

THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-EMANCIPATION IN MARX AND ENGELS*

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THERE can be little doubt that Marx and Engels would have agreed with Lenin's nutshell definition of Marxism as "the theory and practice of the proletarian revolution." In this violently compressed formula, the key component is not the unity of theory and practice; unfortunately that has become a platitude. Nor is it "revolution"; unfortunately that has become an ambiguity. The key is the word "proletarian"—the class-character component.

But "proletarian revolution" too, very early, took on a considerable element of ambivalence, for it could be and was applied to two different patterns. In one pattern, the proletariat carries out its own liberating revolution. In the other, the proletariat is used to carry out a revolution.

The first pattern is new; the second is ancient. But Marx and Engels were the first socialist thinkers to be sensitive to the distinction. Naturally so: since they were also the first to propose that, for the first time in the history of the world, the exploited bottom stratum of workers in society was in position to impress its own class character on a new social order.

When Marx and Engels were crystallizing their views on this subject, the revolutionary potentialities of the proletariat were already

*The following essay is one chapter of a larger work in progress, on Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, and concerns itself with only one aspect of Marx's views on the nature of proletarian revolution. Taken by itself, isolatedly, there is a danger that it may be interpreted in a *onesided* way, as *counter-*posing "self-emancipation" to class organization and political leadership.

Such a conclusion is utterly baseless, in my own opinion. And that such a counterposition has nothing in common with Marx's approach is, I think, proved to the hilt by Monty Johnstone's admirable study, "Marx and Engels and the concept of the Party" (Socialist Register 1967). I agree unreservedly with Johnstone's passing remark: "Marx's famous principle that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves', on which he and Engels insisted again and again, is complemented, not contradicted, by their concept of the Party."

What is true, certainly, is that the "principle of self-emancipation" conditions, and interacts with, one's concept of class party and vanguard organization. What is true is that the principle does contradict, is quite incompatible with, a number of well-known party concepts held by self-styled

being recognized here and there. It was not Marx who first discovered that the proletariat was a revolutionary class. For example, Robert Owen, disappointed at the failure of his philanthropic bourgeois to become enthusiastic about the abolition of their class, turned for help to the beginnings of the working-class and trade-union movement in England; he thought to use them, not to shift power to *that* class, but as troops to push through his own scheme, in which a philanthropic elite would "do them good." Saint-Simon, disillusioned with the failure of monarchs, bankers, scientists, etc. to understand the ineffable justice of his plans for humanity, turned, in his very last work *The New Christianity*, to the workers for the first time—appealing to them to convince their *bosses* to heed the Saint-Simonian wisdom.

The Larger Historical Pattern

The first socialist view of the revolutionary proletariat was to regard its revolutionary potential as an instrument in others' hands; as a battering-ram to break down the old system but not as a force fit to build a new one in its own name. These non-proletarian socialisms not only preceded Marxism, but have always been far stronger than Marxism, in the socialist movements of the world—today as yesterday.

It must be emphasized that this pattern is not something peculiar to the socialist movement, but *extends into* socialism. It extends back into all recorded history, far as human eye can read. One section of the propertied classes, beaten on top, becomes desperate enough to resort to arousing the broader masses below both contestants, and therefore sets the plebs into motion, with appropriate promises and slogans, in order to hoist itself into the seats of power.

Hence, for example, the *tyrannoi* of ancient Greece have become *tyrants* in modern languages not because they tyrannized over the masses any more than the preceding oligarchy, but because they used the masses to "tyrannize" over that oligarchy itself. The pattern is visible in the story of the Gracchi; it is commonplace in modern history. It is a key to the dynamics of class struggle and intra-class struggle throughout time.

But it is always a gamble; there is a social risk. After you have called the masses from below onto the stage of social action, how are you going to get them off and back to their holes, after they have done the job for you? These animals are dangerous: handle with

"Marxist" parties, including both the classic and contemporary Social-Democratic parties and the Stalinist-type parties, both of which types are elitist in different ways. But this is a question which requires a separate and extensive treatment of its own.

care. The intoxication of a joint victory may make them forget that you are the Natural Master. They may reach out for something for themselves, or smash things up in the process.

That danger was there even in ages when the broad working masses (slaves, labouring freemen, or serfs) could not and did not have any vision of a new social order which corresponded to their own class interests; when therefore their rule could not in fact mean a reorganization of society from below, but merely chaos. When that changes, what was previously a serious danger to Order becomes a mortal danger to the social order itself.

THE PROLETARIAN ACHERON

This is the change that takes place in history with the rise of capitalism and its shadow, the revolutionary proletariat. For the first time, there is a class below, the class on whose labour society is founded, that inherently does suggest a social programme for its own reorganization of society. Once set in motion (in struggle), this class has an historical option: it is not limited to lending its services to one ruling class (or section of a ruling class) or another; it can go into business for itself. To be sure, it can still be controlled: for it is very young, and largely unformed, and often childishly stupid, and ill-educated; but how long can this adolescent giant be kept in short pants?

Because of this new type of danger, the class instinct of the bourgeoisie early made it reluctant to call the working masses into civil conflict even as an ally in its own drive to gain power from the older feudal order, and, since then, made it interested mainly in ways and means of fragmenting and channelling the dangerous mass forces below.

But the case of individual ideologists and political adventurers is another matter; so also political tendencies which look in the direction of an anti-capitalist elite.

Hence one of the characteristic differences among the bourgeois politicians is willingness to play with this fire, to one degree or another. Marx noted this, for example, in his thumbnail sketch of the French "liberal" politician Thiers who, after serving both Louis Philippe and Bonaparte, carried out the task of massacring the Paris Commune:

A professional "Revolutionist" in that sense, that in his eagerness . . . of wielding power . . . he never scrupled, when banished to the ranks of the opposition, to stir the popular passions and provoke a catastrophe to displace a rival . . . The working class he reviled as "*the vile multitude.*"

This political type had a Virgilian tag, which was well-enough known in Marx's day to be of interest now. It put the pattern in six vivid words: *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*—"If I cannot change the Powers above, I shall set the Lower Regions [Acheron] into motion." George Brandes' book on Lassalle tells us that the would-be workers' dictator, weighing his political course, "pondering like Achilles in his tent, mentally repeated to himself for nights and days the burden of Virgil's line . . ." The motto also came to Engels' pen as he contemplated the cowardice of the French liberals of a later day:

. . . the *flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* is not their business . . . They are afraid of the proletarian Acheron.⁴

Marx developed a new, third view of the proletariat, basically hostile both to the Olympian view of the ruling class and the Acherontic view of the would-be ruler.

The New Principle

The classic formulation of the self-emancipation principle by Marx was written down in 1864 as the first premise of the *Rules* of the First International—in fact, as its first clause.

CONSIDERING, That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves; . . .⁵

And it was from this source that the phrase became famous, being repeated also by various elements who did not believe a word of it.

Later on, Engels rightly predated the conception to "the very beginning": "our notion, from the very beginning, was that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself,'" he wrote in a preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, slightly varying the formulation, as did Marx also in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

From the very beginning of Marxism, he means. But if we sketch Marx and Engels' course *before* they arrived at this keystone principle of the self-emancipation of the proletariat, we will put it into context. For it was then an unknown principle, previously almost unthinkable.* There was nobody from whom to adopt it. Marx had to invent

*As usual, there are possible exceptions. A prominent candidate is the remarkable Gerrard Winstanley ("Diggers," left wing of the English Revolution); but he was entirely unknown to the early socialists, completely forgotten. Then there was Thomas Münzer (who was therefore the subject of Engels' first serious work after the 1848 revolution); and Spartacus—"the most splendid fellow that all ancient history has to show; great general—no Garibaldi—noble character, real representative of the ancient proletariat," wrote Marx.⁷ But we know too little about the last two.

it himself—r re-invent it. The probability is that it was Marx who straightened Engels out on the subject, in the course of their collaboration in 1845 on *The German Ideology*.

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ENGELS : FROM ELITISM TO MARXISM

A good biography of Engels would recount the layers of ideas through which he had to fight his way before he could even get within reaching distance of Marx's approach. There was more standing in his way than in Marx's case.

We will only mention now that, first, Engels had to revolt against the authoritarian pietist Christianity of his family and home; then came his early intellectual development through the romanticism of "Young Germany", followed by infatuation with the radical-liberal Ludwig Borne. Involvement in the Young Hegelian (left-Hegelian) circle in Berlin, plus an early dash of Shelley, led to his conversion to a so-called "communism" by Moses Hess, who was then in his period of *Schwarmerei* over Proudhon's newfangled "anarchism", which he understood to be similar to his own sentimental petty-bourgeois socialism. In England in 1843, Engels was at first mainly in contact with the Owenites, for whose *New Moral World* he began his English writing, although he also made the acquaintance of émigré German communist workers like Karl Schapper. Then he went through a spell of enthusiasm over Wilhelm Weitling's allegedly "working class" communism, finally making contact with the Chartist movement.

The radical scene was what this sounds like, only more so: a hodge-podge of ideas, a mangle-mangle of movements. And, before Engels got to Chartism, every one of them was basically elitist to the core: "we" will bring salvation to the toilers, and consent to lead them where sheep may safely graze.

Let us pick up Engels toward the end of 1843: he is writing articles for the Owenite *New Moral World*, as a convert to "philosophical communism" by Hess, and as an admirer of Proudhon's anarchism. In a key article, he praises Proudhon's *What Is Property?* (1840) as the most important "communist" work published (for he is ignorant of the fact that Proudhon denounces "communism," since this enthusiasm came from Hess, who had adopted that label). The article emphasizes Proudhon's view—

that every kind of government is alike objectionable, no matter whether it be democracy, aristocracy, or monarchy, that all govern by force; and that,

in the best of all possible cases, the force of the majority oppresses the weaknesses of the minority, he comes, at last, to the conclusion: "Nous voulons l'anarchie!" What we want is anarchy; the rule of nobody, the responsibility of every one to nobody but himself.⁸

There is more of this Proudhonism in Engels' article, radical in sound and reactionary in content. The following is pure Proudhonism :

Democracy is, as I take all forms of government to be, a contradiction in itself, an untruth, nothing but hypocrisy . . . at the bottom. Political liberty is sham-liberty, the worst possible slavery; the appearance of liberty, and therefore the reality of servitude. Political equality is the same; therefore democracy, as well as every form of government, must ultimately break to pieces . . . we must have either a regular slavery — that is, an undisguised despotism, or real liberty, and real equality — that is **Communism**.⁹

This reflects Proudhon's virulent hatred of democracy, using truths about sham-democracy to damn democracy itself, not to demand that the sham be exchanged for real democracy.

"Philosophical" Elitism

To this Proudhonism is attached Hess's "philosophical communism", which Engels, as a disciple of Hess in this article, considers the special glory of the German mind. Unlike the economic-minded English and the political French, the Germans became Communists philosophically, by reasoning upon first principles", he boasts.¹⁰ For "the Germans are a philosophical nation" and will adopt Communism "as soon as it is founded upon sound philosophical principles." This will surely be done; and so, no doubt—

There is a greater chance in Germany for the establishment of a Communist party among the educated classes of society, than anywhere else. The Germans are a very disinterested nation; if in Germany principle comes into collision with interest, the principle will almost always silence the claims of interest. The same love of abstract principles, the same disregard of reality and self-interest, which have brought the Germans to a state of political nonentity, these very same qualities guarantee the success of a philosophical Communism in that country. It will appear very singular to Englishmen, that a party which aims at the destruction of private property, is chiefly made up by those who have property; and yet this is the case in Germany. We can recruit our ranks from those classes only which have enjoyed a pretty good education; that is, from the universities and from the commercial class; and in neither we have not hitherto met with any considerable difficulty.¹¹

This hash, which is pure Hess, give a good idea of what some of the better elements of the day were thinking and saying. Engels' next contribution to the Owenite paper is especially taken from Weitling, who had also been praised in the previous article as the leader of the

"working-class" wing of German Communism. Engels now stresses

the chief point in which **Weitling** is superior to Cabet, namely, the abolition of all government by force and by majority, and the establishment in its stead of a mere administration . . . [and] the proposal to nominate all officers of this administration . . . not by a majority of the community at large, but by those only who have a knowledge of the particular kind of work the future officer has to perform; and, one of the most important features of the plan, that the nominators are to select the fittest person, by means of some kind of prize essay . . .¹²

All this* will give an idea of the thinking of the radical world into which Marx came. Engels' subsequent articles for the Owenites, at the end of 1844 and beginning of 1845, became gradually more ambivalent about the relation between communism and the classes.¹³

The turning-point comes in late 1845—when Engels is well under way in collaboration with Marx on *The German Ideology*—and indeed in the very first article which Engels contributes, not to the Owenite organ, but to the left-Chartist paper *The Northern Star*. Engels spells out the complete turn he has made by cautioning the Chartists not to expect any revolutionary change from the middle classes:

It is from the very heart of our working people that revolutionary action in Germany will commence. It is true, there are among our middle classes a considerable number of Republicans and even Communists, and young men too, who, if a general outbreak occurred now, would be very useful in the movement, but these men are "bourgeois," profit-mongers, manufacturers by profession; and who will guarantee us that they will not be demoralized by their trade, by their social position, which forces them to live upon the toil of other people, to grow fat by being the leeches, the "exploiteurs" of the working classes?

Those who remain "proletarian in mind" will be infinitely small in numbers, he goes on: "Fortunately, we do not count on the middle classes at all."¹⁴

Engels is now a Marxist.

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MARX: THE CASE OF THE SAVIOUR-RULER

Marx's course appears to have been less complicated. Still there are significant stages to be marked. One of the first nodal points

*It is amusing to find Fabianism's Bernard Shaw, in the next century, rediscovering Weitling's idea of "civil service" examinations to select an oligarchy: Shaw's pet suggestion on how to replace democracy.

showed him what pursuit of an academic career would mean. As it happens, it has to do with the historic opposite of the principle of Self-Emancipation, viz. the illusion of the Saviour-Ruler.

A common form of this illusion has always been hope for salvation from the ascent to the throne of a new, liberal monarch. Marx went through this at an early age along with the left-Hegelian circle.

In mid-1840 the old king of Prussia was succeeded by his son, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who as Crown Prince had excited great hope in liberal circles that he would grant constitutional reforms; for he had made certain noises about liberty and national unity.¹⁵ It seems to be a common habit of royal heirs; the same pattern had been true a century before, when Frederick the Great had uttered similar "nice phrases . . . shortly or immediately after his accession to the throne." So remarks Mehring in *The Lessing Legend*, which observes that this is "the noted liberalism of crown princes."¹⁶ One of the leading lights of the Young Hegelians, Bruno Bauer, seized the opportunity to pay fulsome homage to "the highest idea of our State life." the spirit of the Hohenzollerns.¹⁷

These hopes for democratization from above collapsed quickly. Bauer's prostrations before the crown earned only a kick in the face: the new king appointed an orthodox reactionary to the university post that Bauer had his eye on.¹⁸ Next, Bauer was even ousted from his post at the University of Bonn.¹⁹ It was at this point that it was clear to Marx that, doctorate or no, an academic career was closed to him, unless he was ready to bootlick the establishment like Academia in general.

Marx and *Köppen*

There is indirect evidence that, with the rest, Marx had been caught up in the liberal illusion about the new king.

In April 1840, looking to the new reign, Marx's best friend,²⁰ K. F. Koppen, also a prominent left-Hegelian though ten years older than Marx, had published a book on Frederick the Great and *His Opponents*.²¹ One biographer of Marx describes the book as follows:

Koppen honoured Frederick, "in whose spirit we swore to live and die," as the enemy of Christian-German reaction. His basic idea was that the state was embodied in its purest form in a monarchy ruled over by a monarch like Frederick, a philosopher, a free servant of the world spirit. Renewal could only come from the top . . .²²

Koppen was suggesting that the new monarch should bear the torch of the Saviour-Ruler like his great predecessor. Another biographer comments:

The fact that a man like Koppen yearned for "the spiritual resurrection" of the worst despot in Prussian history in order "to exterminate with fire and sword all those who deny us entrance into the land of promise" is sufficient to give us some idea of the peculiar environment in which these Berlin Young Hegelians lived.²³

This is unjust: there was nothing "peculiar" about this attitude. It had been dominant for a few thousand years, and essentially it still is. Frederick may have been "the worst despot" but he was a *modernizing* despot, and this variety still has mass allegiance from well-intentioned people, especially those who would like to become modernizing bureaucrats or mouthpieces for the modernizing despot. Marx's liberal friends held to the old illusion that, if only power found its way into the hands of a Good Man, he would hand down salvation from his seat of rule—and thus, incidentally, spare one all the inconveniences of having to conquer salvation for oneself in struggle against power.

Koppen's book was dedicated to "my friend Karl Heinrich Marx of Trier." There is every reason to believe that at this point Marx saw nothing "peculiar" about his friend's stance, and probably shared it.²⁴ In addition, the following year Marx returned the compliment with an admiring mention of Koppen's book in the planned Foreword (dated March 1841) to his doctoral dissertation.²⁵

The new king's failure to conform to the dream brought about a revulsion of feeling in liberal circles. Engels later described the result:

Indeed, the middle classes, who had partly expected that the new King would at once grant a Constitution, proclaim the Liberty of the Press, Trial by Jury, etc., etc. in short, himself take the lead of that peaceful revolution which they wanted in order to obtain political supremacy—the middle classes had found out their error, and had turned ferociously against the King.²⁶

In the Rhineland (continues Engels) this revulsion or exasperation produced the *Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne, and made its bourgeois sponsors temporarily willing to let Young Hegelian radicals edit it—Marx becoming editor in October 1842.

This is the place to mention that the young Engels also went through his stage of disillusionment in benevolent royalty, before and after Friedrich Wilhelm IV. Just before, though not yet very radical, Engels had written a friend about his disgust with Friedrich Wilhelm III's failure to carry out his promise of a constitution:

The same king who in 1815, beset with fear, promised his subjects in a Cabinet Order that they would get a constitution if they pulled him out

of that pickle—this same shabby, lousy, god-damned king now lets it be known . . . that nobody is going to get a constitution from him . . . There is no period richer in royal crimes than 1816-1830; nearly every prince that reigned then deserved the death penalty . . . Oh, I could tell you delightful tales about the love that princes bear their subjects—I expect anything good only from the prince whose head is buzzing from the buffets of his people, and whose palace windows are being smashed by a hail of stones of the revolution.²⁷

After the accession of the new king in 1840 and the above-mentioned "revulsion", Engels published an essay attacking the king's political and social views and warning that a free press and a real parliament would not be granted by the monarch but would have to be won by the people. It closed with a hint that Prussia was nearing its 1789.²⁸

All this merely taught the liberals not to expect much from this particular monarch; by nature, liberalism typically seeks reform by seeking the ear that is connected to the hand that holds the levers of power. But for Marx the lesson bit deeper. It was his last illusion in the Saviour-Ruler.

The Servile State and Academia

Marx later summarized the whole episode in hindsight at a point (May 1843) when he was in midstream of the passage from radical democracy to communism. The king's "liberal speeches and outpourings" did signify a desire "to bring life into the state", if only his own variety of backward-looking life ("old German fancies"); but when even this variety of change threatened to open the gates to other changes, the old bureaucratic-despotic system "soon killed these un-German activities." It was a "miscarried attempt to transcend the philistine-state on its very own basis."²⁹

One was only mistaken for a while in considering it important which wishes and thoughts the King would come out with. This could not change anything in substance; the philistine is the stuff making up the monarchy, and the monarchy is always only the king of the philistines. He can make neither himself nor his people into free, real men, if both sides remain what they are.³⁰

Since it was impossible for this state "to abandon its own basis and pass over to the human world of democracy", the inevitable result was—

regression to the old fossilized servile state [*Dienerstaat*], in which the slave serves in silence and the owner of the land and the people rules as silently as possible simply through a well-trained, quietly obedient servant-staff. Neither of the two could say what they wanted—neither the former, that they wanted to become men, nor the latter that he had no use for

men in his land. The only recourse, therefore, is to keep silent. *Muta pecora, prona et ventri obedientia.* [The herd is silent, submissive, and obeys its stomach.]³¹

Therefore —

The self-reliance of men—freedom—would first have to be reawakened in the hearts of these men. Only this consciousness, which vanished from the world with the Greeks and into the blue mist of heaven with Christianity, can again turn society (*Gesellschaft*) into a community (*Gemeinschaft*) of men to achieve their highest purposes, a democratic state.³²

For Marx, the freedom of self-reliance meant not only the abandonment of the Saviour-Ruler illusion, but also the decision to abandon the road of scholarship in the university world. For that road was possible only by accepting a life of silent submission to the Servile State, refraining from giving battle to ensconced power, burying one's nose in scholarly busy-work and profound thoughts, while injustice and inhumanity reigned outside the stained-glass windows.



MARX : THE PROMETHEAN SPIRIT

If the course of the professional panderer to power was impossible for Marx, this was by no means simply determined by history or social forces, which do not determine this or that individual. It was demanded by Marx's total personality, combined with his intellect—the two conditioned by the times.

Marx's theories, to be sure, can be held by anyone, once developed : but the way they were developed and the form in which they were expressed were all heavily influenced by the impact of Marx's personal character. The steel core of that character has been portrayed for all time by Marx's favourite poet-dramatist (alongside Shakespeare) : Aeschylus, in *Prometheus Bound*. Aeschylus does not really attempt to explain why Prometheus, insisting on serving humanity whom the new gods would destroy, refuses to bow the neck to Zeus, to Power—like everyone else and as all his well-wishers advise him to do. That is simply the fatality of his character.

It was also Marx's, and as far as anyone can tell, he seems to have been born with it, as his intelligent father early recognized. Marx himself made the connection in preparing for publication the first child of his thought, his doctrinal dissertation. Although its subject was Democritus and Epicurus, in writing the Foreword Marx handed the centre-stage over to Prometheus. The Foreword ends with the invocation of Prometheus' defiance to authority :

Prometheus' admission: "In sooth all gods I hate" is [philosophy's] own admission, its own motto against all gods, heavenly and earthly, who do not acknowledge the consciousness of man as the supreme divinity. There must be no god on a level with it . . . [Prometheus says:]

"I shall never exchange my fetters for slavish servility.

'Tis better to be chained to the rock than bound to the service of Zeus."

Prometheus is the noblest of saints and martyrs in the calendar of philosophy.³³

The defiance of the closing sentence alarmed friend Bruno Bauer as "unnecessary temerity"³⁴—an unconscious echo of the very counsels of timorous prudence to Prometheus by the Leader of the Chorus.

The dissertation itself had not mentioned Prometheus, although in his workbooks for it Marx had written :

. . . as Prometheus, who stole fire from Heaven, began to build houses and establish himself on the earth, so philosophy which has extended itself into the [real] world turns against the apparent world.³⁵

Prometheus scarcely appears again in Marx's writings,* and the above passages were never published in Marx's lifetime. But the comparison was not lost upon those who knew him. When the government closed down the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a contemporary cartoon depicted Marx as Prometheus bound to a printing-press while the royal Prussian eagle gnaws at his vitals.³⁶ The last issue of the paper carried an unsigned farewell poem, ending on the Promethean note.

Our mast blew down, but we were not affrighted,
The angry gods could never make us bend.
Columbus too at first was scorned and slighted,
And yet he saw the New World in the end.

Ye friends, who cheer us till the timbers rattle
Ye foes, who did us honour with your strife—
We'll meet again on other fields of battle:
If all is dead, yet courage still is life.³⁷

More amusing but not less indicative is the evidence of the impression which Marx's character made on his young associates. There is a long satiric "epic", protesting against the dismissal of Bruno Bauer, which Engels wrote before he knew Marx personally, containing

*The only significant reference comes soon, in Marx's 1844 manuscripts.³⁶ In his *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx has to handle Proudhon's use of Prometheus as a sort of economic Robinson Crusoe, but he does not make any Promethean analogies himself.³⁷ Later come only passing references of no present interest. One might wonder if Marx knew Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1819), but there is no sign of it; in fact, Marx never mentioned Shelley in writing; it is Engels who was a Shelley fan from youth to old age.

versified portraits of the prominent Young Hegelians. The passage devoted to Marx goes approximately as follows, in limping hexameters :

Then who, with fiercesome rage, comes rushing thereupon?
 A swarthy chap from Trier, a real phenomenon.
 He neither walks nor skips but springs up in the air,
 And storms about with red-hot fury as though to tear

Down to the earth the far-hung tent of the broad sky—
 His arms he stretches up to seize the winds on high.
 With angry fist up-clenched, he rages without rest
 As if ten thousand flaming demons him possessed.⁴⁰

The portraits in this "epic" are frankly friendly caricatures—the young Engels was a talented cartoonist—but there is no doubt of what kind of character is being caricatured.

Choice and Character

And so it was history and the state of society which, in 1841, presented Marx with the choice : submit to Power, or break with Power. But it was Marx's character which made the choice a foregone conclusion.

Such a character will naturally always excite a variety of reactions. After all, many in the audience are in the position of Hephaestus, who, weeping salt tears very liberally, is the one who actually fetters the hero in chains, protesting it is against his will. "The dirty job must be done", he whines to Power, "but don't push me too hard."

More are in the position of Oceanus, who delivers himself of sage advice : "I would admonish thee to prudence . . . see what are the wages of too bold a tongue. Thou hast not learned humility, nor to yield to evils . . ." He will try to negotiate peace with Zeus, but meanwhile : "Do thou keep thy peace, and restrain thy blustering speech." Others are in the position of the Leader of the Chorus, who has his own diagnosis of the hero's sins : "Care not for mortals overmuch, whilst you neglect your own profit."⁴¹ (In other words: get a well-paying job instead of wasting your time in the British Museum).

Then also in the audience are the descendants of Hermes, the "lackey of Zeus", who thinks anyone who does not cringe before power is simply stark mad—the very best frame of mind for a lackey.

But the Promethean rejection of injustice-by-power could be only

half of Marx's road to the principle of Self-Emancipation; for as we have mentioned, there have been not a few who don the mask of Prometheus in order to replace Zeus as ruler. Aeschylus himself raised the question, long before Lord Acton: "Who could endure you in prosperity?" It is Zeus' lackey Hermes who directs this sneer to Prometheus.

Even after the collapse of the Saviour-Ruler by 1841, Marx must have gone through the next stage, like everyone else: hope in some kind of intellectual elite, who, their hearts bursting with sympathy for the suffering people, would sacrifice themselves in order to lead the flock into a new and better sheepfold. The amazing thing about Marx is that there is only a single, and very ambiguous, scrap of evidence of such a state of mind even transiently, dating to the beginning of 1844. This occurs at the end of the article in which Marx first arrives at the idea that it is the emancipation of the proletariat that means the emancipation of all mankind. Then there is this sentence: "The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat."⁴³

Taken by itself, this sentence is compatible with the tradition of an intellectual elite which conceives itself to be the head of the movement, with the masses making up the troops. On the other hand, this interpretation is difficult to reconcile with the whole train of thought for pages before, which it merely summarizes. Marx had already explained: "As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy", and the emancipation in question must be based "on the theory proclaiming that man is the highest essence of man", etc. These and many other expressions indicate that, by "philosophy", Marx literally means theory, and not the philosophers, that is, the intellectuals.⁴⁴

Yet it is certain that even Engels understood this sentence in more or less the traditional elitist sense (which Engels himself still held).^{*} And certainly it would have been an extraordinary feat if Marx had managed to skip this stage entirely.

But what is not in doubt is that the general trend of Marx's thinking went the other way "from the very beginning." As early as his pre-socialist writings of 1842 for the *Rheinische Zeitung*—in fact in his first published article, on freedom of the press—we find the following retort to a legislator who argued in the Diet that man is naturally imperfect and immature and needs educational guidance:

^{*}In March 1845 Engels referred, in the Owenite paper, to the prediction of Marx's "a year ago" of the union of "the German philosophers" and the German workers, a union now "all but accomplished." He adds: "With the philosophers to think, and the working men to fight for us, will any earthly power be strong enough to resist our progress?"⁴⁴

For him true education consists in keeping man swaddled in the cradle all his life, since as soon as man learns to walk he also learns to fall, and only through falling does he learn to walk. But if we all remain children in swaddling-clothes, who is to swaddle us? If we all lie in the cradle, who is to cradle us? If we are all in jail, who will be the jailer??

This extension of *Quis custodiet ipos custodes?* is already the fundamental answer to all the arguments, old and current, for "educational dictatorships." It already implies that emancipation is not a form of graduation ceremony (getting the diploma from teacher for passing the exam.) but rather it is a process of struggle by people *who are not yet "ready" for emancipation*, and who can become ready for emancipation *only by launching the struggle themselves*, before anyone considers them ready for it.*

Theory and the Theoretician

This is the principle which Marx set down in the spring of 1845 in the third of his Theses on Feuerbach--one of the jottings in which he attempted to clarify a new world-outlook for himself. The crux of the Third Theses is that it asks the question: *Who will educate the educator?*

It goes directly to the elitist concept of the role of the educated "bringer of socialism" to the uneducated masses. Naturally Marx does not question the matter of *fact* that it is the educated who have raised the idea of socialism before the masses. That is how it *begins*; but it cannot be merely a one-way relationship. When Engels published his edited version of the Theses in 1888, he usefully concretized this meaning by introducing an example, Robert Owen, who was not in Marx's original note.

It was Owen's type of materialism which *onesidedly* emphasized that men are the products of their environmental circumstances and upbringing, and which concluded that to change men for the better, one had to change the environmental circumstances and upbringing. Marx's thesis cuts straight to the heart of the difficulty in this reasoning: *who* are the men who are going to operate this change? These men apparently stand exempt from the very law they enunciate; for they, who are also the product of their environmental conditioning, are going to act to change the world which conditioned them. Prometheus was able to change men from the outside, because he

*In the same article, here is how Marx refutes the opponents of a free press who imply that only the government--i.e. themselves--are inspired by God sufficiently to be guardians of the press: "But English *history* has quite sufficiently proved that the assertion of divine inspiration from above *begets* the counter-assertion of divine inspiration from below, and Charles I mounted the scaffold as a result of divine inspiration from *below*."⁴⁴

was himself a god; but Owen's (and Marx's) problem is harder than his.

Who are these "educators" to be, and how do they come into being? Owen's implied answer is very simple: they are "people like me", who just happen to get the idea, plus others whom I convince with its inexorable logic . . .

Against this, Marx's thesis points out (1) that "it is essential to educate the educator himself", and (2) that until this "educator" is himself changed ("educated"), one cannot overcome the division of society between rulers and ruled.

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing [that men are products of circumstances and upbringing and that therefore changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing] forgets that circumstances are changed by men [themselves], and that it is essential to educate the educator himself. Hence this doctrine must [necessarily have the effect to] divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. [For example, in Robert Owen.]

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*.*

How then are the educators to be educated, and, for that matter how do the uneducated become educators? How does this whole two-sided process of "self-changing" take place? Marx's answer is: by "revolutionary practice". One learns to revolutionize society even as one revolutionizes oneself; one learns to revolutionize oneself by trying to revolutionize society. For the working class, it is a process in which two sides interpenetrate; a mountain-climber, making his way up a "chimney" formation, can understand it better than a metaphysician.

This, the Third Thesis, is the "philosophic" formulation by Marx of the basis of the principle of Self-Emancipation, It represents the first time in socialist thought that theory turns around to take a hard look at the theoretician.

6

THE REJECTION OF HUMANITARIAN-PHILANTHROPIC ELITISM

The Third Thesis entails, or leads right into, rejection of the whole humanitarian-philanthropic attitude toward the masses of people, which was typical not only of Owen and the utopians, but also of all

*If read without the bracketed italics, this is Marx's formulation of 1845. The bracketed italics are some of the editorial explanations introduced by Engels in his 1888 edited version.⁴⁷

the other pre-Marxian socialists to one degree or another. There are many reasons why the masses need protection from their friends, "but the greatest of these is charity." In the long run, a people can be held in subjection most effectively not by brute force but by gutting them of the capacity to fight for themselves.

St. Peter explained it long ago: "for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." It was explained also in Deuteronomy: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: *therefore* I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and thy needy, in thy land." *Therefore* has been italicized here since it explains the practical reason for this holy injunction.

Marx's burst of indignation at this sociological strategy of Christianity was directed, in 1847, at a pious Prussian who sermonized that "If only those whose calling it is to develop the social principles of Christianity do so, the Communists will soon be put to silence":

The social principles of Christianity have now had eighteen hundred years to develop and need no further development by Prussian councillors.

The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of Antiquity, glorified the serfdom of the Middle Ages, and equally know, when necessary, how to defend the oppression of the proletariat, although they make a pitiful face over it.

The social principles of Christianity preach the necessity of a ruling and an oppressed class, and all they have for the latter is the pious wish the former will be charitable.

The social principles of Christianity transfer the councillors' adjustment of all infamies to heaven and thus justify the further existence of those infamies on earth.

The social principles of Christianity declare all vile acts of the oppressors against the oppressed to be either the just punishment of original sin and other sins or trials that the Lord in his infinite wisdom imposes on those redeemed.

The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, dejection, in a word all the qualities of the *canaille*; and the proletariat, not wishing to be treated as *canaille*, needs its courage, its self-reliance, its pride and its sense of independence more than its bread.

The social principles of Christianity are sneakish and the proletariat is revolutionary.

So much for the social principles of **Christianity**.⁴⁸

In this passage, the authentic Promethean spirit of self-reliant defiance is transferred from the bosom of a god filled with "love of mankind" to the *proletariat itself*.^{*} Prometheus plus Spartacus equals the starting-point of Marxism.

The class character of charity

From here on, Marx's war against humanitarian-philanthropic

*In the same article, Marx included a powerful echo of the revulsion against the Saviour-Ruler, as he attacked the pious Prussian's appeal for "a

socialism is unremitting. Engels had anticipated it partly in his earlier Condition of the Working Class in England, in a passage attacking the charity system—"your self-complacent, Pharisaic philanthropy" which gives the victim a hundredth part of what has been plundered from his labour :

Charity which degrades him who gives more than him who takes; charity which treads the downtrodden still deeper in the dust, which demands that the degraded, the pariah cast out of society, shall first surrender the last that remains to him, his very claim to manhood, shall first beg for mercy before your mercy deigns to press, in the shape of an alms, the brand of degradation upon his brow.⁵⁰

This first book of Engels' is one of those germinal works of which it can be said, as Rupert Brooke did in another connection, that "thoughts go blowing through them, are wiser than their own." By 1847 Engels was more direct. An article of his on the literature of the then prominent petty-bourgeois "True-Socialist" tendency starts with a mortal thrust at one Karl Beck's "Songs of the Poor Man"—which begins with a poem addressed to the House of Rothschild :

The poet does not threaten the destruction of the real power of Rothschild, the social conditions on which it is based; no, he wishes only it should be used philanthropically. He laments that the bankers are not socialistic philanthropists, not sentimental visionaries, not benefactors of humanity, but just bankers. Beck sings the praises of this cowardly, petty-bourgeois *misère*, of the "poor man," the *pauvre honteux*, with his poor, pious and contradictory desires, the "little man" in all his forms—not of the proud, menacing and revolutionary proletarian.⁵¹

About the same time, in The Poverty of Philosophy, Marx included a pungent page devoted to—

monarchy relying on the support of the people"—unaware, of course, that this was going to be, two decades later, the subject of Lassalle's *pourparlers* with Bismarck :

"We shall make but a few well-meaning remarks to those gentlemen who wish to save the imperilled Prussian monarchy by a Somersault into the people.

"Of all political elements the people is the most dangerous for a king . . . But the real people, the proletariat, the small peasants and the populace, there you have, as Hobbes said, *puer robustus, sed malitiosus*, a sturdy but knavish boy, who will not let himself be made a fool of either by thin kings or fat ones.

"This people would first and foremost force His Majesty to grant a constitution with universal suffrage, freedom of association, freedom of the press and other unpleasant things.

"And having obtained all that, it would use it to show as quickly as possible how it understands the power . . . of the monarchy."⁴⁹

the *humanitarian school*, which . . . seeks, by way of easing its conscience, to palliate even if slightly the real contrasts; it sincerely deploras the distress of the proletariat, the unbridled competition of the bourgeois among themselves; it counsels the workers to be sober, to work hard and to have few children; it advises the bourgeois to put a reasoned ardour into production . . .

The *philanthropic school* is the humanitarian school carried to perfection. It denies the necessity of antagonism; it wants to turn all men into bourgeois . . . The philanthropists, then, want to retain the categories which express bourgeois relations, without the antagonism which constitutes them and is inseparable from them. They think they are seriously fighting bourgeois practice, and they are more bourgeois than the others.⁵²

The Communist Manifesto repeats this more concisely,* under the head of "bourgeois socialism", by which is meant bourgeois social reform; for in the pre-1848 period "social-ism" was still a common label simply for reformatory concern with the "social question". Besides Proudhon, who is specifically mentioned.

To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of the society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind.⁵⁴

And a little further, it is pointed out that utopian socialism, despite its positive "critical" content, tends to degenerate into this kind of socialism too.⁵⁵ "Only from the point of view of being the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for them." And "the proletariat, as yet in its infancy, offers to them the spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement."⁵⁶ In contrast, the Manifesto's message is that "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority."⁵⁷

This is the "very beginning" to which Engels later referred, although the Self-Emancipation principle had not yet received the aphoristic form under which it became famous.

7

"TO WALK BY HIMSELF"

Henceforward the principle weaves through the analyses of Marx and Engels as an integral part of their thought. Here are some examples that come to hand.

*But note that Engels' draft for the Manifesto ("Principles of Communism") does not suggest that there is any incompatibility; it is simply not taken up. Nor does it appear in the Schapper-Wolff draft (published under the title "The Communist Credo" and ascribed by some to Engels) which preceded Engels' "Principles of Communism."⁵⁸

During the revolutionary period that followed the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels' articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* continually appealed to action from below by the populace. In this connection Engels wrote at one point: "In Germany there are no longer any 'subjects', ever since the people became so free as to emancipate themselves on the barricades."⁵⁸ At the beginning of another article, praising the resistance of the Poles to Prussian conquest, he relates a touching anecdote about a practical philanthropist, picked up from a biography of the priest Joseph Bonavita Blank. The holy man was frequented by birds that hovered on and about him; and the people wondered mightily to see this new St. Francis. No wonder: he had cut off the lower half of their beaks, so that they could get food only from his own charitable hands. Engels comments on his parable:

The birds, says the biographer, loved him as their benefactor. And the shackled, mangled, branded Poles refuse to love their Prussian benefactors!⁵⁹

The experience of the revolution was one of the reasons why Marx was sensitized to the necessity of breaking the German people from the habit of obedience to authority from above:

For the German working class the most necessary thing of all is that it should cease conducting its agitation by kind permission of the higher authorities. A race so schooled in bureaucracy must go through a complete course of "self-help."⁶⁰

Around the same time he embodied the same idea in a letter which we have already quoted in the preceding chapter: "Here [in Germany] where the worker's life is regulated from childhood on by bureaucracy and he himself believes in the authorities, he must be taught before all else to walk by himself."⁶¹

The Octroyal Principle

Of course, this applied not only to the Germans. It was ever present to Marx's mind when he discussed the phenomenon of the state-sponsored "revolution from above" in connection with Bonapartism. In pre-Bismarck Prussia, there were the Stein-Hardenberg reforms-from-above, designed to rally support against Napoleon; in Russia there was the tsar's emancipation of the serfs. Marx commented (in English):

In both countries the social daring reform was fettered and limited in character because it was octroyed from the throne and not (instead of being) conquered by the people.⁶²

"Octroyed" is a rare word in English, but deserves to be more widely used. Its connotation—more than merely "grant" or "concede"—is precisely the handing-down of changes from above, as against their conquest from below. (In fact, "octroyal socialism" is a fine coinage for the opposite of the Marxist principle of Self-Emancipation.)

In his book on the 1848 revolution in France, **Marx** recurs to a characteristic metaphor of the theatre (as in "theatre of war"): in this case, not the contrast between "above" and "below," but rather between the active participants on the stage of history and the passive onlookers of the pit or the wings. On the first stage of the revolution :

Instead of only a few factions of the bourgeoisie, all classes of French Society were suddenly hurled into the orbit of political power, forced to leave the boxes, the stalls and the gallery and to act in person upon the revolutionary stage!⁸³

On the peasantry who were momentarily set into motion—to give Bonaparte his election victory of 10 December 1848:

For a moment active heroes of the revolutionary drama, they could no longer be forced back into the inactive and spineless role of the chorus.⁸⁴

This metaphor illuminates **Marx's** concept of the revolution from below as Self-Emancipation. Less figuratively, in another passage, **Marx** mentions indicia of the proletariat's immaturity :

As soon as it was risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on . . . The French working class had not attained this level; it was still incapable of accomplishing its own revolution.⁸⁵

The proletariat was as yet incapable of carrying through a rising from below, under the self-impulsion of its own class drives.

After Bonaparte had consolidated his power, **Engels** remarked that he hoped the old scoundrel was not assassinated. For in that case the Bonapartist clique would merely make a deal with the Orleanist monarchy and go right on :

Before the workers' districts could think about it, Morny would have made his palace-revolution, and although a revolution from below would be thereby postponed only briefly, yet its basis would be a different one.⁸⁶



IN THE **FIRST** INTERNATIONAL

If the principle of Self-Emancipation had to be spelled out more

formally in 1864, it was because of the problem Marx faced in drawing up the programme of the new International so as to gain the agreement of a wide variety of political views. What programmatic statement could delimit the organization as a class movement of the proletariat, yet avoid lining up with any of the various ideological tendencies within that class (or outside it)? The very concept of a class programme which was not a sect programme—not the programme of a Marxist sect either—was itself a basic Marxist concept; but for this the movement was ready. The Preamble to the Rules was **Marx's** solution, beginning with the clause on Self-Emancipation which we have already quoted.

The principle was so deceptively simple that naturally academic historians of socialism never got the point till years afterwards. Thus the eminent Belgian historian Emile de Laveye (one of those who, **Engels** rightly remarked, spread nothing but "lies and legends" about the history of the International⁶⁷) wrote in *Le Socialisme Contemporain* in 1881:

The International also affirmed that "the emancipation of the labourers must be the work of the labourers themselves." This idea seemed an application of the principle of "self-help"; it enlisted for the new association, even in France, the sympathies of many distinguished men who little suspected how it was to be interpreted later on. This affords a new proof of the fact frequently observed, that revolutionary movements always go on increasing in violence. The originators of the movement . . . are replaced by the more fanatical, who, in their turn, are pushed aside, until the final abyss is reached to which wild revolutionary logic inevitably leads.⁶⁸

In contrast to this liberal ignoramus, the viciously reactionary historian of the International, Edmond Villetard, understood very quickly that the militants of the International were so wildly fanatical as to believe exactly what the principle of Self-Emancipation said. "No idea, without excepting perhaps their hatred of capital," he charges, "entered more passionately into their heads and hearts." He quotes one of the French militants who were arrested as Internationalists by the Bonaparte government :

We have proclaimed sufficiently . . . that we no longer wanted deliverers, that we no longer wished to serve as instruments, and that we had the pretention to have knowledge of the situation, to understand our interests as well as any one.⁶⁹

Once launched, the principle kept recurring in the documents of the International, whether written by Marx or others. In an official manifesto addressed to the National Labour Union of the U.S., **Marx** went back to the "stage" metaphor :

On you, then, devolves the glorious task to prove to the world that now at last the working classes are bestriding the scene of history no longer as servile retainers, but as independent actors, conscious of their own responsibility . . .⁷⁰

In a manifesto denouncing the shooting of strikers in Belgium, Mam granted that the Belgian capitalist was so liberty-loving —

that he has always indignantly repulsed any factory law encroaching upon that liberty. He shudders at the very idea that a common workman should be wicked enough to claim any higher destiny than that of enriching his master and natural superior. He wants his workman not only to remain a miserable drudge, overworked and underpaid, but, like every other slaveholder, he wants him to be a cringing, servile broken-hearted, morally prostrate, religiously humble drudge. Hence his frantic fury at strikes. With him, a strike is a blasphemy, a slave's revolt, the signal of a social cataclysm.⁷¹

At a General Council discussion on the Irish question, in the course of a long speech attacking English policy, Mam put it sententiously: "The old English leaven of the conqueror comes out in the [government] statement: we will grant but you must ask."⁷² In other words, the octroyal attitude of the master.

Do-It-Yourself Movement

Not drafted by Marx but by other members of the Council was an address calling for an independent labour press:

Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said, "If you want a thing done, and well done, do it yourself," and this is precisely what we must do . . . we must take the work of salvation into our own hands . . . In order to guard against deceitful friends, we require a press of our own.⁷³

The historian Royden Harrison remarks that "the influence of the International and of Marx himself upon the Land and Labour League is nowhere more clearly in evidence" than in its address, modelled after Marx's, which appealed:

There is one, and only one, remedy. Help yourselves. Determine that you will not endure this abominable state of things any longer; act up to your determination, and it will vanish We are many; our opponents are few. Then working men and women of all creeds and occupations claim your rights . . . to conquer your own emancipation!⁷⁴

That combines Marx with Shelley.

Aside from manifestoes, the General Council of the International was made unaccustomedly sensitive to the question of *who* acted in their name. A small but symbolic point was worked out in the General Council meeting after it had adopted its well-known address to

Abraham Lincoln, which was to be presented to the U.S. embassy. The minutes record :

A long discussion then took place as to the mode of presenting the address and the propriety of having a M.P. with the deputation; this was strongly opposed by many members who said working men should rely on themselves and not seek for extraneous aid.⁷⁵

The motion that was passed limited the delegation to Council members. Mam related to Engels :

... part of the Englishmen on the Committee wanted to have the deputation introduced by a member of Parliament since it was customary. This hankering was defeated by the majority of the English and the unanimity of the Continentals, and it was declared, on the contrary, that such old English customs ought to be abolished.⁷⁶

There were other symbolic tests. In 1865 the General Council announced it had refused the proposal of a rich English lord who had offered an annual subsidy to be the organization's "protector."⁷⁷ The question of "Tory gold" was going to be an issue of Self-Emancipation all through the century.

9

ANTICIPATIONS OF FUTURE PROBLEMS

The outbreak of war in 1870 and the Paris Commune in 1871 brought the question of Self-Emancipation out of the manifestoes and into reality. Later this is reflected in Marx's analysis of the nature of the Commune state. Here we mention some smaller but anticipatory reflections.

In the "Second Address" of the International on the war, Marx already points to that fact about the newly formed Republic of liberal politicians which excites his "misgivings." It is the fact that it has been engineered from above; that Bonapartism was not subverted (which means overturned from below) but only replaced :

That Republic has not subverted the throne, but only taken its place become vacant. It has been proclaimed, not as a social conquest, but as a national measure of defence.⁷⁸

The great thing for Mam about the Commune was that it was just the opposite : the working class of Paris took over.

It is a strange fact. In spite of all the tall talk and all the immense literature, for the last sixty years, about Emancipation of Labour, no sooner

do the working men anywhere take the subject into their own hands with a will, than uprisings at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society. . . .⁷⁹

(In fact, that very Republic of the bourgeoisie about which Marx expressed instant suspicion was the instrument for smashing the Republic of workers who took things into their own hands.)

We hear more from Marx about this in his writings on the Commune State. Here let us turn to some less familiar language, written by Marx in his first draft for *The Civil War in France*. It is a passage in which he asks: What is it that is new about this revolution? True, the workers have borne the brunt; but that has been true in all French revolutions. Then there is a second feature which is not new:

That the revolution is made in the name and confessedly for the popular masses, that is, the producing masses, is a feature this Revolution has in common with all its predecessors. The new feature is that the people, after the first rise [rising], have not disarmed themselves and surrendered their power into the hands of the Republican mountebanks of the ruling classes, that, by the constitution of the Commune, they have taken the actual management of their Revolution into their own hands and found at the time, in the case of success, the means to hold it in the hands of the People itself, displacing the State machinery, the governmental machinery of the ruling classes by a governmental machinery of their own. This is their ineffable crime! Workmen infringing upon the governmental privilege of the upper 10,000 and proclaiming their will to break the economical basis of that class despotism which for its own sake wielded the organized State-force of society! This is it that has thrown the respectable classes in Europe as in the United States into the paroxysms of convulsions⁸⁰

There follows the statement, which was effectively expanded in the final version: "But the actual 'social' character of their Republic consists only in this, that workmen govern the Paris Commune."⁸¹

"Some patronizing friends of the working class," writes Marx,*

*Marx is here doubtlessly referring to the followers of Comte; for the English Comtists, while anti-socialist, did defend the Commune against the press slander campaign; especially Prof. Edward Beesly (who had chaired the meeting that founded the First International). In a caustic paragraph just before this, Marx had distinguished the English Comtists from the French "co-religionists," and attacked Comtism as follows: "Comte is known to the Parisian workmen as the prophet in politics of Imperialism [Bonapartism] (of personal Dictatorship), of capitalist rule in political economy, of hierarchy in all spheres of human action, even in the sphere of science, and as the author of a new catechism with a new pope and new saints in place of the old ones."⁸² This attack did not appear in the final version, either because of respect for the courage of the English Comtists in defending the Commune, or because of space, or both.

ask sympathy for the Commune because it did not undertake any (utopian) "socialist enterprises." He replies :

These benevolent patronizers, profoundly ignorant of the real aspirations and the real movement of the working classes, forget one thing. All the socialist founders of Sects belong to a period in which the working class themselves were neither sufficiently trained and organized by the march of capitalist society itself to enter as historical agents upon the world's stage . . .⁸³

But (he goes on) it is no defect of the Commune that it refused to set up a Fourierist *phalanstère* or a little *Icaria à la Cabet*. What it did set up was the condition of its own emancipation, "no longer clouded in utopian fables"^m—for

the government of the working class can only save France and do the national business, by working for its *own emancipation*, the conditions of that emancipation being at the same time the conditions of the regeneration of France.⁸⁴

For Marx and Engels, there was a direct relationship between the revolutionary (literally subversive) nature of their socialism and the principle of emancipation-from-below, the principle that, as Engels wrote, "there is no concern for . . . gracious patronage from above."⁸⁵ By the same token, only a movement looking to class struggle from below could be a genuinely *proletarian* movement. For it was the proletariat that was "below—" "the lowest stratum of our present society," which "cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung up into the air."⁸⁶

Marxism, as the theory and practice of the proletarian revolution, therefore also had to be the theory and practice of the *self-emancipation* of the proletariat. Its essential originality flows from this source.

REFERENCE NOTES

English translations are cited, wherever possible, from the two-volume *Marx-Engels Selected Works* (Moscow, FLPH, 1955), abbreviated *ME:SW*. Untranslated German texts are cited, wherever possible, from the *Marx-Engels Werke* (Berlin, Dietz, 1961-68), abbreviated *ME:W*. In other cases, full bibliographic data are given on first appearance of a title, and abbreviated afterwards. Volume and page number are abbreviated as follows: e.g. 2: 107 = Vol. 2, page 107. In all abbreviations, M = Marx, E = Engels, and ME = Marx & Engels.

1. M: First Draft of *The Civil War in France*, in *Arkhiv Marksa i Engel'sa*, v.3 (8), 1934, p. 270.
2. From the *Aeneid*, VII, 312.
3. George Brandes: *Ferdinand Lassalle* (N.Y., Macmillan, 1911), 108. The Virgilian line is also used as the title-page motto for the whole book.

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4. Letter, Engels to Paul Lafargue. 16 Feb. 1886; in *Engels-Lafargue: Correspondence* (Moscow, FLPH, 1959), 1:338-39.
5. *M: Provisional Rules of the Association, in The General Council of the First International; Minutes, 1864-66* [v. 1], 288. This remained the same in the later revisions; the 1871 version is in *ME:SW* 1:386.
6. *E: Pref. to 1888 English ed. of Communist Manifesto, in ME:SW* 1:28; *M: Critique of the Gotha Program, in ME:SW* 2:25.
7. Letter, Marx to Engels, 27 Feb. 1861, in *ME:W* 30:160; on Spartacus, see also Marx's well-known "Confession" (question game) in which Spartacus and Kepler are listed as his "favorite heroes"; in D. Riazanov, ed. *Karl Marx, Man, Thinker and Revolutionist* (N.Y., International Pub., 1927), 269. 277-78; or *ME:W* 31:597.
8. *E: Progress of Social Reform on the Continent." New Moral World. 4 and 18 Nov. 1843; in ME: Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)I, 2:442.*
 - g. *Ibid.*, 436.
10. *Ibid.*, 435.
11. *Ibid.*, 449.
12. *E: "The 'Times' on German Communism," New Moral World, 20 Jan. 1844, in ME: Gesamtausgabe I, 2: 452.*
 13. This change can be followed through several steps in the English-language articles reprinted in *ME: Gesamtausgabe I, vol. 4.*
14. *E: "The late Butchery at Leipzig—The German Working Men's Movement," Northern Star, 13 Sept. 1845, in ME: Gesamtausgabe I, 4:477.*
15. Boris Nicolaievsky & O. Maenchen-Helfen: *Karl Marx; Man and Fighter* (Phila., Lippincott, 1936), 43.
16. Franz Mehring: *The Lessing Legend* (N.Y., Critics Group, 1938), 29.
17. Franz Mehring: *Karl Marx* (N.Y., Covici Friede. 1935), 50.
18. Mehring: *Karl Marx*, 51; Nicolaievsky, 44.
19. Nicolaievsky, 45-46.
20. Cf. Helmut Hirsch, "Karl Friedrich Koppen, der intimste Berliner Freund Marxens," *International Review for Social History* (Amsterdam), v. 1.
21. Karl Friedrich Koppen: *Friedrich der Grosse und seine Widersacher* (Leipzig, 1840).
22. Nicolaievsky, 39.
23. Mehring, *Karl Marx*, 47.
24. *Ibid.*, 49; Nicolaievsky, 39.
25. In *ME: On Religion* (Moscow, FLPH, 1957), 14.
26. *E: Germany: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (N. Y., International Pub., 1933; Marxist Lib., v. 13), 22-23.
27. Letter, Engels to F. Graeber, g Dec. 1839/5 Feb. 1840; in *ME:W* Erg. Bd. 2:443.
28. *E: "Freidrich Wilhelm IV, Konig von Preussen," writ. ab. Oct. 1842; pub. 1843; in ME:W 1:446ff, esp. 453.*
29. *M: Second letter, dated May 1843, in the "Exchange of Letters," pub. in Deutsch-Französischer Jahrbücher, 1844; in ME:W 1:341-42; transl. largely based on M: Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, ed. Easton & Guddat (Garden City, Doubleday, 1967), 209-10.*
 30. *Ibid.*, *ME:W* 1:341; *M: Writgs. Yg. Mx.*, 208.
 31. *Ibid.*, *ME:W* 1:342; *M: Writgs. Yg. Mx.*, 210.
 32. *Ibid.*, *ME:W* 1:338-39; *M: Writgs. Yg. Mx.*, 206.
 33. In *ME: On Relig.*, 15.
 34. Mehring, *Karl Marx*, 59.
 35. In *ME:W* Erg. Bd. 1:215.

36. *M: Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow, FLPH, n.d.), ¶17.
37. *M: The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow, FLPH, n.d.), 98-102. There is an echo of this in *M: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, tr. N. I. Stone (Chicago, Kerr, 1904), Appendix, "Introduction," 268. (This "Introduction" is a section of the *Crundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Economie*.)
38. The cartoon may be seen in Mehring, *Karl Marx*, facing p. 296, with a detailed explanation of the verso. (Not in the later paperback ed.)
39. From the German text as given in Nicolaievsky, 60. Since the author seems to be thoroughly anonymous (cf. Auguste Cornu, *Karl Marx et Fr. Engels*, Parris, P.U.F., 1958, 2: 102), one might wonder whether this was not a last flare-up of Marx's temptation to write verse. Seven years later, when Marx's *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was closed up in the same city in 1849, a farewell poem by Ferdinand Freiligrath was published in the final issue, naturally striking the same note.
40. The poem has a long title, usually shortened to *Der Triumph der Glaubens*, writ. and pub. in 1842; here transl. from *ME:W* Erg. Bd. 2: 301.
41. Most of the quotations are from the Paul Elmer More translation of *Prometheus Bound*. The first (Hephaestus) is a colloquialized adaption.
42. *M: "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," Deutsch-Francoisischer Jahrbücher*, 1844; writ. end of 1843 to Jan. 1844; in *M: Writgs. Yg. Mx.*, 264.
43. *Ibid.*, 260-64.
44. *E: "Communism in Germany," 2nd article, New Moral World*, 8 March 1845; in *ME: Gesamtausgabe* I. 4: 344.
45. *M: "Debatte über Pressfreiheit [&c.]" Rheinische Zeitung*, 5 May 1842; in *ME:W* 1: 49.
46. *Ibid.*, 51.
47. For the two versions in English, see *ME: The German Ideology* (Moscow, Progress Pub., 1964), 646, 651-52; for the two in German, see *ME:W* 3: 5-6, 533-34. In the second paragraph of the thesis, Engels introduced two changes which we have omitted entirely, as unnecessary or misguided. He deleted the words "or self-changing," and altered "revolutionary practice" [*revolutionäre Praxis*] to "transformatory [or revolutionizing] practice" [*umwälzende Praxis*].
48. *M: "The Communism of the Paper Rheinischer Beobachter," in ME: On Relig.*, 82-83; transl. mod. after *ME:W* 4: 200.
49. *Ibid.*, 85; transl. mod. after *ME:W* 4: 202.
50. In *ME: On Britain*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, FLPH, 1962), 315.
51. *E: "Deutscher Sozialismus in Versen und Prosa,"* pub. Sept. 1847; in *ME:W* 4: 207.
52. *M: Pov. Phil.*, 124-25.
53. *Der Bund der Kommunisten. Dokumente* (Berlin, Dietz, 1970) 1: 470 ff.
54. In *ME:SW* 1: 60.
55. *Ibid.*, 63-64.
56. *Ibid.*, 62.
57. *Ibid.*, 44.
58. *E: "Berliner Vereinbarungsdebatten." Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, 7 June 1848. in *ME:W* 5: 45.
59. *E: "Die Polendebatte in Frankfurt," Neue Rhein. Zeit.*, 9 Aug. 1848; in *ME:W* 5: 319.

60. Letter, Marx to Engels, 26 Sept. 1868; in *ME: Selected Correspondence* (N.Y., International Pub., 1935), 249.
61. Letter, Marx to J. B. Schweitzer, 13 Oct. 1868; in *ME: Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, FLPH, n.d.), 259.
62. *M: First Draft of Civ. War in Fr.*, 280.
63. *M: Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, in *ME:SW* 1:146.
64. *Ibid.*, 174.
65. *Ibid.*, 148.
66. Letter, Engels to Marx, 17 March 1858; in *ME:W* 29:305.
67. Letter, Engels to Wl. J. Schmuilow, 7 Feb. 1893; in *ME:W* 39:24.
68. Quoted here from the English translation, *The Socialism of Today* (London, Leadenhall Pr., n.d.), 152. (Translation first pub. 1884.)
69. Edmond Villetard de Prunières: *History of the International*, tr. by S. M. Day (New Haven, 1874), 65-66. The speaker quoted was Chalain. The original, *Histoire de l'Internationale*, was published in Paris, 1872.
70. "The International Working Men's Association to the National Labor Union of the United States," dated 12 May 1869; writ. by Marx; adopted by the Gen. Council; in *Gen. Council. F.Z. 1868-70* [v. 3], 102, 321.
"The Belgian Massacres," dated 4 May 1869; manifesto writ. by Marx, approved by the Gen. Council; in *ibid.*, 314-15.
72. At meeting of the General Council, 16 Nov. 1869; in *ibid.*, 182.
73. "To the Working Men of Great Britain and Ireland," pub. Sept. 1865; in *Gen. Council. F.Z. 1864-66* [v. 1.], 299.
74. R. Harrison: "The Land and Labour League," International Institute for Social History, *Bulletin*, v.8, 1953, no. 3, 174,195.
75. Minutes of 29 Nov. 1864, in *Gen. Council F.Z. 1864-66* [v. 1], 54.
76. Letter, Marx to Engels, 2 Dec. 1864, in *ME: The Civil War in the United States* (N.Y., International Pub., 1937), 273.
77. Jules L. Puech: *Le Proudhonisme dans l'Association Internationale des Travailleurs* (Paris, Alcan, 1907), 103n.
78. *M: "Second Address of the General Council . . ."*, dated 9 Sept. 1870; in *ME:SW* 1:496.
79. *M: Civ. War in Fr.*, in *ME:SW* 1:522-23.
80. *M: First Draft of Civ. War in Fr.*, 346-48.
81. *Ibid.*, 348. Cf. *Civ. War in Fr.*, in *ME:SW* 1:522.
82. *Ibid.*, 346.
83. *Ibid.*, 348.
84. *Ibid.*, 352.
85. E: *Ludwig Feuerbach*, in *ME:SW* 2.400-01.
86. *ME: Communist Manifesto*, in *ME:SW* 1:44.

