

CHAPTER 10, Section 3.

Office copy

The Unknown Ecological Notebooks, the Unread Drafts of Letters to Zasulich, as well as Undigested 1882 Preface to the Russian Edition of the Communist Manifesto.

"Everything depends upon the historical background in which it finds itself ... If the revolution takes place at the right time, if it concentrates all its forces to ensure the free development of the village commune, the latter will soon emerge as the regenerative force in Russian society and as something superior to those countries which are still enslaved by the capitalist regime."

Karl Marx March 1881 First Draft of Letter to Vera Zasulich

We have come to the last seven years of Marx's life, and it is time to draw threads together, not only of <sup>those of</sup> Marx's works when he was alive, but of the works found that ~~hadn't~~ <sup>been</sup> published. Furthermore, it is a fact that the continuing interest in Marx's ~~Marxism~~ Marxism is not for history's sake, but because it continues to be a living universe. Because Marx had discovered a new continent of thought as well as of revolution, and ~~because~~ <sup>unity</sup> because he held together, in ~~both~~ both concept and practice so creatively, they not only remain relevant but carry a global urgency for our age. Nothing is more integral to the totality of Marx's Marxism than the dialectic of liberation. Those last years of his life <sup>when</sup> all his major works were completed and <sup>the ever-widening</sup> revolutions and counter-revolutions ~~rounded~~ <sup>rounded</sup> out even the totality as still a newer beginning of a philosophy of revolutions-to-come.

We last saw him in the crucial year, 1875, as he wrote the Critique of the Gotha Program and, in being the philosopher-critic of that program, worked out for us the strategy and tactics of continuing revolutions until we reach the ultimate,

14941

the free: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." The covering letter that accompanied those "Marginal Notes" gained special significance as he referred to a new edition of the Revelations of the Cologne Communist Trial, to which he was appending a reprint of the 1850 Address on the permanent revolution.

That same pivotal year, 1875, was the year he completed the French edition of Capital, to which ~~so much~~ <sup>of historic importance</sup> was added, especially ~~for~~ <sup>for</sup> the sections on Fetishism and the Accumulation of Capital, that he asked the readers of the original German edition to make sure to read this edition. Here we are, <sup>more than</sup> ~~a~~ <sup>full</sup> century after that French edition and we still keep "discovering" paragraphs omitted by Engels from the first posthumous German edition which was to have inserted all changes made by Marx, and on which all other editions in every language ~~has~~ <sup>have</sup> been based. The specifically omitted paragraph has a special significance for both Luxemburg's age and ours <sup>—</sup> that is to say, it clearly shows that "the co-called primitive accumulation of capital" was by no means a factor of pre-capitalism only, but a characteristic of the most technically advanced capitalism:

"But only after mechanical industry had struck root so deeply that it exercised a preponderant influence on the whole of national production; only after foreign trade began to predominate over internal trade, thanks to mechanical industry; only after the world market had successively annexed extensive areas of the New World, Asia and Australia; and finally (only after a sufficient number of industrial nations had entered the arena — only after all this had happened can one date the repeated self-perpetuating cycles) whose successive phases embrace years, and always culminate in a general crisis, which is the end of one cycle and the starting-point of another. Until now the duration of these cycles has been ten or eleven years, but there is no reason to consider this duration as constant. On the contrary, we ought to conclude, on the basis of the laws of capitalist production as we have just expounded them, that the duration is variable, and that the length of the cycles will gradually diminish."

Whether this commentary would or would not have changed Luxemburg's view that Marx dealt only with the primitive accumulation is not the fundamental point at issue. She didn't know at all about the Ethnological Notebooks and can therefore in no way be blamed for all the debris that has accumulated on that work. Nevertheless, we do need to turn to her again precisely because what both disputes reveal is the failure to recognize the crucial role of philosophy. It is not a question of knowing or not knowing the specific book that Marx commented on. It is a question of ~~your~~ your own attitude to that work, especially if you are as serious a revolutionary as Luxemburg was.

It happens, for example, that when she was a young woman of 16 she had read Morgan's Ancient Society, and Bachofen's Mutterrecht.\* These works evidently left sufficient impression on her, for we find, interspersed in all of her mature works, serious references to primitive communism. Just as, on both mythology and the so-called "Woman Question", her letters reveal also serious consideration of women characters in Shakespeare's plays\*\*, so the use of Penthesilea at so great a historic turning point as World War I, to denounce not only all who capitulated directly in the imperialist war but those who waffled, demonstrates how present in her mind was Woman as power. It is true she did not make a category of women as a special revolutionary force, but she was most influential as anti-war theorist, and aware of the fact that the women were a most important section of the anti-war movement.

Nevertheless, the distance between Marx as philosopher of revolution and Luxemburg as a brilliant revolutionary publicist

and anti-imperialist theorist cannot be easily bridged. Luxemburg's lack of depth -- and not just when she was a mere 16 -- when it came to philosophy, did not show itself in her first great polemic against revisionism, 1898-99. This was so not only because the attack on Bernstein was cast mainly in political-economic terms, but also because it was sufficient simply to oppose Bernstein's demand for "removal of the dialectic scaffolding" without concretizing dialectics of revolution other than one opposing it to reform.

The question was entirely different when Luxemburg came to criticize Marx, himself, and on so central a point as accumulation of capital, which for revolutionaries couldn't possibly be separated from proletarian revolt. It may not have been obvious to many that such an "economic" question as accumulation of capital was directly related to revolution, but it certainly was to Luxemburg. Because her position on imperialism was put forward when she was very aware -- ahead of others, including Lenin -- of the opportunism of the German Social-Democracy, she refused to see that it wasn't those "epigones" that her theory took issue with, but Marx, himself.

Instead of looking for a "grave-digger" in those decisive non-capitalist lands, she continued to deny the revolutionary nature of any "nationalism", simply proclaiming that "long before" capitalism's downfall because of the non-existence of non-capitalist lands, the proletariat would abolish capitalism.

Nor did she consider that philosophy -- the power of negativity -- helped illuminate either what was integrally related to capitalism or imperialism as their absolute opposite; on the one hand, the proletariat who would bring down the collapse of capitalism; and on the other hand, the national movements against imperialism. She certainly did not question her own reduction of dialectics to a matter of "style" to account for her dislike of "the rococo ornamentation" in Volume I. That expression was far more revealing than she had meant it to be of her near-tone-deafness on the question of philosophy for hidden in the fetishism of commodities and in "the so-called primitive accumulation of capital" (my emphasis), was that power of negativity that came alive as revolutionary Reason as well as Force. To dismiss that as "rococo ornamentation" was to cause self-paralysis.

Her previous differences with Marx on the question of Poland she considered tactical, feeling very confident that she understood Poland better than anyone, Marx included. Moreover, much had happened in Poland since Marx's death, especially the fact that there now was a Marxist movement there. Luxemburg felt the task had become one of finding a more original as well as up-to-date analysis. When world war broke out, however, Lenin questioned not only her general position on the National Question, especially as it related to Poland, but the dialectic of its methodology of revolution. And because, to him, the national movement meant the dialectics of liberation, whereas Luxemburg categorically denied the presence of any revolutionary force in the National Question, Lenin called her methodology "half-way dialectics." That was the first time dialectics was not mere method, but the life-and-death question of revolution.

14945

<sup>(what she would have considered)</sup>  
If, sitting in prison, she was aware of Lenin's slur,  
it did not in any way influence her opposition either to the  
National Question or to <sup>(as if it were one and the same.)</sup> Imperialism. Her  
central point was that the breakdown of capitalism in its im-  
perialism stage couldn't possibly be ~~explained~~ explained on  
the basis of Marx's formulae on expanded reproduction, and hers  
did.

<sup>PA</sup> All these questions became abstract  
once the Russian Revolution broke out. What mattered was the  
revolution. Her criticism of some of the features, especially  
what she considered insufficient democracy, took secondary place  
to her hailing the Russian Revolution as the greatest world event  
and praising the Bolsheviks as the only ones who dared, and who  
therefore should serve as the beacon light for all.

Within a year, came the overthrow of the Kaiser and the  
beginning of the German Revolution. Her <sup>commitment</sup> ~~response~~ to the revo-  
lution being total, once action became the determinant, she plunged  
in to lead the January 1919 Spartacist revolt, although she had  
soberly advised against it as both ill-timed and ill-prepared.  
There was certainly no time to talk of philosophy, not when the  
counter-revolution moved so fast that the <sup>German</sup> revolution  
was beheaded.

It will not do to rewrite history, and it certainly doesn't help, in digging into the 1917 Russian, or the 1919 German Revolution, to come up with the same 1902 answer at all times as both Stalinists and Trotskyists do: "the party, the party, the party" -- and then claim that, because she didn't have "a vanguard party" and Lenin did, that alone explains the success of the Russian Revolution and the failure of the German. If that is all there is to it, how does one explain the transformation into opposite of that first workers' state into the state-capitalist monstrosity we know today? No, that glib, fetishistic answer will not do, especially not when enough life was left in the German Revolution, even after it was beheaded, to have been followed by two others, that likewise failed.

In drawing together all threads of Marx's life, what becomes imperative for today is asking what Marx felt compelled to do after the defeat of the Paris Commune, after Lassaleanism\* rather than Marxian dialectics became the "program" of the Socialist Workers Party of Germany. Why, in a word, at the end of his life, did Marx return, at one and the same time, to his earliest concept of the permanent revolution on the totally new ground of the 1880s, <sup>and to</sup> the pivotal Man/Woman relationship. Both led to his discernment in the excerpted passages from Mofgan, and from Maine, Phear and Lubbock, of a totally new projected relationship between the primitive and so-called backward economies and the most technologically advanced. Not only that. He, himself, had a new view of the subject of revolution. So deep was that view that he ~~was~~ began disagreeing with those

who interpreted his "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" as if that were a universal. He insisted, in his critique of Mihailovsky, that that historical tendency was drawn for the history of Western Europe, and did not mean that "the East" (not only the Orient, but Russia was included) would have to go through all those stages. In the draft letters to Zasulich he projected a possible revolution coming in Russia ahead of the technologically advanced West.

So much balderdash has been spread about the last decade of Marx's life that it becomes necessary to clear away what post-Marx Marxists said, in order to get to what Marx said and did. It is true that we would not have had Volumes II and III of Capital were it not for Engels. It is also <sup>true</sup>, unfortunately, that just as he assumed other "bequests", beginning with his Origin of the Family, so he had deeded all of Marx's documents (and his own) to the Second International as "the heirs". They not only never attempted to publish the Collected Works of Marx, but heavily edited what they did publish\*\*. The leaders of the Russian Revolution were the first to seriously unearth the entire heritage of Marx. <sup>At</sup> the head of the Marx-Engels Institute stood the well-known scholar, David Ryazanov. He announced a plan to publish two parallel series of documents: one, the "finished" works of Marx; the other, fragmented manuscripts. But Ryazanov-- who did so much to bring out Marx's early works, creating an entirely new view of Marx as a total person and not just an economist -- had no such appreciation for the works of Marx's last decade. No doubt, in part he was influenced by Mehring, who, in his biography of Marx, called the last decade "a slow death." Ryazanov allowed himself a quite gratuitous commentary when he announced the



rich heritage, the Ethnological Notebooks especially, to the Socialist Academy:

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ <sup>"This</sup> methodical and systematic way of working Marx retained until the end of this life. If in 1881-82 he lost his ability for <sup>intensive, independent</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ intellectual creation, he nevertheless never lost the ability for research. Sometimes, ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ reconsidering these Notebooks the question arises: Why did he waste so much time on <sup>this</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ systematic, fundamental summary, ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ or expend so much labor as he spent ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ as late as the year 1881, <sup>on basic</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ took on geology, summarizing it chapter by chapter. ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ In the 63rd year of his life -- that is <sup>inexcusable</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ pedantry. Here is another example: ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ He received, in 1878, a copy of Morgan's work. On 98 pages on his very miniscule handwriting <sup>showed</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ that a single page of his <sup>is the equivalent of</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ a minimum of <sup>2.2 pages</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ of print) he <sup>made</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ a detailed summary of Morgan. In such manner does the old Marx work." \* \*

<sup>had concocted</sup> Ryazanov ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ this slander after he listed such a great amount of unpublished manuscripts that he told the Academy that "to sort out all this heritage" would take 30 to 40 years and it was impossible for any single person to do it <sup>but</sup> evidently not impossible for that single person, Ryazanov, to reach conclusions even though he had not read the work. He <sup>stressed</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ that he had found no less than 50 notebooks reaching as far back as the notebooks for Marx's doctoral thesis, 1840-41; <sup>(and in particular the 1840-41)</sup> 1843-1845 and for the decades of the 1850s, 1860s, 1870s. <sup>That</sup> by no means exhausted the heritage,

as there were three huge volumes just on the question of a day to day history of the 1857 crisis, compiled at the time Marx was writing what we now know as the Grundrisse, which in itself was some 900 pages. Ryazanov calls attention to a four-volume compilation that Marx made -- a chronological survey of the world up to the mid-17th century. He <sup>continued to</sup> also emphasize that the 50 notebooks, which comprised some 30,000 pages, were written in Marx's minuscule handwriting so that printed pages would be more than double that number. Furthermore there were notebooks on mathematics which he confessed Fritz Adler had given him as far back as 9 years before, and that just "recently" he had received another one from Bernstein. Above all, -- and that's what the cornerstone of the whole report was about -- were the 1881-2 Notebooks on anthropology, plus one substantial work on geology. It was at that point that Ryazanov came up with that gratuitous commentary about "inexcusable pedantry."

Intellectuals who in no way measure up to the rare discoverer of a new continent of thought <sup>which is</sup> ~~such~~ <sup>such</sup> also <sup>are</sup> ~~also~~ revolution, seem to find <sup>(resistible)</sup> the temptation to bring the bigg-er-than-life founder down to their size.

Here is what had occurred directly after Marx's death: Engels <sup>too</sup> was overwhelmed by the vast amount of writing that Marx had produced that he knew nothing about, from the very first time he met him in Paris in 1844 to the very last months of his life, <sup>what he did</sup> know was the incompleted Capital which, Marx had told his daughter Eleanor, Engels was "to make something out of it". 14950

As it turned out, what came first from Engels' pen was Origin of the Family, not Vol. II, much less Vol. III. Marx had conceived these two volumes as Books II and III to be included in a single volume, II; what Marx assigned to a Volume III was his Theories of Surplus Value, which Engels did not live to issue, leaving it for Kautsky to publish. In any case, none of these ~~books~~ had priority over what he considered to be Marx's "bequest" when he found Marx's notebooks on Morgan and realized that Marx had wanted him to read Ancient Society several years earlier. Here is how ~~Engels~~ Engels expressed that "bequest":

"No less a man than Karl Marx had made it one of his future tasks to present the results of Morgan's researches in the ~~light~~ light of the conclusions of his own -- within certain limits I may say our -- materialist examination of history, and thus to make clear their full significance."

It's very doubtful that all Marx meant to do was to expound on the "full significance" of Morgan's work. But at that time, and unfortunately ever since, it ~~was~~ *was*

assumed that Engels reproduced, more or less in full, Marx's "Abstract." That Engels thought he was doing just that can be seen also from his Aug. 30, 1883 letter to Bebel, who had been amazed that Engels was unacquainted\* with so much of Marx's works:

\* For that matter, we must not forget, Engels first saw Vol. I of Capital when it was already on galleys, and some of the questions he then posed show how very far from the profundities of Marx's discoveries Engels was.

☞ You ask: How could it happen that Marx hid from me the condition (mere) in which Marx left his work? Very simple: if I knew about it I would have given him no rest, day or night until the book would be completed and published. Marx knew about this more than anyone else; but he knew also that ~~Marx hid from me the condition~~ at the worst, as is true right now, I would publish the manuscripts totally in his spirit, and it's about this that he talked to *Tussy*.

To what extent does that hold for Engels' own work, Origin of the Family, which he had likewise considered a "bequest" of Marx? Now that we finally have a transcription of Marx's Ethnological Notebooks, we can see that nothing could be further from the truth. Nor is it only a quantitative question though that is vast in itself: Marx's excerpts from and commentaries on Morgan's work alone numbered no less than 98 pages, whereas Engels' quotation from the Abstract numbered but a few paragraphs\*\*. Nor is it a matter also that other anthropological Notebooks had been summarized: Maine, Phear and Lubbock, not to mention Kovalevsky's work that he had excerpted in 1878. No, the serious, overwhelming, if not bewildering fact is the sharp differences between Engels' Origin of the Family and Marx's Notebooks, whether these relate to primitive communism, the Man/Woman relationship, or, for that matter, the attitude to Darwin.\*\*\* it related to Indeed, the whole idea of Historical Materialism, though it is Engels who did give Marx's conception that succinct title.

Marx's historic originality in internalizing new data, whether that be in anthropology or "pure" science, was a never-ending confrontation with what Marx called "history and its process."<sup>24</sup> That was concrete. That was ever-changing. And that ever-changing concrete was inexorably bound to the universal, because, precisely because, the determining concrete was the ever-developing Subject — self-developing men and women.

The whole question of transitions is what is at stake between Marx's and Engels' views. Marx is showing that it is during the transition period that you see the duality, the beginnings of antagonism, whereas Engels always seems to have it only at the end, as if class society came in very nearly full blown after the communal form was destroyed and private property was established. Moreover, where, to Marx, the dialectical development from one stage to another is related to new revolutionary upsurge, Engels sees it as a unilateral development.

In the 1850s, for example, what inspired Marx to return to the study of pre-capitalist formations and gave new appreciation of ancient society and its craftsmen was the Taiping Revolution.<sup>25</sup> It opened so many new doors on "history and its process" that "materialistically" a stage of production wasn't just a stage of production — be it the Western or the Asiatic mode of production — but a question of revolutionary relations. Whether that concerned the communal form or the despotic form of property, the development of the individual to society and to the state was crucial. It was no accident, on the other hand, that Engels, who certainly agreed with Marx's singling out the Asiatic mode of production, nevertheless happened to skip over the question of the Oriental commune in his analysis of primitive communism in *The Origin of the Family*.

<sup>25</sup>It is not clear whether Engels knew Marx's *Grundrisse*, but he did know the articles in *The New York Tribune* on the Taiping Revolution.

**M**ARX, ON THE CONTRARY, showed that the elements of oppression in general, and of woman in particular, arose from within primitive communism, and not only related to change from "matriarchy," but beginning with establishment of ranks — relationship of chief to mass — and the economic interests that accompanied it. Indeed, in Volume III of *Capital*, as Marx probed in his chapter, "Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent," "the economic conditions at the basis" of class "individuality," you can see the actual dialectical foundation for his stress, in the *Notebooks on anthropology*, on property as the material base for changing social relations. He was not using Morgan's phrase, "career of property," as if it were a synonym for historical materialism.

Engels' uncritical acclaim of Morgan notwithstanding, Morgan did not "discover afresh in America the materialist conception of history discovered by Marx 40 years ago."<sup>22</sup>

Far from considering Morgan a fellow "historical materialist" Marx emphasized in his <sup>(draft)</sup> letter to Zasulich \* that Morgan <sup>who</sup> "can certainly not be suspected of revolutionary tendencies and whose works are supported by the Washington government" nevertheless spoke of the "archaic system" as "higher" than capitalism.

*Marx emphasized*  
Morgan's great contribution on the theory of the gens and its early egalitarian society, but he certainly didn't tie it, alone, to the precedence of matriarchy over patriarchy as did Engels in the Preface to the Fourth Edition, 1891. "This rediscovery of the primitive matriarchal gens as the earlier stage of the patriarchal gens of civilized peoples has the same importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy." Marx rejected biologism in Morgan as he had in Darwin.

Marx didn't take issue with Morgan's findings about the Iroquois society and especially singled out the role of women in it. But he did not stop there. In calling attention to other societies and other analyses, he brought in, first, new illumination to the writings of Plutarch:

"The expression by Plutarch, that 'the lowly and poor readily followed the bidding of Theseus' and the statement from Aristotle cited by him, that Theseus 'was inclined toward the people' appear, however, despite Morgan, to indicate that the chiefs of the gentes etc. already entered into conflict of interest with the mass of the gentes, which is inevitably connected with the monogamous family through private property in houses, lands, herds."<sup>23</sup>

Then, Marx demonstrates that, long before the dissolution of the primitive commune, there emerged the question of ranks within the egalitarian commune. It was the beginning of a transformation into opposite — gens into caste. That is to say, within the egalitarian communal form arose the elements of its opposite — caste, aristocracy, different material interests. Moreover, these weren't successive stages, but co-extensive with the communal form. Or as Marx put it when they began changing the names of the children to assure paternal rather than maternal rights (a paragraph Engels did reproduce in *The Origin of the Family*): "Innate casuistry! To change things by changing their names! And to find loopholes for violating tradition while maintaining tradition, when direct interest supplied sufficient impulse."

In a word, though Marx surely connects the monogamous family with private property, what is pivotal to him is the antagonistic relationship between the Chief and the masses:

Which is why Marx, while singling out how much more freedom they enjoyed than in "civilized" societies, also pointed to the limitations of freedom among the Iroquois women;

"The women allowed to express their wishes and opinions through an orator of their own selection. Decision given by the Council. Unanimity was a fundamental law of its action among the Iroquois. Military questions usually left to the action of the voluntary principle."

Secondly, and this is the critical point, the Russians took liberties when they, in 1941, did translate the Marx text on Morgan. Engels, naturally, cannot be blamed for this mis-translation. Nor can the Russians excuse themselves on the basis that the inspiration for using the words "private" and "hallowed" came from Engels. Here is how Marx excerpted a part of Morgan:

"When field culture bowleson hatte, dass d(in) ganze Oberflaeche der Erde could be made the subject of property owned by individuals in severalty u(nd) (das) Familienhaupt became the natural center of accumulation, the new property career of mankind inaugurated, fully done before the close of the Later Period of Barbarism, welche einen grossen Einfluss auf (the) human mind, rief new elements of character wach . . ." (Ethnological Notebooks, p. 135.)

Here is the original Morgan excerpt: "When field agriculture had demonstrated that the whole surface of the earth could be made the subject of property owned by individuals in severalty, and it was found that the head of the family became the natural center of accumulation, the new property career of mankind was inaugurated. It was fully done before the close of the Later Period of barbarism. A little reflection must convince any one of the powerful influence private property would now begin to exercise upon the human mind, and of the great awakening of new elements of character it was calculated to produce . . ."

Here is how the Russian translation reads: "When field agriculture had demonstrated that the whole surface of the earth could be made the object of property of separate individuals and the head of the family became the natural center of accumulation of wealth, mankind entered the new hallowed path of private property. It was already fully done before the later period of barbarism came to an end. Private property exercised a powerful influence on the human mind, awakening new elements of character . . ." (Akhiv Marks y Engelsa, Vol. 3, p. 62. Emphasis is mine to stress what was neither in Morgan nor in Marx's excerpt.)

Now the Russians have very concrete, class—state-capitalist class—interests that inspire them to translate "the career of property" as "private property" and repeat the word twice. But why should independent Marxists who are not statist-Communist likewise narrow the subject to collective vs. private property, when Marx's point is that the "property career", i.e. accumulation of wealth, is that which contains the antagonisms of the development of patriarchy and later class divisions?

If we are to grapple with that seriously, we must, first, appreciate the totality of Marx's philosophy of revolution sufficiently to want to unearth what Marx had said from under all the debris of what was attributed to him from the time of his death in 1883.

*How*  
Marx himself "applied" what he was researching to what, as world revolutionary he was a participant in, and a theorist of, (whether that be Volumes II and III of Capital on which he was working, the letters he was writing to can be seen in: ^ Russian revolutionaries and independent scholars. In the case of his draft letters to Zasulich what Marx was stressing is confirmed by the clearly written, well-known, but undigested, Preface to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto. What he stressed was, first, the historic determinant; secondly, the theoretic concept which would result if that historic determinant were related to a capitalist world in crisis since it is this which creates favorable conditions for transforming primitive communism into a modern collective society: "In order to save the Russian commune there must be a Russian Revolution." In a word, revolution is the indispensable whether one has to go through capitalism or can go to the new society "directly" from the commune.

### III. MARX'S NOTEBOOKS: THEN AND NOW

Marx died before he could write up his Notebooks on anthropology either as a separate work, or as part of Vol. III of Capital. There is no way for us to know what Marx intended to do with this intensive study, much less the concrete manner in which he would have dialectically related the external to the internal factors in the dissolution of the primitive commune. What is clear, however, is that the decline of the primitive commune was not due just to external factors, nor due only to "the world historic defeat of the female sex." That was Engels' phrase, not Marx's.



Just as it was important to keep in mind that Marx never let go of his concept of revolution whether he was talking of the history of pre-capitalist societies, or present needs, so here it is important to remember Marx's concept of Man/Woman relations ~~whether he was analyzing it in his 1844 Essays~~ or talking about the concrete world of the First International ~~which~~ which he headed and which, as far back as 1868 elected a woman, Madame Harriet Law to the highest body, the General Council, of the International. It is true that it took our age to discover just how extensive and concrete were the historic roles of women in the Paris Commune\*, but it is Marx who ~~not only~~ described them in the Civil War in France as both brave and thinking, but before it ever erupted had encouraged Dmitrieva, who became active

in the Paris Commune and organized independent women's sections of the First International. In a word, it was always a question of not separating theory from practice or vice versa. And at no time to consider any defeat, least of all as far back as the move from matrilineal to patrilineal society as a "world historic defeat". There was always one more revolution to make and the proof was that one learned from a defeat to transform the next battle into a victory.

Now then, more equal as Man/Woman relations were under primitive communism compared to patriarchal society, Marx was not about to glorify the former as "model". Therefore he called attention to the fact of conquests, even when the commune was at its height.

- 18 -

Just as there was conquest, even when the commune was at its height, and the beginning of slavery when one tribe defeated another, so there was the beginning of commodity exchange between the communes as well as emergence of conflict within the commune, within the family, and not only between the family and the gens. All these conflicts coalesced during the dissolution, which is why Marx's Notebooks keep stressing the duality in primitive communism.

In the paragraph that Engels did quote in *The Origin of the Family*, Marx emphasized that not only slavery, but also serfdom was latent in the family; indeed, that all conflicts that were developing in the transition to class society were present in the family "in miniature."

Finally, what Marx called "the excrescence of the state" in class-divided society—and he uses that in his reference to a period during the dissolution of the commune—is introduced into the question of transition from primitive communism to a political society. The point at all times is to stress a differentiation in the family, both when that is part of the gens or as they separate out of the gens to another society, at which point Marx again differentiates between the family that is in a society that already has a state and the family before the state emerged. The point at all times is to have a critical attitude both to biologism and uncritical evolutionism.

**IT WAS BY NO MEANS SIMPLE**, unitary development, and it cannot under any circumstances be attributed to a single cause like patriarchy winning over matriarchy and establishing thereby nothing less than some sort of "world historic defeat of the female sex." Marx, by taking as the point of departure, not the counter-revolution, but new stages of revolution, was enabled to see even in the Asiatic mode of production, the great resistance to Western imperial encroachments, contrasting China to India, where British imperialism won.

Throughout Marx's Notebooks, his attack on colonialism, racism, as well as discrimination against women, is relentless, as he refers to the British historians, jurists, anthropologists and lawyers as "blockheads" who definitely didn't appreciate what discoveries were being made and therefore often skipped over whole historic periods of humanity. Listen to the criticisms included in Marx's Notebooks on Maine: "Herr Maine als block-headed Englishman geht nicht von gens aus, sondern von Patriarch, der spaecker Chief wird etc."<sup>27</sup> And a little later: "Nach dem Ancient Irish Law women had some power of dealing with their own property without the consent of their husbands, and this was one of the institutions expressly declared by the English block-headed Judges to be illegal at the beginning of the 17th century."<sup>28</sup>

As against Engels, who was so overwhelmed with all the new data on forms of marriage and the development of a family, in and out of the gens, that it very nearly subsumed the question of property, i.e. economics, Marx, in assembling new data, never fails to criticize the major writers he is excerpting. He does this, not just "politically", i.e. calling attention to the fact that they are bourgeois writers, but calling attention to the fact that their method is empiric and nowhere is empiricism as method as vacuous as when gathering new facts. What Marx was doing, instead, was following the empiric facts dialectically, relating them not only to other historic facts, but tracing the development of each fact, its petrification and transformation into opposite, caste. Which is why he kept his eye on the differences in rank in the gens, emergence of conflict within it, both in changing material interests and in relations between Chief and ranks. And yet, Marx drew no such unbridgeable gulf between primitive and civilized as Engels had. As he was to write to Zasulich, in the year he was working most intensively on Morgan's Ancient Society, the pivotal point was that everything "depends on the historical environment in which it occurs."

While there was no difference between Marx and Engels on such a conclusion--indeed, the expression "Historical Materialism" was Engels', not Marx's--the relationship of concrete to universal always remains, with Engels, in two totally separate compartments. Put differently, "knowing" Historical Materialism, and having that always at the back of his mind, and recognizing Marx as "genius" whereas he and the others were "at best, talented", did not impart to Engels' writings after Marx's death, the totality of Marx's new continent of thought. Engels' *The Origin of The Family*, as his first major work after the death of Marx, proves that fact most glaringly today, because Women's Liberation is an idea whose time has come, and for that, *The Origin of the Family* sheds little direction.

As Marx, in the last years of his life was turning to anthropology, it was neither as the philosophic anthropology which ran through his 1844 Essays, nor just as the latest empiric data in the 1880s. Rather, whether it's a question of the description of the equality of women during primitive communism, or the question of Morgan's theory of the gens, what Marx was focusing on was the self-development of humanity from primitive communism to the period in which he lived, through revolutionary praxis. That is what kept him enthralled as he dug deep into the latest in anthropology, in archeology, in early history, technology and agriculture, craftsmanship and primitive human relations. Truly, we see here that no greater empiricist ever lived than the great dialectician, Karl Marx. And Marx wasn't hurrying to make easy generalizations, such as Engels' on the future being just a "higher stage" than primitive communism. No, Marx envisioned a totally new man, a totally new woman, a totally new life form (and by no means only for marriage); in a word, a totally new society.

We get a glimpse of this not only in his letters to Vera Zasulich, but in his projection of revolution in backward countries possibly preceding that in the West, which he included directly in the new Preface for the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto.

We must not reduce this to mean simply as an answer to the question: Could Russia escape capitalism? (debated in those terms) The Russian Marxists -- and I don't mean only Plekhanov and Zasulich who did not favor the 1917 revolution. It would take the defeat of the German 1919 revolution before Lenin, in 1920, turned to the Orient as an extension of the Russian Revolution and said "if not through Berlin, then perhaps through Peking." And Trotsky, who did develop his own theory of permanent revolution and did think it was possible to go directly to it, had not rooted it in Marx's concept. His original point of departure, by failing to conceive of the role of the peasantry as revolutionary, far from depending, as had Marx, on a "second edition" of a peasant war to assure the revolution its success, never tired of totally subordinating the role of the peasantry. Marx, however, at one and the same time, kept seeing new revolutionary forces reaching down even into the "archaic economic forms", i.e. the primitive commune, provided they worked their way out of isolation <sup>from</sup> ~~the~~ technologically advanced countries, and took advantage of all the world had developed.

What -- with all this century's experience -- makes it ~~so~~ so poignant to turn the pages of history back to Marx's time, is that his global concept of world revolution was so much ahead of the times that he, himself, didn't quite know how to express it in the letter to Vera Zasulich.

Marx found it difficult to answer a simple question from Vera Zasulich on the future of the Russian commune, in the manner in which it was debated between the Narodniks and the Marxists—that is to say, whether it could lead to communism without needing to go through capitalism and evidently without a revolution! He wrote no less than four different versions of his answer, the first of which was fully ten pages long. From that first draft until the very much abbreviated one that he finally sent, what is clear is that his preoccupation is not "the commune" but the "needed Russian Revolution".

The second draft manifests also what he had developed with the Asiatic mode of production: "The archaic or primary formation of our globe contains a number of strata of different ages, one superimposed on the other . . . (isolation) permits the emergence of a central despotism above the communities . . . I now come to the crux of the question. We cannot overlook the fact that the archaic type to which the Russian Russian commune a revolution is needed."

The third draft, which in part was quoted above on the question of the historical environment being the crucial point, was a conclusion Marx reached as he emphasized "the dualism within it (the commune) permits of an alternative: either the property element in it will overcome the collective element, or the other way."

**THIS IS ALWAYS THE KEY** to the whole. We must remember that just as, in 1844, Marx was projecting not just the overthrow of the old but stressing that a new society must change human relationships totally, actually as well as philosophically, so, once the 1848 Revolutions were defeated, Marx developed a new concept—the "revolution in permanence." In a word, it was in the 1850 Address to the Communist League that Marx first projected both the deepening of the concrete revolution as well as the world revolution, the inter-relatedness of both.

As we saw, it was the Taiping Revolution in the 1850s which led, at one and the same time, to his probing of pre-capitalist forms of society, and seeing the Chinese Revolution as "encouraging" the West European proletariat, which was encouraging at the moment, to revolt. The Grundrisse, which contained that most brilliant chapter on pre-capitalist formations, also contained the projection of a totally new society where, as Marx wrote, "does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming."

And here — after the great "scientific-economic" work, Capital (which, however, likewise projected "human power is its own end"31), after the defeat of the Paris Commune; and after four full decades from the start of Marx's discovery of a whole new continent of thought, first articulated in 1844—we see that Marx returns to probe "the origin" of humanity, not for purposes of discovering "new" origins, but for perceiving new revolutionary forces, their reason, or as Marx called it in emphasizing a sentence of Morgan, "powers of the mind." How total, continuous, global must the concept of revolution be now? One culminating point in this intensive study of primitive communism and in the answer to Vera-Zasulich,32 can be seen in the Introduction Marx and Engels wrote for the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto, which, without changing a word in the Manifesto itself 33, projected the idea that Russia could be the first to have a proletarian revolution: "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting for a communist development."

*Commune belongs, conceals a dualism 36*

*so total upsetting of the old that the present is a total shift*

*consequence of it by realization IT*

The London Times dated January 1881...  
not waste his criticism on either the writer or his  
reports. This is excerpting Lubbock's...  
"Among many of the lower races...  
females is the prevalent custom..."...  
Lubbock still continues to talk of "a man's hairs" Marx  
contemptuously noted "but then they are not the man's  
hairs; these civilized asses cannot free themselves of  
their own conventionalities."

For these British scholars he had nothing but contempt, calling  
them "rogues," asses <sup>(or "black heads")</sup>, expounding "silliness" whereas Marx called  
the Australian aborigine <sup>"the intelligent black"</sup> who would not accept the talk by the cleric  
(quoted by Lubbock) about there being a soul without a body.

How could anyone consider the very limited quotations from  
Marx that Engels used in The Origin of the Family as  
any kind of summation of Marx's views? How can anyone, like  
Ryazanov, think that those Ethnological Notebooks dealt  
"mainly with landownership and feudalism"?

In truth they contain nothing short of both a pre-history  
of humanity, including emergence of class distinctions  
(and a history of "civilization")  
from within communal society, ~~and a history of "civilization"~~ that  
~~formed~~ <sup>to Marx's famous section in Capital on the</sup> historical tendency of capitalist  
accumulation, which was, as he wrote to Zasulich, "only of  
Western civilization" -- this time directed to the Asiatic mode  
of production.

It illuminates ~~Capital~~ Capital. It includes, furthermore, as Marx does deal with feudalism and land ownership, what is not integral with feudalism -- Oriental society, the Asiatic mode of production. So very <sup>was it</sup> pivotal to Marx that he singled it out, as against all he had written before 1857-59, the Asiatic mode of production as separate from primitive, slavery, feudalism and capitalism.

Finally, the Oriental peasant commune, the whole discovery of primitive communism, is not (underlined, not) a matter of past but the illumination it casts on the relationship to future.

and recent Russian  
 One original/contribution to the whole question of the Asiatic mode of production which somehow was immediately withdrawn from circulation precisely because it was both factual and related to ~~Marx's~~ Marx's philosophic-historic concepts spoke ~~about the fact~~ about the fact that "it is as if Marx returned to the radicalism of the 1840s, however, on new ground." And the new ground, far from being any sort of retreat to "old age" and less *creativity and less* radicalism, revealed "principled new moments of his (Marx's)

-24-

philosophic-historic conceptions". This is what we must first begin developing for our age, fully aware of the fact that we have no Marx to help us. Just as the young Marx had transformed Hegel's revolution in philosophy into a philosophy of revolution, when he first turned to "economics" and discovered in the proletariat the new Subject, though he had not yet worked out his original contributions to political economy, so, at the end of his life Marx expanded the Subject to include women, peasants, Blacks, encompassing the universe so that the Orient was not separated from the West, nor the North from the South, nor Mid-East from Russia, and every moment as well as the totality of moments spell out revolution, permanent revolution.

\* \* \*

December 23 , 1980  
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