "In 1880, he wrote to his disciple, Edward Bernstein, with reference to Marx, that he did not understand how one could be jealous of a genius. 'Genius is such an exceptional thing that we who have it not always know that we cannot attain it.'"<sup>2</sup>

Engels found subordination to an authority figure psychologically necessary; if he had not found Marx, he would have discovered some other man to serve and deify. Thus, as a teen-ager, he characterized Ludwig Börne as the "John the Baptist" of the age and wrote that he would be content to be "a sparrow" perched on "the oak, Börne, on whose branches I have climbed. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Born in 1820, two years after Marx, Engels descended from prosperous Pietist industrialists of peasant origin who had lived in the Wuppertal for two centuries and had acquired cotton mills in Manchester, Barmen, and Engelskirchen. Although he was denied the educational opportunities that Marx enjoyed, after graduating from the *gymnasium* at sixteen or seventeen, he worked in the family business as a sort of clerk, meanwhile learning half a dozen foreign languages, reading extensively, and publishing pseudonymous satires and literary and political criticisms in the German press.

Marx was exempted from military service as tubercular, but Engels was sent to Berlin by parents alarmed by his radical views to do his stint as an artillery officer. Here, the 20-year-old Engels was accepted as a prominent figure in the Berlin coterie of young radical Hegelians. Moses Hess converted Engels to socialism at twenty-three and Marx shortly thereafter. Marx and Engels met for the second time in August 1844 and began their lifelong collaboration. Later that year, Engels wrote and published *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, a study of labor conditions based on first-hand observations of the Manchester scene and on extensive documentation for other areas. While essentially propaganda, the book was far more factual and realistic than most efforts of the sort.

### **A Case of Communist Exploitation**

From then until Marx's death four decades later, Engels subordinated his own writing to assisting Marx and ghosting work for which Marx took credit. During this long period, he served Marx with unrelenting devotion and allowed his personality to be dominated in ways that most men would have found intolerable. It was only after Marx's death that Engels became a prolific author of works on socialism. The nature of this relationship can be clarified by indicating some of the ways in which Engels allowed himself to become an appendage of Marx.

By chaining himself to a family cotton business which he regarded as boring, odious and a form of slavery, Engels largely supported Marx during most of the latter's adult life. This servitude lasted for two decades and kept the Marx family alive. In June 1869, when he was almost fifty, Engels finally sold his business interests and became a free man.<sup>4</sup> He settled a lifetime allowance of 350 pounds a year on his friend, enabling the Marx family to spend the rest of their lives in middle-class comfort.<sup>5</sup>

When Marx became European correspondent for the *New-York Daily Tribune*, he prevailed upon Engels to write a third of the articles which Marx signed and for which Marx was paid. The rest Marx wrote himself in a crabbed and almost illegible hand. Jenny Marx remained a lifelong slave to the task of copying out her husband's writings. These copies were then sent to Engels, who translated them from German into English. In time, Marx learned enough English to write in that language.

But why did Marx not learn to write legibly? Certainly, it was not a task beyond his mental abilities. Engels wrote legibly because he had nobody to do his copying for him. Did Marx perpetuate this type of helplessness as a means of chaining his wife and friend more closely to him, transforming them into

adjuncts and mere projections of himself? Was this one of the reasons Marx consistently avoided becoming a financially independent man? Does it help explain his continuous complaints to Engels about agonizing afflictions of every sort, ranging from headaches, to liver troubles, to hemorrhoids, tumors, toothaches, eye inflammations, influenza, fevers and colds, rheumatism, boils, abscesses, and festering carbuncles which afflicted almost every part of his anatomy, including his penis? Certainly some, perhaps all, of these ailments were real enough. Nevertheless, one is reminded of the egocentric parent who always seems to be at death's door to make his children feel guilty if they try to lead independent lives of their own.

This relationship was entered into voluntarily on both sides. Its nature explains Engels's failure to tell Marx that he had a business to run, that he was already supporting him, and that he refused to serve in addition as his translator and ghost writer.

### Sex Life and Family

Another "sacrifice" that Engels willingly made was to avoid marriage and to live an emotionally stunted life. Instead of having children of his own, he gave his affection and support to Marx's children and their children. Conceivably, Engels was sterile, but this would not explain the fact that he never formed a close emotional attachment to a woman with whom he could communicate emotionally and intellectually as an equal.<sup>6</sup>

Marx generally involved himself with women of somewhat higher status than his own—a countess, a pseudocountess, and the young daughter of a banker. Engels did the opposite. In his early twenties, he began a liaison with Mary Burns, a Manchester Irish working-class girl. This lasted until her sudden death from a heart attack some twenty years later. For the next fifteen years or so, Engels lived on the same basis with Mary's sister, Lizzie. He may have married Lizzie on her death bed; if so, the ceremony was clandestine. The Burns girls were the daughters of a dyer. They were functional illiterates who could not be presented as Engels's companions in Manchester society. Hence, Engels kept two households strictly apart. As a young man, he was also normally promiscuous, but almost always with *grisettes*, peasant or working-class girls. These seem to have been purely sexual encounters in which money frequently changed hands. He wrote Marx on March 9, 1846: "If I had 5,000 francs income, I would do nothing but work and amuse myself with the women until I became *kaputt*." In old age, Engels explained these relationships as due to his preference for the proletariat over the capitalist class and at least one of his biographers swallowed



this explanation whole hog, adding that Engels opposed the institution of marriage on principle.<sup>7</sup>

Marx was contemptuous of Lizzie Burns as "an illiterate Irish woman."<sup>8</sup> When Engels found a small bundle of letters among Lizzie's effects, he said: "Burn them. I need not see her letters. I know she would not deceive me." A friend remarked maliciously to Eleanor Marx that, since Engels had to write all of Lizzie's letters for her and read the replies aloud to her, the burned correspondence "contained no secrets from him—but they might do so for her."<sup>9</sup>

Engels's common-law marriages with the Burns girls aroused all of the prudish intolerance of Jenny Marx. Stefan Born wrote about her behavior during a Christmas party given in 1847 by a Brussels workers' club: "Among those present were Marx, who came with his wife, and Engels, who brought—his lady. The two couples were at either end of a large room. When I greeted Marx, he indicated by a significant glance and a smile that his wife would under no circumstances meet Engels's companion. In matters of honor and morals, the noble lady was quite intransigent."<sup>10</sup>

Marx acquiesced in his wife's rudeness. Engels "was always a welcome guest at the Marx home, but—since Jenny Marx disapproved of people living together as man and wife without being married—he was never able to bring Mary Burns with him."<sup>11</sup> Although Engels was paying for their house, he was not free to bring his mistress to it. In addition, Jenny Marx addressed him all her life as Mr. Engels. On receiving a financial windfall, one of Jenny Marx's first acts was to have calling cards printed, designating herself as *née* Baroness von Westphalen.

Contemporaries described Engels as tall, handsome, well-built, gracious though aloof. He was financially independent, a fine horseman, an amateur musician, a competent cartoonist, an excellent writer, a capable businessman, and a person of wide-ranging interests. He was not the sort of man who would have had any difficulty finding a wife who shared his intellectual gifts and his revolutionary convictions. Yet he chose women as his life-companions who were unable to read and write. One might suppose the reason to be that he regarded women as inferior and as mere sexual objects, but both his writings and his relationship to Marx's daughters rebut this.

Engels may have been emotionally incapable of any close relationship with a woman. Certainly, his most significant relationships were with men whom he placed on pedestals. Marriage would have made him the head of a family, and he preferred to be an adjunct, companion, and helpmate to the Marx family.

The only time the intense friendship with Marx almost blew up was when Engels wrote Marx on January 7, 1863 that Mary Burns had died without warning of a heart attack or apoplexy. "I cannot tell you how it has affected me. The poor girl loved me with her whole heart."

Marx replied the next day: "The news of Mary's death surprised me as much as it disturbed me. She was good-hearted, witty and loyal to you." Marx then devoted two long paragraphs to his financial problems, which had again become desperate. He concluded with this postscript: "How will you arrange your establishment now? It is extremely difficult for you, since you had a home with Mary which was free and withdrawn from all human filth, whenever you wanted to avail yourself of it."

The postscript was even more unfeeling than the faint praise with which the letter began. A few days after losing the woman with whom he had lived for twenty years, Engels was neither coldly planning new arrangements nor prepared to discuss them with Marx. Engels waited four days, then replied:

You will find it understandable that this time my own misfortune and your frosty attitude have made it impossible to answer you sooner.

All my friends, including philistine acquaintances, have on this occasion, which affects me deeply, shown more sympathy and friendship than I could have anticipated. You found this moment suitable for a display of the superiority of your cold way of thinking. So be it.

Marx replied on January 24 that he had regretted his letter as soon as he posted it. His only excuse was the really desperate situation in which he and his family found themselves. The crisis was so horrible that he had decided to send his two older daughters to work as governesses, to let Lenchen Demuth (Jenny's maid) find a place as a servant elsewhere, and to take his wife and their smallest child, Eleanor, to live in a charity lodging house for workers. Engels replied with his usual generosity; he accepted Marx's apology, adding: "I am glad that I did not lose with Mary my oldest and dearest friend." He added that Mary's death had "buried the last part of my youth." He then took desperate measures to raise funds to keep the Marx family afloat. Nothing came of Marx's threat to embrace poverty and send his daughters out to work. The matter would never be alluded to again.

This correspondence is interesting not only because Engels wrote about Mary's love for him, but not about his feeling for her, but also because it casts an interesting light on the ways Marx manipulated other people.

### **"The Faithful, Dear Lenchen"**

One final and extraordinary example of this exploitation is the way Marx foisted his illegitimate son on Engels.

Helene (Lenchen) Demuth had served the von Westphalens since she was a small girl. When she was about twenty-one, Jenny's mother sent her to the newly married couple to serve as their maid and housekeeper, describing her as "the faithful, dear Lenchen."

She was a remarkable woman. Marx said of her, according to his daughter, Eleanor, that "she had a real genius for organizing and managing, and . . . could have managed the universe."<sup>12</sup> Since Jenny Marx was almost as impractical as her husband, Lenchen did "the cooking, housecleaning, laundering, dressmaking, nursing, wet-nursing, household planning and every other practical task, including taking articles to the pawn shop when hunger or eviction threatened."<sup>13</sup> Eleanor called her "as noble a woman as ever lived."

One of our most valuable sources on the Marx menage in the 1850s is the memoirs of Wilhelm Liebknecht, an intransigent German socialist, eight years younger than Marx, who had fought in the 1848 revolution by invading his native country from Switzerland and proclaiming a republic in Baden. When this was put down, Liebknecht was imprisoned, but escaped to Geneva, then settled briefly in France, and after that showed up in London, where he remained for thirteen years as an ardent disciple of Marx.

Liebknecht was a well-educated man, who had attended three German universities. A revolutionary extremist, he eked out a precarious livelihood in England by teaching and serving as London correspondent for German newspapers. Unlike Marx and Engels, he was uncompromising in his hatred of militarism and would suffer two years' fortress confinement for his opposition to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. His political skill resulted in the founding of the German Socialist Party in 1874. His son, Karl Liebknecht, also a socialist leader, organized the Spartacist League to foment international workers' opposition to World War I. Together with Rosa Luxembourg, Karl Liebknecht was murdered during the Spartacist uprising of January 1919.

Wilhelm Liebknecht wrote that "Lenchen had the dictatorship in the house." Marx "could not inspire her with awe. She knew him with his humors and weak points, and she rolled him around her finger. His temper might be ever so exasperated, he might storm and thunder ever so much, keeping everybody else at a distance. Lenchen went into the lion's den, and if he growled, she gave him such a severe lecture that the lion became meek as a lamb."<sup>14</sup>

Tasks that were disagreeable or required firmness of character were generally entrusted to Lenchen. Liebknecht reports that, as one might have suspected, Marx was not a logical or a strategically sound chessplayer. But he played with "zeal, impetuosity of attack and surprise."<sup>15</sup> Defeated over the board by Liebknecht, Marx played on till late at night, then "grimly demanded revenge" the following morning. He studied opening variations the rest of the night. Shortly after 11 A.M.,

Marx came downstairs, formally shook hands with Liebknecht, and played chess until midnight. When he won his first game, he was jubilant. As he lost the rest, he became morose. He demanded revenge the next day.

The next morning, Lenchen appeared in Liebknecht's room. "Library," she said (for everyone in the Marx household was given a nickname), "Mrs. Marx begs that you play no more chess with *Mohr* [Marx] in the evening—when he loses the game he is most disagreeable."<sup>16</sup>

### Marx's Illegitimate Son

The years 1850 and 1851 were a period of utter destitution for the Marx family. In the spring of 1850, they were evicted from their hotel and moved into two tiny rooms in the house of a Jewish lace maker in Soho. The family consisted of seven people. In November of that year, the one-year-old Guido died suddenly. Jenny Marx was again pregnant. Marx took this opportunity to have sexual relations with Lenchen, despite the fact that, under the crowded conditions of their squalid lodgings, privacy was impossible. "In the early summer of 1851," Jenny Marx wrote in her autobiographical sketch, "an event occurred which I shall not touch upon further, although it brought about a great increase in our public and private sorrows."

On March 28, 1851, Jenny gave birth to Franziska, who would survive only a year.<sup>17</sup> At the time, Lenchen was six months pregnant. Marx wrote Engels in what may seem to modern readers an inappropriately jocular tone: "To conclude in a tragicomic vein, I shall disclose to you a *mystère en très peu de mots*." On second thought, Marx decided it would be better to discuss what he had in mind with his friend face to face—namely, that Engels acknowledge paternity.

Lenchen's son was born on June 23, 1851, and christened Frederick to lend plausibility to Marx's swindle. Nevertheless, tongues wagged. Shortly after the birth, Marx wrote Joseph Weydemeyer about "the unspeakable infamies my friends are spreading about me," but promised that he would "laugh at all this filth."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to his other afflictions, Marx complained to Engels that his wife was keeping him awake all night with her sobbing. He pointed out that he was "naturally not very long-suffering and even a bit hard." Marx wanted sons to continue his work and serve as his mirror-images. When his little daughter, Franziska was born, he wrote Engels, "alas she was delivered of a girl and not a *garçon*."

Neither of Marx's two legitimate sons survived childhood. Yet Marx ignored Freddy's existence and, as far as we know, never saw him, made no provision

for him, and allowed him to sink into the mire of London proletarian poverty. Lenchen, a responsible human being, did what she could for Freddy, but that was little. Since Marx was a snob and a social climber, he gave no further thought to a son who was merely a bastard by a servant of peasant extraction.

His treatment of Lenchen scarcely requires comment. Siring illegitimate children was no more uncommon in Victorian England than in contemporary America, but the fathers, there as here, generally made some provision for them.

### **Freddy Demuth—Aftermath**

Freddy grew up in poverty as a manual worker, even though he eventually rose into the ranks of the skilled. After Marx's death, he was allowed to visit Engels's house provided he used the servants' entrance. When Lenchen died in 1890, Louise Freyberger, the divorced wife of the German socialist leader, Karl Kautsky, took over as Engels's housekeeper. The first thing she did was to put a stop to this instance of class discrimination:

I got to know Freddy on the occasion of my first visit to London. Old Nimm [Lenchen Demuth] introduced him to me as her admirer and he came to visit her regularly once a week. It is curious that he never entered the house by the front door, but always came to the kitchen through the tradesman's entrance. Freddy's visits continued after I had taken charge of General's [Engels's] household and I saw to it that he had full rights of a guest.<sup>19</sup>

Engels was dying of cancer of the esophagus. He told a friend, Samuel Moore, that Karl Marx was Freddy's father and that he, Engels, had kept the secret for forty years. When Moore told this to Eleanor, Marx's idolatrous daughter, who was four years younger than Freddy, she said "that the General was lying." The day before his death, Eleanor confronted him. The old man wrote on a slate that Marx was the father. Eleanor "broke down when she left the room. All her hatred of me was forgotten and she wept bitterly on my shoulders."<sup>20</sup>

In the long letter she wrote August Bebel 13 years after Engels's death, Louise Freyberger commented:

General authorized us (Mr. Moore, Ludwig and myself) to reveal the facts only if he were accused of having treated Freddy badly. He was not going to have his name dragged in the mud—especially as it would do nobody any good. He had agreed to take Marx's place in order to save Marx from serious domestic difficulties. The existence of Marx's son was known to us [Frey-

berger and Bebel], to Mr. Moore, to Lessner and Pfänder. . . .

Freddy is ridiculously like Marx and only blind prejudice could see the slightest resemblance to General in the boy's typically Jewish features and blue-black hair. I have seen the letter that Marx wrote to Engels in Manchester at the time [of Freddy's birth]. I believe that General destroyed this letter *as he destroyed so many others in the Marx-Engels correspondence*. . . .<sup>21</sup>

I have just read again what you wrote about the affair. Since his wife was dreadfully jealous, Marx was always afraid that she would leave him. He had no affection for the boy. To acknowledge him would precipitate too great a scandal. I think that Freddy was boarded with a Mrs. Louis and he took the name of his foster mother. It was only after Nimm's [Lenchen's] death that he called himself Demuth.<sup>22</sup>

A few final comments. When Lenchen died, she left everything she had to Freddy. After working for half a century for the two champions of the international working class, this frugal woman had been able to accumulate 95 pounds!

While the Freyberger letter is basically honest, it was written to an outstanding German socialist leader and tries to put Marx in the best possible light. To say that Marx "had no affection for the boy" is a bit misleading since there is no evidence that he ever saw him.

That Jenny Marx was jealous is quite true. But since we can infer from her autobiographical sketch that she knew that Karl Marx was the father, it seems probable that what she was not willing to do was to live in a *ménage à trois* with children by two different mothers. Marx was afraid that his wife would leave him. The scandal could have destroyed him politically. The fact that his wife was of the German aristocracy gave him prestige among socialists and Communists and was a personal source of vanity. In addition, many biographers believe that he loved Jenny.

However, he complained frequently to Engels about her weeping and wailing, wrote Engels in 1854: "*Beatus ille der keine Familie hat*,"<sup>23</sup> confided to his future son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, on short acquaintance, that, if he could live his life over again, "I would not marry,"<sup>24</sup> and characterized his wife to Engels as "silly."

Since Marx survived his wife by about a year and a half, his continued neglect of his son cannot be ascribed to the fear that Jenny would leave him. During his last years, Marx was well-to-do thanks to the generosity of Engels, but there is no evidence that he did anything to rescue Freddy from dire poverty.<sup>25</sup> One can perhaps infer from the Freyberger letter that Lenchen was not permitted to acknowledge her own son publicly as long as she was part of the Marx or Engels household. If there is an ironic side to this sordid and distasteful story, it is that Marx seems to have been bound by the priggish, mean and deceitful standards of the Victorian lower middle class which he affected to despise.



In conclusion, if the relationship between Marx and Engels was essentially that of exploiter and victim, Engels nevertheless derived immense satisfaction from his numerous sacrifices. It invested his life with a historic significance it might otherwise have lacked. Nor am I suggesting that Engels was a weak character. Quite the contrary. He was an authoritarian who lived within an orderly and hierarchic chain of command. He controlled subordinates with what seemed to some inhuman efficiency. David Riazanov, the great Soviet Marxian scholar, saw Engels as "cold and unfeeling." Certainly, he was not a man who wore his heart on his sleeve.

Nor was the relationship entirely one of subordination. Engels appropriated as his sphere military affairs and science, leaving to Marx philosophy and politics, and Engels often served as a stabilizing force. After Marx's death, it would be Engels who would transform a monstrous egoist into the myth-figure of a far-sighted, dedicated, self-sacrificing revolutionary leader.

## Notes

1. For a maverick view, see Norman Levine, *The Tragic Deception: Marx contra Engels* (Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1975).
2. Gustav Mayer, *Friedrich Engels* (New York: Knopf, 1936), p. 52. English translation by Gilbert Highet and Helen (MacInnes) Highet.
3. Quoted in Seigel, p. 150.
4. "I shall never forget the triumphant 'for the last time,' which he [Engels] shouted as he drew on his top boots in the morning to make his last journey to business," Eleanor Marx recalled. When he returned from work, "he was flourishing his walking stick in the air and singing and laughing all over his face." To Marx, he wrote: "I am a free man." Quoted in Padover, pp. 340-41.
5. Most standard biographies provide details of the amounts which Engels contributed to Marx financially.
6. Though crude by current standards, contraceptive devices were widely available in nineteenth century England, particularly to the educated classes. See Norman E. Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* (New York: Gamut, 1936, 1963), pp. 186-239. Marx's powerful ego may have made him sire children he could not support. Engels' weak ego may have made him refrain from siring those that he could.
7. Mayer, p. 145, quotes a letter Engels wrote Julie Bebel about Lizzie fourteen years after her death: "She came of real Irish proletarian stock, and the passionate feeling for her class,

which was instinctive in her, was worth more to me than all the blue-stockinged elegancies of 'educated' and 'sensitive' bourgeois girls could have been." Yet in letters to Marx, Engels confessed that he preferred the society of his fellow businessmen and members of the hunt club to that of workers.

8. According to W. O. Henderson, *The Life of Friedrich Engels* (London: Frank Cass, 1976), II, 567.

9. *Ibid.*, II, 567.

10. *Ibid.*, I, 104.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Eleanor Marx to Wilhelm Liebknecht, March 12, 1896 (in English).

13. Padover, p. 206.

14. Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Karl Marx, Biographical Memoirs* (Chicago: Kerr, 1901), pp. 123–24).

15. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

17. The Marxes had to beg two pounds from an acquaintance for the infant's coffin. Marx wrote Engels on April 28 that, even though he had a tough hide, "this time the whole shit has affected me deeply."

18. Payne, *Marx*, p. 266.

19. Louise Freyberger to August Bebel, September 2 and 4, 1898. Henderson, II, 726–27.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Emphasis supplied.

22. Freyberger to Bebel, *ibid.*

23. A mish-mash of Latin and German, meaning "blessed is he who has no family."

24. Karl Marx to Paul Lafargue, August 13, 1866.

25. Marx died in 1883. We know that Freddy was in need as late as 1887 because Laura Lafargue had to ask her brother-in-law, Charles Longuet, to "send him something." After that, his economic situation improved since he was a skilled machinist. Payne, *Marx*, pp. 533–34.

## 26

# Economic Hardship and Despair

During Marx's first six years in London, his large family lived in either two or three rooms in an impoverished part of Soho. The Marxes were afflicted by illness, hounded by creditors and usurers, and evicted from their miserable lodgings. Perpetual insecurity and pressing debts bore down upon them. In one instance, Marx had to borrow from a casual acquaintance the small sum needed for a coffin in which to bury an infant daughter. On another, he was unable to leave the house because he had pawned his coat. At still another time, he was unable to feed his family meat because he owed money to the butcher. There was a time when he was unable to mail letters and manuscripts because he lacked the money for postage.<sup>1</sup> In her autobiographical sketch, Jenny wrote with restraint about the "years of great hardship, continual acute privations . . . and real misery." In March 1851, Marx wrote Engels that he was "up to the top of his head in petty bourgeois shit," in early 1853 that "the crud has reached its climax," and in June 1854 that he was "over my ears in crud."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that much of the misery of the Marx family was due to the improvidence of both husband and wife did not make that misery any the less real. When Marx arrived in England in mid-1849, he believed that the European revolution was about to erupt again and that, when it was victorious, he would be called to the Continent to play a major role in European political affairs. Temporary poverty seemed comparatively unimportant. However, when those expectations were dashed to the ground, the long, dark night of poverty set in for the Marx *ménage*.

Yet the data we have on Marx's income makes it difficult to understand why his poverty and that of his family was so appalling and long-lasting. Marx's main source of income was gifts and "loans" from friends and political supporters. His secondary source was inheritances. He earned practically nothing from his

books, derived little more than a subsistence income from his newspaper articles. Engels was the main source of revenue. When Engels went to Manchester to work in the family business in order to keep Marx afloat, his father kept him on a tight rein because of his revolutionary past. However, in 1852, the senior Engels visited Manchester, realized that his son was taking his business responsibilities seriously and handling them well, and increased his authority and his income. In 1860, he was made a partner.<sup>3</sup>

Even in the worst period of poverty—the 1850s—Engels probably contributed about 100 pounds a year on average to the Marx family plus larger sums in emergencies.<sup>4</sup> During the dismal year of 1851, for instance, David McLellan estimates that Marx received 150 pounds in gifts, and this covers only what we know about from surviving documents.<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand Lassalle and at least three others contributed funds to Marx. During the five-year period 1865–1869, Engels gave Marx 1,862 pounds, thereafter, 350 pounds annually.<sup>6</sup> Thus from his mid-forties to his death, Marx received enough *largesse* from Engels alone to enable him to live about seven times as well as the average British skilled worker.

In early 1862, Marx faced another and his last really desperate financial crisis. The children couldn't go to school because of lack of suitable clothes and tuition money. It was during this crisis that Marx wrote Engels that he planned to discharge Lenchen Demuth, send his two older daughters to work as governesses, and move with Jenny and little Eleanor to charity lodgings. What had happened? The *New York Daily Tribune* was accepting fewer of Marx's articles on world affairs and the last of them would be published on March 10, 1862. The main reason for this was that American public interest was focussed on the Civil War. Another reason was the anti-Semitic tenor of Marx's contributions, which later contributed to Horace Greeley's decision to fire Charles Dana in 1862.

In the spring of 1861, Marx had traveled to Germany and Holland—to Trier to get money from "the old woman" who was "rapidly approaching her end" and to Holland to pay court to his young cousin, Nanette Philips, and to "squeeze" money from her father, banker Lion Philips. He described this trip to Engels as financially successful.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the reason for the financial crisis of the early 1860s was that Marx had become embroiled in a bitter controversy with the eminent zoologist and naturalist, Karl Vogt. He published an interminable diatribe against his enemy, which sold 41 copies and caused Marx considerable financial loss. He sued Berlin's *National-Zeitung*, which had published portions of Vogt's attack on him. The case was decided in favor of Vogt in the lower German court, whereupon Marx took it to an appellate tribunal. The latter held that Vogt had not committed libel in referring to Marx as "the leader of a band of blackmailers" because the statement was true. This unsuccessful legal action cost Marx at least 100 pounds

and his polemical attack on Vogt, a book called *Herr Vogt*, wasted about a year of his working time.

Marx's second source of income was inheritances. He got about 1,500 pounds from his mother, who died in 1863, and his friend and disciple, Wilhelm ("Lupus") Wolff, who died in 1864. Jenny's mother left practically no estate, but she gave her daughter the family silver with the Campbell crest of her Scottish ancestors—silver which would frequently visit London pawn shops—and two maids, Lenchen Demuth and her sister, Marianne, who worked for the Marxes for practically nothing.

Finally, we come to writing. Except for the 100 pounds a year on average, which Marx got from the articles he and Engels wrote for the *New-York Daily Tribune* during 1851–1862, Marx's writings were probably a dead loss financially. For example, he wrote a scurrilous attack on his associates in the 1848 revolution called *Heroes of the Exile*. This was in particularly bad taste because its victims were, for the most part, men who had risked their lives fighting on the barricades for their beliefs, whereas Marx had not. This screed was bought for 25 pounds by a man called Bangya, who turned out to be a police agent of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. What use the Hapsburgs made of the volume is unknown. It was not published during Marx's lifetime.

In addition to the working time it cost him, that other intemperate volume, *Herr Vogt*, was printed at Marx's personal expense. He ended up owing the printer money, was sued for it, and had to pay up.

## Where Did the Money Go?

Even allowing for improvident management, the destitution of the Marx family during most of the period 1850–1865 seems somewhat of a mystery. Marx suffered from almost every physical (and perhaps psychological) affliction that the gods can bring on those they wish to destroy. His wife contracted smallpox and would die of cancer. In addition, she was hysterical and subject to fits of deep depression in which she contemplated suicide. Three of Marx's six legitimate children died in infancy or childhood. The eldest daughter, who would die at thirty-nine, manifested "pythonic transports" as a child, to use Liebknecht's phrase, but since psychiatry was as yet unborn, children so afflicted seldom received medical attention. The two younger daughters committed suicide.

Whether this frightful mortality was due mainly to poverty, to poor heredity, or to other causes remains an open question. The survival rate among Karl Marx's siblings, none of whom suffered from poverty, was also poor.

Medical expenses must have taken up a significant portion of the budget,

particularly during Marx's last years when his ample allowance from Engels enabled him to take health trips to European spas and to North Africa. Since Marx had a weak stomach, he stimulated it by eating heavily spiced foods, including caviar, which, then as now, was not cheap.

One of the most desperate years for the Marx family was 1851. According to the garrulous and immensely informative Liebknecht, Marx at about this time smoked a pound of cigars daily which cost him 3 shillings. If this is true, he spent over 50 pounds a year on tobacco alone—about what a skilled English worker earned annually! This was the year in which he sired and abandoned his illegitimate son, Freddy, and the year before he had to borrow the money for a cheap coffin for his little daughter, Franziska.<sup>8</sup>

Nor does Marx ever seem to have been so desperately poor that he was unable to get drunk. Karl Peter Heinzen, who advocated the use of modern technology by revolutionaries so they could exterminate millions of class enemies and who can hence be considered one of the intellectual ancestors of Hitler's death camps and Stalin's Gulag Archipelago,<sup>9</sup> used to accompany Marx to a café after work, where they would get drunk on bottle after bottle of wine and where Marx would glare at some member of the gathering and observe: "I am going to annihilate you." This was in the 1840s.

In the summer of 1850, a time of great poverty and destitution for the Marx family, Lieutenant Techow spent his unforgettable evening with Marx, at which the latter got "completely drunk" on port, claret, and finally champagne.

A year later, Marx, Liebknecht, and Edgar Bauer went on a pub crawl from Oxford Street to Hampstead Road. This involved taking a drink at every pub along the line of march, a challenging undertaking "considering the enormous number of saloons in that part of the city." Marx got drunk enough to declaim about the cultural superiority of Germans and inferiority of Englishmen in a working-class pub. When it became clear to them that they were in imminent danger of being beaten up, the Germans made a hasty retreat. Outside the pub, they picked up paving stones, threw them at the gas street lights, smashed the glass, and made such a racket at two in the morning that irate citizens summoned the police. Liebknecht tells his readers in his memoirs how Marx, Bauer, and he were pursued unsuccessfully by the agents of the law through London alleys.

Marx's financial crises were real enough, but the skimpy available evidence suggests that they were in considerable part due to his incapacity to manage his family affairs in an adult manner. His unwillingness to limit his expenditure on his minor dissipations added to the misery and destitution that afflicted his wife and children. In addition, he wasted his time and talents in polemical attacks on people of such minor importance that the financial failure of these efforts could



have been predicted in advance. Finally, he never really faced up to the financial necessity of acquiring a steady, remunerative occupation.

## Notes

1. However, postage stamps were much more costly in relation to income then than now. Consider the case of Karl Theodor Friedrich Weierstrass, who was more or less a contemporary of Marx (1815–97) and one of the greatest mathematical geniuses of the nineteenth century. On his salary as a *gymnasium* mathematics teacher, Weierstrass could not afford the postage needed to mail his epochal papers on the theory of functions to a reputable mathematical journal. Hence, his contributions remained unknown to the European mathematical world for decades. Another case is that of Marx's father, who complained to his son about the exorbitant cost of paying the mailing charges on the manuscripts Karl sent him from Berlin.
2. Seigel, p. 254.
3. Mayer, p. 170.
4. Seigel, p. 259.
5. David McLellan, *Karl Marx* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 287.
6. McLellan, p. 357, citing East German documentary sources.
7. Padover, pp. 330–38.
8. Liebknecht, pp. 151–54. Marx, however, economized on tobacco, not by reducing the amount he smoked, but by shifting to cigars which cost one shilling sixpence the pound.
9. Walter Lacqueur, "Karl Heinzen—the Origins of Modern Terrorism," *Encounter*, August 1977, pp. 23–25.

## Paterfamilias or Kronist?

First, a word of explanation or apology: To my astonishment, the word *kronism* does not appear in either the *Oxford English Dictionary* or in my 1966 edition of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. Yet it is a perfectly good word. It is used in biology to designate animal species that control population by eating their young.

It derives from the Greek chief of the Titans, Cronus, whose primary claim to our memory is that, like revolutions, he devoured his own children. His father, Uranus, the god of the heavens, had warned him that he would be overthrown by his progeny, so he regularly swallowed them at birth—Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. When his sister-consort, Rhea, gave birth to Zeus, however, she hid him from her voracious mate in a Cretan cave. Cronus was tricked by Rhea into swallowing a stone instead of Zeus, suggesting that he may have been more of a gourmand than a gourmet. When Zeus grew to manhood, he overthrew his father and forced him to disgorge his five siblings, who had apparently remained undigested. Zeus then ruled the gods unchallenged.

I use the term *kronist* here to designate parents who devour their children psychologically. There are various ways of doing this. Among civilized people, favored ploys are prolonging their infancy, transforming them into psychologically dependent creatures, stifling their self-reliance, and preventing them from developing in accordance with their innate potentialities and desires.<sup>1</sup> The *kronist* often is, or appears to be, devoted to the children he suffocates.

The tragic fate of Marx's wife and daughters is relevant to our topic because it illustrates the wreckage which egocentricity, hatred of mankind and destructiveness can inflict on the inner world of family. There is, however, no implication here that Marx was indifferent or antagonistic to his wife and children. In his own way, he was devoted to them. Moreover, his family, to-

gether with his relationship with Engels, was almost the only place where he was accepted at his own estimation of his ability and importance. Every failure, every slight, every clash of wills and hate-laden feud drove him further inward to the familial safe haven of acceptance. Here he ruled as an almost omnipotent patriarch. As he became older and more infirm, his interest in world affairs and his dreams of fame and power receded. He became increasingly preoccupied with his children and grandchildren, sharing their infrequent joys and many sorrows.

## The Marriage

His marriage with Jenny von Westphalen was a love match. In the early years, friends who saw them together commented on the love and devotion of each for the other. Jenny's autobiographical story, *A Short Sketch of an Eventful Life*, which she wrote, not for publication, but for her children and grandchildren, begins with the sentence: "June 19, 1843, was my wedding day."

By all conventional standards, Jenny had married beneath her in almost every sense of the word—a commoner, a man of Jewish descent, an extremist revolutionary. But she realized that she was marrying a genius, a man who was intellectually head and shoulders above all the men whom her family would have regarded as suitable husbands. She believed in Karl Marx's star, embraced all his revolutionary convictions, and probably imagined, as the fires of revolt swept across Europe in 1848 and 1849, that he was destined for a position of enormous political power. This dream swiftly faded into the dreary decades of beggary and improvidence. She was virtually cut off from her family and condemned to live in squalid and crowded tenements, bearing children half of whom died in infancy and childhood.

Even during the first year of their marriage, Marx told Ruge that Jenny's battle with her family on his behalf had ruined her health.<sup>2</sup> In 1852, she wrote Karl, who was in Manchester, from London: "I sit here and go to pieces. . . . I sit here and almost weep my eyes out and find no help. My head is disintegrating." She was determined to live in London, even though Germany was less expensive, because "it is so colossal, that one vanishes into nothing. Here the individual is worth nothing, and for that very reason one ceases to be important to oneself and to others—one can retire into himself and his snail's shell, nobody takes any notice."<sup>3</sup>

In June 1862, Marx wrote Engels: "My wife tells me every day that she wishes she lay with her children in their graves, and I really can't blame her, since the humiliations, tortures and horrors which one must endure in this situation are

actually indescribable."<sup>4</sup> On several occasions, she considered leaving him. But to return to her family in Germany would mean eating crow and admitting that her defiance of convention and her marriage had been ghastly mistakes. When Engels finally made Marx's financial position secure, Jenny was able to at least enjoy the comforts of a bourgeois existence. But this did not happen until she was fifty.

As for Marx, his complaints about his wife were largely confined to his letters to Engels. He wrote his friend on July 31, 1851 that his writing was going badly because "torrents of tears annoy me and make me angry for entire nights." He complained again on October 30, 1868, at a time when their financial problems were largely solved, that for several years now, his wife had lost her mental equilibrium and "torments the children with her weeping and irritability and bad temper, although the children bear it with equanimity."

Eleanor Marx in her reminiscences wrote touchingly of how, when Jenny was on her death-bed and Marx was seriously ill, the old couple held each other in bed like young lovers, but Louise Freyberger, in the letter to August Bebel of September 2, 1898 which I have already quoted, painted a very different picture: "That Frau Marx once left her husband in London and went to Germany and that Marx and his wife had not slept together for years, all this has been well known to Tussy . . . but she idolized her father and invented the most beautiful legends. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Jenny's attitude toward Karl was in part masochistic, if one extends that word to include the willing acceptance of subjugation. She wrote Lassalle on May 5, 1861, after her husband had returned from visiting him in Germany: "I feel particularly well after having been provisionally freed from the chains of mastery and feeling myself again subjugated." As Künzli points out, this acceptance of subordination meant that she completely identified with Karl Marx—except during periods of rebellion in which she asserted her independence and either left him or considered doing so. "Despite poverty, pregnancies and month-long illnesses, she served as Marx's permanent secretary," writing almost all his correspondence and manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> All this, although Jenny was a cultivated and talented woman, who knew contemporary Russian literature, wrote more fluently than her husband, and served occasionally as London theatre critic for German newspapers. One might add that she complained less about her poverty and illness than Marx did, although her descent into the inferno of poverty was more drastic than his own.

One must agree with Künzli's verdict, that "in so far as Marx was capable of love, he loved Jenny."<sup>7</sup> This despite Marx's frequent complaints that he wished he had never married, such as this from his letter to Engels of February 22, 1858: "There is no greater imbecility possible for people with general aspirations than

to marry and thus betray themselves to the *petites misères de la vie domestique et privée*."

But there were peculiar aspects to Marx's attitude toward his wife. He wrote Engels from Germany on May 7, 1867, that what he "most dreaded was the return to London. . . . Then again family howlings and inner collisions." His opinion of women in general was low. He called them "comic creatures, even those equipped with understanding."<sup>8</sup> One of his love letters to his wife from Germany referred to the fact that he had carried off the belle of the Trier aristocracy, suggesting that one of his main feelings toward her was narcissistic triumph.

An even stranger letter was one he sent Jenny from Manchester, when she was with her dying mother in Trier. He wrote that he only became conscious of his love for her fully through the "enchantment of distance." It was only when she was "away" that his passion for her arose "as it really is" and that he felt "again like a man." The narcissistic character of this long and pedantic communication is further enhanced by the fact that there is not a word in it about Jenny's feelings for her dying mother (whom she loved in contrast to Marx's acute dislike of his own mother).<sup>9</sup> This "love letter" was the product of a man incapable of experiencing mature love in his daily life. It was not accidental that Marx used the word "passion" instead of "love."

One is reminded of the fact that the young Marx had remained secretly engaged to Jenny for seven entire years. During much of this protracted period, he indulged in aimless and inchoate reading at the University of Berlin, not attending classes, and making no realistic preparations to support himself and his wife. When he finally married her, he spent their honeymoon in an orgy of intensive reading and study. All this seemed superficially in contradiction with the reams of poetry he had sent Jenny from Berlin while they were engaged, proclaiming his undying love in stilted verse. The 1856 letter shows the same adolescent characteristics. But at that time Marx was 38 years old! It is perhaps not surprising that one of Jenny's nicknames for her husband was "my big baby."

## The Daughters

One of Marx's few amiable qualities was his love for children. Liebknecht writes:

It is necessary to have seen Marx with his children in order to fully understand the deep mind and childlike heart of this hero of science. In his spare minutes or on his walks he carried them around, played with them the wildest-merriest games—in short, was a child among children. . . .

For Marx, the society of children was a necessity—he recovered and refreshed himself thereby. And when his own children were grown up or dead, his grandchildren took their place.”<sup>10</sup>

He “was attracted as by magnetism toward strange children, particularly helpless children that chanced to cross his way.”<sup>11</sup> He once said that the redeeming feature of Christianity was Christ’s love for children.<sup>12</sup>

But there may have been a darker side to this. “It is an experience of deep psychological analysis that men, the development of whose emotional life has been arrested at the childhood level, often have an uncommonly good relationship to children,” Künzli observes.<sup>13</sup> He adds the sharper comment:

But there is also a negative dimension—hatred of mankind. Without comparing Marx with the Nazi criminals: It still must be pointed out that Himmler too loved children. That which directed this incomparably primitive creature to sadism and crime manifested itself in Marx’s case in hatred of mankind, cynicism, hate, scorn and ridicule. At the base of both attitudes lay a maladjusted childish emotionality which had been fixed at the infantile level. The child is by nature egocentric. He is in his way—usually a harmless one—a despiser of human beings because he has not yet consciously noticed the people around him. What is a normal stage of development with children becomes a sign of immaturity in adults: As a despiser of mankind too, Marx was still a “big child.”<sup>14</sup>

All of Marx’s three daughters who survived childhood were extraordinarily gifted. Their intellectual abilities were shown by the prizes they won in their school work, competing with older children, and by the precocity of their letters. They were also esthetically gifted. The oldest, Jenny, had a talent for drawing and was passionately attracted to the theatre; Laura played the piano and sang English and German songs; Eleanor knew “entire scenes from Shakespeare” at the age of six.<sup>15</sup>

All three daughters had a cool and distant relationship to their mother. All three were “unambiguously psychologically dominated” by their charismatic father.<sup>16</sup> This means that they absorbed his singleminded passion for revolution, his dictatorial attitudes, and some of his indifference to the fate of human beings except as agents of, or obstacles to, Communist power.

To give instances of this: When Wilhelm Liebknecht asked the 26-year-old Eleanor to send him a cheap edition of Disraeli’s novel, *Endymion*, she impertinently refused to do so on the grounds that the book was “idiotic” and “below contempt and below criticism.”<sup>17</sup>

A more offensive instance was an attack on Bismarck which Laura and Elea-



nor Marx wrote for the German newspaper *Sozialdemokrat* of April 15, 1886. A man called Karl Blind, who had provided the Marxes with lodgings in London in 1849, had shot and wounded the chancellor. At a sitting of the Reichstag, Bismarck observed: "Now whether or not Marx nurtured murderers, I do not know; but I have heard that Blind, the man from whose bullet I still bear a scar, was a disciple of Marx." In their rejoinder, Laura and Eleanor said that Marx had had "not the slightest interest" in the fate of people such as Bismarck and that he regarded the German chancellor as "a thoroughly bigotted Prussian Junker, who was totally incapable of understanding any large historical movement."

## Jennychen

The eldest daughter and Marx's favorite was Jenny, born in Paris in 1844. Physically, she was the image of her father. According to Liebknecht, little Jenny "had sometimes Pythian raptures—the spirit came over her"—as it did over Pythia; her eyes began to shine and to flame, and she commenced to declaim, often the most singular fantasies. On the way home from Hampstead Heath, she once had such an attack; she spoke of the life on the stars, and what she said took the form of a poem."<sup>18</sup> Her mother was disturbed, remarking: "No child of her age should talk like that—this premature development is not a sign of health." But Marx rebuked her.<sup>19</sup>

As a school-girl, she had done everything possible to emulate her father. She wrote poetry in five languages and became thoroughly familiar with the greatest writers of Greece and Germany. She helped Marx in the politics of the First International and in the preparation of *Das Kapital*.

At eighteen, she was under a doctor's care for two months. Marx thought her problem was psychosomatic, an insight that was almost certainly correct. At twenty, she had an attack of asthma. Shortly after her marriage to the French socialist, Charles Longuet, she again suffered from asthma—possibly of psychological origin—and from chronic coughing. Insomnia was added to her illnesses. Longuet and she had six children. Yet the marriage was a disaster, which lurched from one crisis to the next with both husband and wife developing psychosomatic ailments. Longuet failed as a father-substitute and began to experience crises of guilt.<sup>20</sup>

Jenny's asthma became worse, and at the age of thirty-nine, she contracted cancer of the bladder which proved terminal. Her sister Eleanor thought that Jenny had "wanted to die."

## Laura

The second daughter, Laura, was born in Brussels in 1845. A blonde and rosy child, she resembled her mother. She also seems to have been better able to withstand the psychological pressures involved in being Karl Marx's child than either of her sisters.

Just as Marx had nicknames and petnames for his other daughters, he called Laura "dear little bird's eye, Kakadu, secretary, horsewoman and poetess." He bound her to him in other ways. She was, like her sisters, brought up as an inflexible, doctrinaire Marxian socialist, totally committed to the revolution and intolerant of deviations and heresies. As a young girl, she wrote poetry and translated Goethe and Heine into English. But at fifteen, she started translating Engels into English and, after her marriage, plunged into the translation of a large number of Marx's works, including the more ponderous and unreadable ones.<sup>21</sup> Thus, even when she was a bride and matron, her father was eternally present in the spirit if not in the flesh.

When Laura was first courted by Paul Lafargue, Marx did everything possible to retard or prevent the marriage. As I have already mentioned, he referred to Lafargue as a "nigger" and a "damned pestering boy." When Laura decided to accept her suitor, Marx conceded that she was "half-engaged . . . to my medical Creole." A week later, he wrote Lafargue that "there is as yet no promise of marriage" and ordered him to become less ardent in his courtship or he, Marx, would order Laura to break everything off! He added that he had "sacrificed my whole fortune [!?] to the revolution" and, if he had his life to lead again, he "would not marry." Finally, "I know nothing about your family. Even if they live in prosperous circumstances, it does not prove that they are willing to bear sacrifices for you. I do not even know how they feel about your proposed marriage. It is necessary for me, I repeat, to have a positive clarification of all these questions."<sup>22</sup>

In other words, Marx was doing everything within his power to keep Laura unmarried and an emotional and economic dependent. The letter also expressed his mid-Victorian priggishness and his overriding concern with money.

When Lafargue's replies convinced him that the family was wealthy and that the father of the groom had promised him a wedding gift of 100,000 francs, Marx's attitude changed. The sum involved was a fortune. The marriage opened up new vistas. Marx was prepared to lose a daughter if he would gain a new source from which to "borrow" money. But unfortunately for Marx, there is no evidence that the wedding gift was ever made. After the couple married, Marx

and his wife continued to sneer at Lafargue as a "nigger" and Marx continued to castigate him as a follower of Blanqui and a sympathizer with his archenemy, Proudhon.

Lafargue drifted from his profession of medicine, after the couple had lost all of their three children, to photography, business schemes, literature, and public relations. Being unsuccessful at all of them, he emerged as a leading light of the French Socialist Party and devoted his efforts to revolutionary politics. In November 1911, when Lafargue was sixty-nine and Laura sixty-six, they were discovered in their house near Paris, sitting side by side in their chairs, stone dead. They had committed suicide by injection of potassium cyanide. Laura left no note explaining the reasons for their action. They were neither impoverished nor in particularly poor health.

The French Socialists were shocked at what they considered a betrayal of the "cause." The daughter of the man who had proclaimed a Communist society that would end human alienation, that would create the fully rounded, whole man of the future had found that life within the Communist movement was so drab and empty that there was no point in continuing it. And if the life had been pointless, what sort of explanation could one leave to the comrades? If suicide is an act of hostility exceeded only by sadism, torture, and murder, then one suspects that the object of that filial hostility may have been a father who had devoured his children and destroyed every opportunity they had to become free and independent human beings.

## Eleanor

The youngest of the children, Eleanor, was born in London in 1855. Thus, she escaped most of the childhood insecurity of her older sisters.

She was a tomboy, "who boxed without fear with boys who were older than she was," according to Bernstein. For years she refused to go to school;<sup>23</sup> her father taught her to love Shakespeare and, from a very early age, she took part in adult political discussions. Dark and Semitic in appearance, she resembled Karl Marx physically. Where Laura was cold and analytic, Eleanor was highly emotional. From an early age, her great love was the stage and her greatest desire was to become an actress.

In 1872, at the age of seventeen, Eleanor fell in love with a 34-year-old French journalist and refugee from the Paris Commune named Prosper Olivier Lissagaray. Lissagaray was a Basque count who had given up his title because of his revolutionary convictions. He was editor of a small pro-Communist periodical and would write the standard pro-revolutionary work on the uprising, *His-*

*toire de la Commune de 1871*, a book that would be translated into German, English, Russian, and other languages. Marx did everything within his power to prevent the marriage. The fact that Lissagaray was a fellow revolutionary counted for nothing as he was penniless and could in no foreseeable way contribute to Eleanor's support or the financial resources of the Marx family. Yet this was not the main obstacle. With his 350-pound annual pension from Engels, Marx could have given the young couple financial help if he had wanted to do so. Eleanor was able to support herself as a teacher—she did so after Marx's death—and there is no reason to believe that Lissagaray was either lazy or incompetent.

The real problem was that Eleanor was the last of his daughters. His wife was becoming increasingly ailing, neurotic, and unbearable to live with. Under these conditions, Marx welcomed the prospect of keeping an attractive and brilliant young daughter at his side during his declining years to serve as a combination companion, assistant and nursemaid. Eleanor complained bitterly to her father that he had been grossly unfair in his criticism of her fiancé. Marx again assumed the parsimonious and money-oriented role of the Victorian man of affairs, a sort of preview of the first generation of Forsytes in John Galsworthy's classic, a father who exhibited all the qualities that the literary Marx (as opposed to the real, living Marx) would denounce as "petty bourgeois philistinism." Marx wrote Engels on May 31, 1873, that Eleanor's "reproach that I have been unfair to Lissagaray is unfounded. I demand nothing from him except that he give me proofs instead of phrases, that he is better than his reputation, and there should be some reason to have confidence in him."

He forbade Eleanor to see her fiancé. Lissagaray was thus confined to writing letters to "*ma petite femme*." Because of her adulation of her father, Eleanor acceded to his egocentric and destructive demands. In 1882, ten years after she had fallen in love with Lissagaray, Eleanor terminated the engagement. The darker side of Marx's abuse of his parental authority in this relationship was an incestuous desire for his youngest daughter, according to the analysis by Lewis S. Feuer which I cited in an earlier chapter.

The price Eleanor paid for allowing this paternal tyranny to stifle her emotional and sexual life was the transition from health to devastating psychosomatic illnesses. In 1873 or 1874, she wrote her father that, when she had been "so very ill at Brighton (during a week I fainted 2 or 3 times a day), L came to see me, each time left me stronger and happier. . . ." She begged her father to allow her to see Lissagaray from time to time as this would "do . . . more good" than all the medicines her physicians had prescribed.<sup>24</sup>

Marx wrote his friend, Dr. Ludwig Kugelmann about "the severe illness of my

youngest daughter" when Eleanor was nineteen. He pretended that the problem was just a "female disorder" with a touch of hysteria. During much of this decade, Eleanor was unable to eat regularly, suffered from insomnia, had trembling hands, a nervous tic, was pallid and thin and in a state of "extreme depression." On August 14, 1881, Marx wrote Engels that "her state is one of utter nervous dejection . . . perfect derangement of action of stomach since she has stopped the habit of eating . . . dangerously overwrought nervous system . . . sleeplessness, neuralgic convulsions, etc." so that it is "a miracle that a collapse has not already occurred."<sup>25</sup>

He dragged Eleanor with him on the trips he took to spas and health resorts, generally leaving his wife at home in London. Near the end of his life, he wrote Laura Lafargue on January 4, 1882, that Eleanor "gives the impression that she is staying with me out of a sense of duty, bearing it all as a self-sacrificing martyr."<sup>26</sup>

Eight days later, Marx wrote Engels that he was determined not to sacrifice his daughter's happiness to becoming "nurse" to an old man! This was indeed a belated recognition of the crime he had committed against her. At the age of twenty-six, Eleanor was now "permitted" to take drama lessons in London and pursue the career that she had dreamed of since childhood, that of an actress, but it was a very late start.

In addition to suffocating her talent and destroying her career, Marx had prevented her from seeing the man she had loved for the best decade in a woman's life for romantic love. And because of Eleanor's strong discipline and constancy, she had apparently avoided sexual relations with other men while remaining "engaged" to Lissagaray. When Marx finally died on March 14, 1883, the burden was at last lifted from Eleanor's shoulders. She took up with a popularizer of Darwin, an atheist lecturer, and a dabbler in natural science and socialist theories called Edward Aveling. Since he was married and unable to obtain a divorce, they lived together openly.

Aveling was a caricature of Karl Marx. He was "a shameless seducer" and extremely successful with women, despite the fact that was physically ugly to the point of hideousness.<sup>27</sup> Henry Mayers Hyndman thought him "untrustworthy in every relation of life" and "a man of very bad character." The German socialist leader and theorist Karl Kautsky called him "an evil creature." Eduard Bernstein characterized him as "a despicable rogue" and George Bernard Shaw as "a thief." He inspired "fear and horror" in Olive Schreiner, the brilliant young South African author of the autobiographical novel, *The Story of an African Farm*.<sup>28</sup>

His main characteristics seem to have been infantile selfishness and a complete lack of moral scruples or even ordinary honesty. Eduard Bernstein wrote:

His passion for having everything of the best; the assured and shameless manner in which he borrowed, in order to pay for his pleasures, the scanty cash of even the poorest of his acquaintances; his gift of fascinating the ingenuous, and in particular women, by his lyrical and aesthetic affectations and flirtations, in order to exploit them in the same unceremonious fashion in which a spoilt child makes a convenience of its nurse; these are characteristic features of the man for whom Eleanor Marx sacrificed herself as completely in real life as Mrs. Dubedat sacrificed herself for her husband in the play.<sup>29</sup>

While on a speaking tour with Eleanor in the United States to raise money for the defense of the anarchists on trial for murder in the Haymarket bombings, Aveling stole some of the money raised from his supposed comrades. This "scamp," as the Austrian socialist leader Victor Adler called him, stole Eleanor's personal possessions, had affairs behind her back, and even tried to blackmail her with the threat that he would expose the fact that Karl Marx was Freddy Demuth's father!<sup>30</sup>

He was so vile that the British Fabians, who shared his political convictions, refused to have anything to do with him. Yet Marx had met Aveling, approved of him, and given him in this way the encouragement that he withheld from the honorable Lissagaray.<sup>31</sup>

Hyndman explained Marx's favorable view of the abominable Aveling as due to the fact that "Marx had no ability to judge men," but this is only part of the truth. Marx was attracted to people like Blanqui, who were regarded as utterly vile and loathsome by balanced and intelligent observers like Tocqueville. The fact that Aveling was egocentric, amoral, ruthless in his exploitation of all human relationships, and perhaps fixed at a childhood level of emotional growth may have struck a resounding chord in Marx's psyche.

The end of the story came just after Eleanor's forty-third birthday. She and Aveling had been living together as man and wife, in defiance of Victorian conventions, for 14 years. He wrote her a note that he had bigamously married a young actress named Eva Frye with whom he had been carrying on an affair. Eleanor, on hearing the news, took cyanide, leaving a suicide note for her lover: "Dear, it will soon be all over now. My last word is the same that I have said during all these long, sad years—love." There is some evidence that Aveling, after acquiring "chloroform and a small quantity of prussic acid for a dog," using his medical license to do so, had entered into a suicide pact with Eleanor with no intention of carrying out his side of the bargain. This is argued rather convincingly by Payne.<sup>32</sup>

Eleanor devoted most of her life to her father and, after his death, to his work. She labored in the British Museum translating at least three of his books. He had



used several ploys to perpetuate the absolute dependence of his daughters, one being to treat them as children and address them by childish nicknames. (He referred to the eldest daughter as "Jennychen" or "the child" even when she was a married woman in her thirties with children. "The child is suffering from a mental discord," he wrote Engels on January 12, 1882, when Eleanor was in her late twenties.)

In choosing a relationship with a sadist, Eleanor was reenacting the masochistic role Marx had forced on her during the years of her youth and young womanhood. There was another parallel between the two relationships. Eleanor had uncritically idolized her father. When she learned that Karl Marx had impregnated Lenchen, inveigled Engels into falsely acknowledging paternity, and then allowed the child to sink or swim in the harsh world of the London slums, she experienced an agonizing crisis. In the parallel relationship with Aveling, she was forced to recognize that the man to whom she had given her love and dedicated her life was evil. At the brink of suicide, she rationalized her lover's insults, infidelities, duplicity, thieving, and blackmail on the grounds that we are all products of our environment and hence none of us is morally responsible.

She became closely attached to her fellow victim, Freddy. One of her last letters to him, dated two months before her suicide, indicates the dreariness and misery of the brave new world which Marx had inflicted on his children and had attempted to inflict on humanity: "I sometimes feel like you, Freddy, that *nothing* ever goes well with us. Of course, poor Jenny had her full share of sorrow and trouble, and Laura lost her children. *But Jenny was fortunate enough to die*, and sad as that was for her children, there are times when I think it fortunate. I would not have wished Jenny to have lived through what I have done."<sup>33</sup>

Were the suicides of Laura and Eleanor belated and indirect acts of rebellion and aggression against Karl Marx? Künzli suggests: "It is a frequent experience of depth psychology that the unconscious conflicts in the psyche of the parents break out in the children. The suicide of the daughters can be interpreted as a delayed, surrogate suicide of Karl Marx himself. 'I will take proud revenge on myself,' he had written as a young man. . . . Thus, in the tragic destiny of the daughters of Karl Marx, the existential alienation tragedy of the father was repeated in shattering fashion."<sup>34</sup>

I prefer a somewhat simpler interpretation, namely, that the suicides were a final act of revolt and aggression against the tyranny of a father who smothered his children, thwarted their love lives, chained them to him, prolonged their dependency, and either stifled their prodigious talents or channeled them into the translation of his own turgid prose. And, at the same time, that the sterility and lack of any moral and value guidelines in the Marxian world outlook destroys the richness and beauty of life for those who remain in its thrall.

## Notes

1. The Carthaginians persisted in the practice of sacrificing their first-born to their deities long after other Mediterranean civilizations had abandoned this gruesome practice. It is not accidental that Diodorus of Sicily identified the supreme Carthaginian god, Baal Hammon, not with Zeus, but with the child-eater, Cronus. see my article, "Some Possible Genetic Consequences of Carthaginian Child Sacrifice," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, August 1968, pp. 69-77.
2. Seigel, p. 273.
3. Jenny Marx to Bertha Markheim, January 28, 1863. Seigel, p. 274.
4. Marx to Engels, June 18, 1862.
5. Padover, p. 524. Tussy was Eleanor Marx's nickname. Louise Freyberger never knew Karl Marx or his wife. Her information was doubtless obtained from Engels when she served as his housekeeper.
6. Künzli, pp. 312, 316.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 321.
8. Marx to Engels, January 28, 1863.
9. Karl Marx to Jenny Marx, June 21, 1856.
10. Liebknecht, p. 113.
11. *Ibid.*, 110.
12. Eleanor Marx recalled her father telling her: "Despite everything, we can forgive Christianity a lot because it taught people to love children." *Karl Marx, Eine Sammlung von Erinnerungen und Aufsätzen* (Zürich, 1934), p. 116.
13. Künzli, p. 304.
14. Künzli, p. 305.
15. Eleanor Marx in *Erinnerungen*, p. 114.
16. Künzli, p. 469.
17. Padover, p. 515.
18. Liebknecht, pp. 131-32.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
20. Künzli, p. 472.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 476–77.
22. As translated by Padover, p. 489.
23. Eduard Bernstein, "Eleanor Marx," *Die Neue Zeit*, 16 Jahrgang, 2 Band, 1898, 118 ff.
24. C. Tsuzuki, *The Life of Eleanor Marx, 1855–1898* (Oxford, 1967), p. 35. Quoted in Padover, p. 517. The letter is undated.
25. Part of the quoted material is in English, part in German. I have not bothered to indicate which is which.
26. Padover, p. 573.
27. Henderson, II, 686.
28. Quotations from Henderson, II, 685–86.
29. Eduard Bernstein, *My Years of Exile* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1921), p. 162. Dubedat is a character modelled on Aveling in George Bernard Shaw's play, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, according to Bernstein, p. 163.
30. Padover, p. 521.
31. Künzli, p. 485, citing Hyndman's memoirs as they appear in *Erinnerungen*, p. 249.
32. Payne, *Marx*, pp. 525–32.
33. The word *nothing* is emphasized in the original. Other emphasis supplied.
34. Künzli, p. 491. The quotation from the young Marx will be found in *MEGA*, I, 1 (2), 30.

## Engels Forges the Marx Myth

The long, dreadful period of prosperity and peace that had lasted since the collapse of the 1848 revolution was interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War, the disastrous defeat of the forces of Napoleon III, the capitulation of the French government, and the foolhardy uprising of Paris workers known to history as the Commune. This uprising had no chance of success. It had no semblance of a socialist program. It was neither organized nor led by followers of Marx. And, privately, Marx regarded the whole operation as folly. Yet in terms of public relations, he rose to the occasion. Marx wrote Kugelmann on April 12, 1870: "This present insurrection in Paris—even though going under before the wolves, swine and vile dogs of the old society—is the most glorious deed of our Party since the June [1848] revolution."<sup>1</sup>

This was a characteristic lie. In 1960, the Moscow Academy of Sciences published a two-volume translation of the *Minutes of the Paris Commune*. Biographical sketches therein showed that twenty of the leaders were Proudhonists or semi-Proudhonists, twenty were followers of or sympathizers with Blanqui, five were neo-Jacobins, five were bourgeois radicals and democrats, one was a Bakuninist, and the rest were uncertain or unclassified.<sup>2</sup> Thus, there is no indication, even in the official Soviet account, that Marx or his people were responsible for the Commune.

When Marx claimed that the Commune was "the most glorious deed of our Party since the June revolution," he committed a second and even more flagrant prevarication. His Communists had played no role of any consequence in the June 1848 uprising in Paris, and as I have shown, Marx's and Engels's writings clearly admitted that fact at the time.

From the comfort of his by-now bourgeois London establishment, Marx hastened to write an *Address of the General Council of the International Working*

*Men's Association* (First International), which has come to be known as *Civil War in France*. This eloquent document begins with the brazen falsehood that the seizure of power in Paris by "the working men"<sup>3</sup> was "almost instantly acclaimed throughout France, without a single voice of dissent. . . ." If the Commune had been instantly and unanimously acclaimed by the French people, it would not have been drowned in blood by these same Frenchmen in the course of a few weeks' fighting. Marx concluded with a peroration that again claimed credit for the suicidal venture and sought to glorify it:

Our Association is in effect nothing but the international bond between the most advanced working men in the various countries of the civilized world. Wherever, in whatever shape, and in whatever conditions the class struggle obtains any consistency, it is but natural that the members of our association should stand in the forefront. . . .

Working-men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the workers. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal political pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them.<sup>4</sup>

The Commune was put down in short order and a merciless, savage repression followed: mass executions of the militants, imprisonment of hundreds of others under inhuman conditions, the deportation of the defeated fighters to serve long sentences at forced labor in France's most deadly tropical colonies. Marx reacted to these horrors with the exultant realization that he had at last emerged from obscurity into the limelight. On June 18, after the defeat, he wrote Kugelmann:

You know that during the whole time of the Paris Revolution I was denounced as the "grand chef de l'Internationale" by the Versailles sheets and *par repercussion* by the local journals. And now there's the *Address* which you have probably gotten! It makes a devil of a noise and I have the honor of being *at this moment the best calumniated and the most menaced man in London* [in English in the original]. That really does one good after the tedious twenty years of stagnant idyll.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Karl Marx had created the myth of the Paris Commune as the model of the future proletarian revolution, as the first glorious attempt of his International to establish a proletarian dictatorship, as a great struggle of class against class in which he emerged as the titantic hero. The fact that he never stirred from London did not tarnish his glory.<sup>6</sup>

Marx basked for a while in this reflected glory. The purple passages he had

written in *Civil War in France* made him seem the most dangerous revolutionary extremist in Europe and the most ardent champion of the defeated Communards. What he really thought about the whole affair was quite different. He wrote Dumela Nieuwenhuis on February 22, 1881: "Perhaps you will point to the Paris Commune; but apart from the fact that this was merely the rising of a town under exceptional conditions, the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it be. With a small amount of common sense, they could have reached a compromise with Versailles useful to the whole mass of the people. . . ."

The Versailles regime was, of course, the French government that had succeeded the downfall of Napoleon III and had emerged out of the latter's military defeat by Prussia. The only "compromise" the Communards could have made with Versailles was to lay down their arms in return for amnesty. What Marx was saying was that the whole episode was an instance of avoidable and irresponsible folly.

### The Funeral Oration

When the Commune erupted, Marx was fifty-two. During the remaining thirteen years of his life, he published practically nothing of importance and gradually sank into chronic invalidism, alternating with frequent visits to health spas on the European continent.<sup>8</sup>

Marx apparently died of bronchitis, complicated by a lung tumor on March 14, 1883, shortly before his sixty-fifth birthday. Engels wrote Sorge<sup>9</sup> the next day that his life could have been prolonged for a few years, but only as a "helpless invalid."<sup>10</sup>

On the afternoon of March 17, Marx was buried in Highgate Cemetery in the presence of between eleven<sup>11</sup> and "probably no more than twenty" mourners.<sup>12</sup>

Engels delivered a funeral oration that was designed not only to immortalize his dead friend, but to present posterity with an almost totally false picture of his achievements and character. It was a superlative public relations exercise in what would later be called "the big lie."<sup>13</sup>

Engels had these things to say about his friend's character and reputation: "And therefore Marx was the best-hated and most-slandered man of his age. Governments, both absolutist and republican, expelled him from their territories, whilst the bourgeoisie, both conservative and ultra-democratic, vied with each other in heaping abuse on his head."

As Engels well knew, Marx had not been hated. He had simply been ignored. When he finally acquired notoriety as the supposed strategic brain behind the Paris Commune, he exulted at his emergence from oblivion. As for his being



hounded and deported by all governments, both liberal and despotic, the facts were again somewhat at variance with Engels's assertions. Marx had exiled himself from his native Germany by foolishly relinquishing Prussian citizenship. He had been expelled from Belgium for breaking his word of honor not to meddle in Belgian affairs. France had not expelled him from her territories, but merely from Paris. Great Britain had given him complete freedom to live within her domains for the last quarter century of his life, despite the fact that he used that opportunity to advocate the overthrow of the British government and to approve acts of terror against government officials. He had been free to visit Berlin and other German cities despite his rejection of Prussian citizenship. How did Marx react toward this wholly imaginary campaign of villification against him? "He brushed it all to one side like cobwebs, ignored them and answered only when compelled to do so."

This last statement was an even more incredible prevarication than its predecessors. Marx had spent his whole life in vendettas, base intrigues, and superfluous quarrels. He had not only answered every slur, but had gone out of his way to insult and intrigue against people who had imagined they were his comrades. He had pounced mercilessly on weak and defenseless little people like Karl Grün. The only attacks he had ignored were those from gutter anti-Semites. He could scarcely do otherwise since he was a gutter anti-Semite himself.

He died, Engels continued, "loved and mourned by millions of revolutionary workers from the Siberian mines from the length and breadth of Europe and America to the coasts of California." This was quite untrue, but let it pass. It was just the usual graveside afflatus. "And I make bold to say that, although he had many opponents, he had hardly a personal enemy."

It is true that by 1883 most of Marx's enemies were dead or else sufficiently removed in time from his quarrels, spite, and intrigues to have forgiven him. But there were still quite a few left who would gladly have danced on his grave.

This unscrupulous falsification of the dead man's character was one half of the myth that Engels created at Highgate. The other half was a description of Marx's intellectual achievement: "Just as Darwin discovered the law of the development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of the development of human history." Engels proceeded to claim that Marx had discovered that man must "eat, drink, have a roof over his head, and clothe himself" before he can develop a more complex culture and civilization. Also that economics determines culture, institutions, and ideology, rather than vice versa.

Marx had said that. But he had by no means been the first to say it, nor did Marx claim it as his original discovery.<sup>14</sup>

Marx's second prodigious discovery, Engels contended, was "surplus value," from which flowed the "special law of motion governing contemporary capitalist

methods of production. . . ." Since Marxian economics is now generally regarded as a dreary wasteland of misconceptions and aborted predictions, we need not linger over this assertion.

Engels's effort to link Marx's name with that of Darwin was a calculated swindle which the two conspirators worked out during Marx's lifetime. Engels read *The Origin of Species* immediately on its publication in 1859 and urged Marx to study it. Marx ignored the advice for a year. On June 18, 1862, Marx wrote Engels that Darwin "amuses me . . . It is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labor, competition, opening up of new markets, 'inventions' and the Malthusian 'struggle for existence. . . .'"

The only inference one can draw from this is that Marx had skimmed Darwin so hastily that he failed to understand even the fundamentals of the theory of evolution. That Marx could actually believe that a quack like Trémaux was a greater scientist than Darwin was a measure of his incapacity to understand either science or scientific method. In a letter to Kugelmann in 1868, Marx had attacked a man called Buchner for the latter's praise of Darwin and had called the linkage of Darwin's theory of evolution with his own theories "superficial nonsense."<sup>15</sup> He wrote Kugelmann on June 27, 1870, to excoriate a certain Friedrich Albert Lange. Applying Darwinism and "the Malthusian population phantasy" to history was "swaggering, sham-scientific, bombastic ignorance and intellectual laziness."<sup>16</sup>

So much for Marx's real opinion of the greatest biological scientist of his age. This did not prevent Marx or Engels from realizing that it would be expedient to swindle the reading public into imagining that Marx was doing in sociology and history the same sort of revolutionary scientific work that Darwin had already achieved in biology. In a letter to Engels dated December 7, 1867, Marx gave his colleague detailed advice on how to review *Das Kapital* for a Swabian paper. Engels should write: "When he [Marx] proves that contemporary society, economically considered, is pregnant with a new, higher form, then he only shows socially the same universal process of change which was proved in the natural sciences by Darwin." Marx went on to point out that by appealing to the liberal god, "Progress," he would make *Das Kapital* seem palatable to "this piggish little paper" which is still "the popular oracle of all federalists [anti-Prussians] in Germany and is read abroad."<sup>17</sup>

Engels's funeral oration does not rank with that of Pericles. It tells us nothing that is true about the human condition. It provides no insights into the nature of a just society. But in the history of the black art of modern ideological propaganda, it deserves a prominent place. It pioneers in the skilful manipulation of the mass mind without any restraints of truth or decency.

The mausoleum of words that Engels built over the corpse of his friend was a structure of lies, convenient and necessary lies serving to create a legendary Marx, the sort of hero-figure that idealistic men and women would follow with blind faith and adoration. The vengeful, envious, destructive genius, who had hated almost everyone he knew and who had hated himself above all other people, had been made invisible. This new, legendary, heroic Marx would inspire millions to offer their lives in struggle for what they believed would be the liberation of the masses of mankind from poverty, dearth and spiritless conditions. But, reflecting the true character of their hero, their new world would not give the masses plenty in exchange for freedom, but would deprive them of both; it would not create a new socialist man, but merely a man capable of bare survival in a moral and intellectual wasteland.

## Notes

1. Marx, *Letters to Kugelmann*, pp. 96-97.
2. Cited in Wolfe, p. 132. For an admirable, documented and detailed account of Marx's role in the Paris Commune affair and the contrast between his claims and reality, see Wolfe, pp. 114-47.
3. Of eighty-seven leaders of the Commune, only thirty-three described themselves as workers. There were twenty-four journalists and writers, six office workers, five doctors, five lawyers, five salesmen, five artists, two officers, one merchant and one professional revolutionary (Blanqui). Wolfe, p. 132.
4. Marx, *Civil War in France*. No page references given because of the variety of extant editions.
5. Wolfe, p. 131.
6. V. I. Lenin in *State and Revolution* swallowed the myth whole hog and declared that the Russian Revolution "continued the work of the Commune and confirmed the historic analysis made by the genius of Marx." The Commune was "the first attempt of a proletarian revolution to *break up* the bourgeois state machinery. . . ."
7. Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (New York: International Publishers, 1935) pp. 386-87.
8. The significant exception was the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), in which Marx demanded that the German Socialist Party endorse the dictatorship of the proletariat and

oppose equality of wages under socialism. The party had been created by Lassalle, not Marx. It paid obeisance to Marx, but did not generally take his advice.

9. Friedrich Adolf Sorge was a German-American music teacher and a devoted follower of Marx. When Marx decided to torpedo the First International to prevent Bakunin from controlling it, he had its headquarters moved to the United States. Sorge became chairman of the General Council in New York and the International suffered a painless death. A much more interesting member of the family was Richard ("Ika") Sorge, who joined the Soviet intelligence service in the late 1920s. After the Nazis took power in Germany, Sorge was ordered by Moscow to join the Nazi Party, proceed to Tokyo as correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and set up a Soviet spy ring in Japan. He did so with conspicuous success. He became the lover of the German ambassador's wife and recruited the private secretary to the prime minister of Japan into his network. He was soon privy to all Japanese cabinet-level decisions. Thus, Sorge was able to inform the Kremlin that Japan would attack the United States and Great Britain, but not the USSR. This enabled Stalin to transfer crack Soviet divisions from Siberia to the European front, which probably saved Moscow. (I have been informed by people who should know the facts that Sorge was able to get loyalty and security clearance by the Nazi Party and the Gestapo because his files were falsified by Soviet agents in these organizations. These agents allegedly rose to positions of power by betraying members of the underground German Communist Party to the Nazis, for execution.) Sorge was finally caught and hanged by the Japanese during World War II.

10. Mehring, 554.

11. Payne, *Marx*, 500.

12. Padover, 590.

13. Engels's funeral oration is generally available; for example, the complete text will be found in Rühle, 366-68.

14. Nor, we may add, was it necessarily true. Did Cro-Magnon man have to wait until he was well-fed, well-clothed, and well-housed before painting mammoths on the cave walls at Lascaux?

15. Shlomo Aveneri, "From Hoax to Dogma," *Encounter*, March 1967, p. 32.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

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