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ST. ANTONY'S PAPERS (FAR EASTERN AFFAIRS) 1963

George Lichtheim's "Marx and the Asiatic Mode of Production"

While GL is quite ~~ambivalent~~ ambivalent and takes too long a time to praise Wittfogel, he is actually quite superior on Marx precisely on the Asiatic Mode of Production, and only at the end to you see there is a difference since he considers the German development to be so superior as to be both Western and especially German, so he will stick not to the introduction or the conclusion but what he sums up as ~~ambivalent~~ On (Pre-Capitalist Formations long before it was published; in a word, his translation from the Grundrisse ~~ambivalent~~ differs from the English translation. He begins to bring out all there is in Marx on the Asiatic mode of production. GL first tackles the (1853) articles to the NY Herald Tribune and it's only after that in which he dismisses a good deal as if it were only journalism that he comes to the Grundrisse. However, it isn't true that the description in the early 50s is easily dismissed. And he himself, for example, places very high both Engels' remark on the Oriental government having only three departments and Marx's use of it on a very high plane. (See p. 89.)

SM
The situation in relation to self-governing villages is likewise totally accepted, repeating Marx's expression, "inoffensive though they may appear had always been the solid foundation of oriental despotism" which is exactly the way it is expressed in 1857. Here is p. 90. QM

Whereas it is true that the centralized despotism arose from the need to provide artificial irrigation, GL by no means makes that the never-ending central point, as does Wittfogel whom he criticizes also for underestimating how great a theory Marx made of it as against the journalistic writing which was supposedly his foundation.

In going over to the ceterpoint on the Grundrisse, he keeps emphasizing that China constitutes 1/3 of the human race. It's here (p. 53) that he begins gathering all the strands of Marx's theoretical arguments. ~~ambivalent~~

NB --- Though GL's reference to pages on China do not agree, the dates from the NY Daily Tribune will give you ---

12/3/1859
article

14568

GL p. 93: "Oriental society clearly is something more complex than a system of canals. It has to do, on the one hand, with centralized, i.e. despotic, regulations of the basic economic functions (and) on the other, with the prevalence of the self-sufficient village economy. But still the key as we've seen earlier has to be sought in the absence of private property and land."

On that page too he brings the four epochs of human development. Ftn. 19 on p. 94 contrasts Marx to Engels.

On p. 97 GL shows how in the 1860s when Marx was already working on Capital, HE REVERTS TO THE THEME OF THE 1853 ARTICLES. "We now find him," GL says of Marx, " remarking on the stability of the ancient village communities in a manner suggesting that he saw some genuine virtue in these peculiar mode of life. At the same time, his hostility to capitalism has deepened. This is worth stressing as a qualification that he had by the 1860s lost some of his early revolutionary ardor." (p. 98).

From p. 100 on GL goes to the Grundrisse, making sure on p. 106, ftn. 63, not only to praise it as "among the most brilliant and incisive of Marx's writings", but he also says Marx anticipated a good deal of what Weber had to say on Oriental society, and had it been published in 1900 instead of 1940 "one may suppose that Max Weber and his school would have found even more reason for relating themselves to Marx's researches."

On p. 102, in gathering all the strands in Marx, he clearly shows how history predominates over everything, and then he throws in also "sociology."

p. 104 is where he develops Marx's concept of "Asiatic history is a kind of indifferent union of town and country." How he dared to begin singling out German is beyond me.

p. 108 he comes to the letter to Zasulich and just when he is finally going to reach a (near point) to my point of view he ends by being so enamored of European development with a "dialectic of its own", to which there is no parallel in Oriental history" that it is clear he is jumping off the deep end.