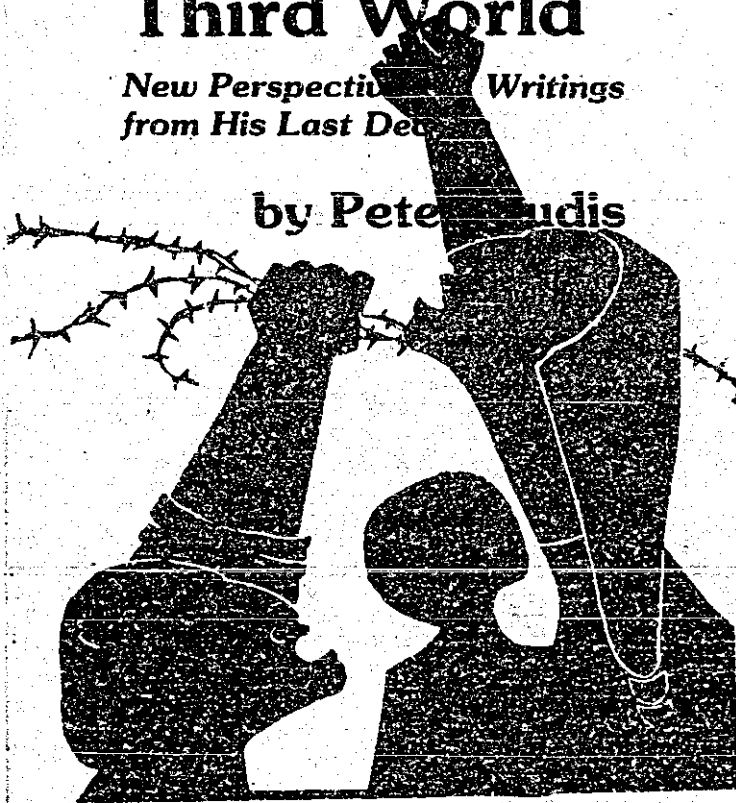


# Marx and the Third World

*New Perspectives Writings  
from His Last Decade*

by Peter G. ...udis



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from His Last Decade*

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PART I: DOES THE THIRD WORLD'S  
CHALLENGE TO WESTERN ANALYSTS  
INCLUDE MARX?

Today's Third World confronts the radical theoretician with a profound dualism. On the one hand, nation after nation there over the past 30 years has initiated successful freedom struggles against colonialism, imperialism, and foreign domination. These struggles offered the promise of a new beginning in human freedom, by posing the indigenous, non-capitalist social relations within Third World nations as a foundation for building societies free from dependency and underdevelopment. On the other hand, virtually every Third World nation is anything but free or independent today; either they are hemmed in by the power of Western neo-colonialism, or the foreign structures of Russian/Chinese "Communism" have been imposed upon them. Where the birth of a new Third World a generation ago seemed to herald the creation of a new pathway to human development, today the tendencies of domination and alienation of the developed world continue to define the social choices and economic/political structures of "under-developed" nations.

This dualism is issuing a serious challenge to the thought of all theoreticians in this centenary year of Karl Marx's death, for within the Third World



in general (and within the Indian sub-continent in particular) debate continues on whether it is possible to forge a pathway out of this dilemma. This is expressed in the voluminous, and continuous, debates over development and under-development, dependency and social transformation, "backwardness" and the unfinished state of Third World revolutions. Is it possible, for instance, for the Indian sub-continent to downplay,

if not actually bypass, reliance upon modern methods of industrial production (as dominant in both the U.S. and Russia) and yet still create new, more developed economic, political, and social relations? Are there indigenous pathways to social transformation within the rural sector that could break the inability of modern industrialization to meet the social needs of the mass of humanity? To what extent can indigenous, cultural, even traditional forms of social relations be incorporated into the struggles for a new society? All of these questions are huge ones and we make no pretense here of answering them; instead, we want to see in this centenary year of Marx's death if it is possible to unearth new conceptions, new methods, new ideas from heretofore unanalyzed terrain of Marx's thought that can aid the effort of working out the problems of development, under-development, and social revolution in today's Third World.

We wish to confront this question through an examination of the writings of Karl Marx on the Third World from his last decade, 1875-83. The focus on the last

decade is dictated both by the content of Marx's writings from this period and the fact that Marxists have studiously ignored their relevance for today. We undertake this probing, not to pretend that Marx provided polished "answers" for the crises of today, but rather to discern in the unfolding of his new discoveries concerning non-capitalist lands a method for confronting the realities of the 1980's.

Marx made some of his most unique and timely discoveries during his last decade, writings that have yet to be fully translated into English, much less analyzed. One of the few works to probe into the relevance of Marx's last decade is Raya Dunayevskaya's recent work, Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution. Lawrence Krader is also one of the few who has explored this material. He transcribed in 1972 one of the most important of all of Marx's works --the Ethnological Notebooks. While many of Marx's comments and analyses from this period are in the form of notes and comments from books he was excerpting, close scrutiny of his voluminous literary production reveals the development of new perspectives on the peasantry, on the economic basis of pre-capitalist societies (such as the village commune), and on primitive communism, man/woman relations, and imperialism. Marx developed all of these conceptions as part of a search for new forces of revolution, new pathways to revolution, new subjects of revolution. He developed them as part of his search for new allies to deepen and extend the

content of proletarian revolution. As he wrote in 1845, "the proletariat...cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhumane conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation." (Marx, 1975: 38) The total uprooting of the old society demanded by the labor/capital relation necessitated bringing all of oppressed humanity into the struggle for socialism, not only in the West, but in the East as well.

Marx hardly ignored the East prior to the 1870's and 1880's. As early as 1853 he wrote on the Taiping revolt in China, citing its potential for stimulating "revolutions on the [European] continent." (Marx, 1979a:98) He deepened his understanding of the East later in the 1850's in his now-famous "Pre-capitalist Economic Formations" section from the Grundrisse. These writings show how far Marx had moved by the late 1850's from his earlier position (enunciated in the Communist Manifesto) that the East was "vegetating in the teeth of barbarism."

Nevertheless, Marx's writings on the East from his early 1850's period were definitely Euro-centered. In his writings on India from 1853-57 he concentrated on the "backwardness" of Asian societies, noting that India "had no history at all" because it was dominated by an "undignified", "stagnant", "passive life" of a pre-capitalist mode of production. This did not mean Marx placed Asian society outside the vantage point of his concern with human development and freedom. On the contrary, he asked "can mankind

fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?" (Marx, 1979b:132). His answer was a definitive no, but at one and the same time he pointed to the newness of some positive features of pre-capitalist societies, praising the Taiping revolt so strongly as to place a reference to it in Capital itself. In a word, the proletariat of the "advanced" West could not themselves be free so long as those of the "backward" East were enslaved.

Marx searched for a possible pathway whereby the people of pre-capitalist Asia could join those of the capitalist West in a struggle for socialism. He discerned such a pathway in the "dual" character of colonialism. On the one hand, British imperialism in India was "barbarous", "destructive", that which "levelled all that was great and elevated in the native society." (Marx, 1979c:218) On the other hand, the British would succeed, Marx said, in introducing capitalist relations in India and elsewhere, thereby planting the seeds of social revolutions to come against colonialism, capitalism, and economic backwardness. As he pointed out,

Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions for a new world in the same way as geological evolutions have cleared the surface of the earth. (Marx, 1979b:222)

This did not mean British imperialism or the "capitalist mode of production" would by themselves free India from back-



wardness and under-development. Not colonialism or capitalism, but the revolt against them, would signal "a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia."

Marx's writings on the East from this period presented Third World social development as progression through definite stages. Marx assumed that the development of capitalism in the East would follow, and mirror, the rise of capitalism in the West. For both East and West, reaching the socialist mode of production required the prior stage of capitalism, for it is that stage which creates a new subject of revolution, the proletariat, whose struggle for freedom creates a new, socialist world out of the shell of the old. Later, Marx was to radically transform these conceptions of the Third World, but that has not prevented both his detractors and his followers from presenting his 1850's writings on India as the summation and substance of his view of under-developed societies. In truth, Marx's analyses of India in the 1850's was a corollary to, and derivation from, his analysis of the rise of capitalism in the West. It was only after the 1850's that he broke truly new ground, in tracing out and discerning the "law of motion" which is internal, indigenous, and unique to the Third World. Thus, while the Grundrisse first gives us the new respect and profounder grasp of the pre-capitalist formations, it was not until the 1870's that developments in the East take center stage of Marx's attention. What prompted this change was the emergence of new revolutionary

movements in Russia and Asia. As he wrote  
Sorge in 1877,

The Revolution this time starts  
from the East, that same East  
which we have so far regarded as  
the invincible support and  
reserve army of counter-  
revolution. (Marx, 1967:296)

Revolution was the energizing principle  
focusing Marx's attention on the Third  
World, first in 1857, then more  
comprehensively in 1877, and from there  
all the way to the very end of his life.  
The realities of the East there by became  
central to all his subsequent life and  
thought, even dictating changes in the new  
editions of his greatest theoretical work,  
Capital. Indeed, the changes Marx  
introduced in the 1872-75 French edition  
of Capital reveal the ground for all his  
work on "the East" during his last decade.

PART II: NEW ASPECTS OF THE  
RELATION OF THE FRENCH EDITION OF  
CAPITAL TO THE ASIATIC MODE OF  
PRODUCTION.

Marx wrote that the French edition of Capital "possesses a scientific value independent of the original and should be consulted even by readers familiar with German." (Marx, 1977:105). Three fundamental changes from the original 1867 German edition interest us here: one, the section "Fetishism of Commodities" which was greatly expanded; two, a new paragraph added into the section "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation"; three, the insistence by Marx that the So-Called Primitive Accumulation of Capital be considered integral to "The Process of Accumulation of Capital." That should put an end, once and for all, to the post-Marx Marxist tendency to view capitalist accumulation as a universal applying to all pre-capitalist societies, as if that were their only pathway to revolution.

While the first change on the fetishism of commodities does not directly apply to the issue of Marx's relations with the East, and readers can read that section in the English translation as Marx wrote it, the other changes are of the essence to the whole question of today's Third World.

Marx had written in the 1867 edition of Capital how during the constant process of capital accumulation,

effects become causes in their turn, and the various vicissitudes of the whole process, which always reproduces its own conditions, take on the form of periodicity. (Marx, 1977:786)

In the French edition, Marx appended this with:

only after foreign trade began to predominate over internal trade, thanks to mechanical industry; only after the world market had successfully annexed extensive areas of the New World, Asia, Australia...only after all this had happened can one date the repeated self-perpetrating cycles, whose successive phases embrace years, and always culminate in a general crisis...<sup>4</sup> (Marx, 1977:786)

In effect, Marx is saying that European colonialization of the Third World would not prove capable of vitiating capitalism's deep, persistent, "periodic" crises. On the contrary, Western plunder of the East would only deepen and bring on an even stronger economic crisis of capitalism. The rise of imperialism, in a word, would be accompanied by its opposite, crises, which would eventually lead to revolution.

The second important addition is in chapter 26, where Marx wrote of the expropriation of the agricultural laborer



from the land and his transformation into "free wage laborer" at the dawn of capitalist production. Chapter 26 of the 1867 edition of Capital ended with these sentences:

This history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and turns through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historic epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form. (Marx, 1977:876)

Marx appended this in the French edition to read,

but also the other countries of Western Europe are going through the same movement.

Marx hereby restricts his famous analysis of the historic tendency of capital accumulation to the nations of Western Europe, and Western Europe alone. Marx did not "apply" the laws of economic development in Europe to what would inevitably follow in Asia; instead, Capital Vol. 1 represents a specific, concrete, total analysis of the rise of capitalism in the West, and does not necessarily offer the East the 'image of its own future'.

Marx developed his refusal to "apply" a model of Western development to the Third World into a principle in his 1877

polemic with the Russian populist N.K. Mikhailovsky. Where Mikhailovsky portrayed Marx's "position" as saying semi-feudal Russia would first have to undergo a stage of capitalism in order only subsequently to arrive at the material conditions for socialism, Marx wrote,

For him it is absolutely necessary to change my sketch of the origin of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of a Universal Progress, fatally imposed on all peoples, regardless of the historical circumstances in which they find themselves, ending finally in that economic system which assures both the greatest amount of productive power of social labor and the fullest development of humanity. But I must beg his pardon. This is to do me too much honor and too much discredit. (Marx, 1955: 293)

Marx concludes his letter warning of any effort to constrict dialectical methodology to mere unfolding of economic stages:

By studying each one of these evolutions separately, and by comparing them afterwards, the key to these phenomena can easily be found, but one will never succeed with the open sesame of an historic-

philosophical theory, of which the supreme virtue consists in its being supra-historical (i.e., beyond the pale of history). (Marx, 1955:294).

This became the theoretical foundation for all of Marx's writings on the Third World in his last decade. Marx separates himself from the conception that the under-developed nation is fated to suffer through the horrors of capitalism in order for conditions of human freedom to be created. In breaking from such unilinear evolutionism, he probes into the internal structures of Russian and Asian society, drawing out the elements within them that could serve as the basis for a Third World socialism.

Marx therefore plunged into a study of the rural village commune. He closely examined this economic unit of pre-capitalist societies, both to grasp the nature of the Third World peasantry and to discern pathways for the transformation of those societies. The central importance of the village commune in Marx's studies on the East emerges from his commentary of Maxim Kovalevsky's book, The Communal Ownership of Land: The Causes, Process and Consequences of its Dissolution (1879).

Marx took issue with Kovalevsky's tendency to drag in foreign, and indeed, European categories to analyze what was indigenous to lands such as India. Marx particularly objected to his designation of India as "feudal"--a dispute that sheds much light on the debates over development and dependency in today's Third World.

Marx wrote:

According to Indian law the ruling power is not subject to division among the sons; thereby a great source of European feudalism is obstructed. (Krader, 1975:376)

In another passage, he wrote,

Payment of the kharadj made their property as little feudal as the land tax makes French landed property feudal. (Krader, 1975:373)

Finally, Marx noted that,

Because...farming out of offices...and commendation are found in India, Kovalevsky here finds feudalism in the West European sense. Kovalevsky forgets, among other things, serfdom, which is not in India, and which is an essential moment (of it). (Krader, 1975:383)

Neither did Marx characterize India, or indeed; any nation of "the East", as subject to an undifferentiated "Oriental despotism". Instead, Marx links the very concept of "oriental despotism" to the ideology of European imperialism!

There is no trace of the transformation of the entire conquered land into 'domainal property'. The 'lousy Oriental-



ists', etc., refer vainly to the places in the Koran where the earth is spoken of as belonging to the property of God.  
(Krader, 1975:370)

As against those who import foreign, ready-made, and mechanical categories to explain the non-capitalist, peasant societies, Marx deepened his conception of the mode of production native to the East: the Asiatic Mode of Production. This mode of production exists wherever isolated village communities (which serve as the center of economic life) co-exist with highly centralized political structures (which serve as the center of urban life). Marx defined it as:

the isolation of the communities, the absence of links in the life of one with the others, this localized microcosm, is not found everywhere as an inherent characteristic of the primitive type, but wherever this isolation of communities is found, it causes a centralized despotism to elevate itself above them.  
(Blackstock, 1952:220)

The "Asiatic Mode of Production" was no mere economic designation, as if Asia had no choice but to languish within it for centuries to come. Instead, in Marx's hands the concept became a way to probe into the internal social relations of Asian nations, through the explication of those elements which pointed towards a transformation of that despotic form of

production into new relations of human freedom. Thus, Marx saw the communal relations of the isolated peasant village as containing the emancipatory germ of socialism in that they were not subject to the fragmented, atomized, and alienated social relations of modern capitalist society. Once the British confronted the native pre-capitalist relations, they proceeded to break them down in the interest of creating conditions of capitalist commodity production. To quote Marx:

The English broke up the village communities into districts by force, and introduced private property artificially into the shares of the cultivated land...the British government appropriated the forest and waste lands unto itself as state property, to the detriment of the village communities...in order to further European colonization. (Kradler, 1975: 394)

Thus common property was recognized in principle, how far it was in practice always depended and depends on what the English dogs hold most useful for themselves. (Kradler, 1975: 392)

The mere existence of such communal forms, however, by no means guarantees the creation of a future socialism. The emancipatory potential of the village

commune becomes actual only through the conscious intervention of a revolutionary subject. Rather than viewing capitalism/imperialism as a necessary stage the Third World had to endure in order to reach socialism, Marx came to view the struggles against them as the determinant for the village commune to become the basis for a Third World socialism. As we will see later, Marx deepened this conception in 1882, arguing that the freedom struggles of the East could not reach socialism without being connected with the workers movements of the West. But that hardly made Marx a unilinear evolutionist. He noted how the very entrance of British capitalist-imperialism in India stifled, and often destroyed, the very social organism which could possibly become the germ for a Third World socialism--communal peasant relations. Far from the destruction of such an "archaic" social formation speeding the arrival of socialism, it actually removed one of the best potentials for moving the under-developed lands towards socialism--providing specific historical conditions were met.

Marx extended this conception in his critique of the writings of Sir Henry Maine, an early anthropologist. Where Maine held that the dissolution of the communal relations of India was a natural, inevitable, "progressive" step, Marx viewed it as an artificial transformation brought about through the intervention of British imperialism.

British officials in India, as well as critics like Sir Henry Maine who rely on them, describe

the dissolution of communal ownership of land in Punjab as if it took place as an inevitable consequence of economic progress in spite of the affectionate attitude of the British toward this archaic form. The truth is rather that the British are themselves the active offenders for this dissolution. (Wada, 1982:142)

Later Marx was to write,

As concerns East India, for example, everyone, except Sir Henry Maine and other people of the same fiber, knows only too well that there the suppression of the communal ownership of land was only an act of English vandalism, which has brought not an advance, but a setback, to the native peoples. (Blackstock, 1952:219)

Marx had deepened his conception of Asian society by the 1870's to the point of viewing imperialism, dependency, importation of modern capitalistic methods of industrialization as retrogressive steps for the under-developed nations. This by no means implies that Marx "glorified" the archaic. Rather, as against the birthtime of capitalism in the Europe of the 16th-18th centuries, the emergence of industrialization in the late 19th century had revealed that capitalism had lost many of its formerly "progres-



sive" features. Marx was looking for those elements indigenous to the Third World, with a critical eye, to see which could aid the effort of by-passing the now-destructive phenomenon of foreign-induced industrialization. In a letter to Danielson he wrote,

The appearance of the railway system in the leading states of capitalism allowed, and even forced, states where capitalism was confined to a few summits of society, to suddenly create and enlarge their capitalistic superstructure in dimensions altogether disproportionate to the bulk of the social body, carrying on the great work of production in the traditional mode. There is, therefore, not the least doubt that in those states the railway creation has accelerated the social and political disintegration, as in the more advanced states it hastened the final development...of capitalist production. (Marx, 1955:298)

How very different from his 1853 remark that "the railway system will therefore become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry"! Marx's sensitivity to the "development of under-development" anticipated the modern analysis by a full half century and speaks volumes against any denial of Marx's relevance to today's Third World, weighed down as it is with importation of

"advanced" Western technology that it does not have the social infra-structure to support. As against any determinism, technological or otherwise, Marx's method consisted of tracing out those factors which supported or suppressed the possibility of social transformation in the under-developed world. Thus, in his last decade he came to ground his hopes for an Indian socialism, not on the importation of Western technology, expertise, much less capitalistic social relations, but rather upon a social revolution against British imperialism. Indeed, all through the 1870's and 1880's what guided Marx's persistent, profound, and detailed commentaries on social relations within India was a search for new revolutionary beginnings. As he wrote to Danielson in 1881,

In India, serious complications, if not a general outbreak, are in store for the British government...There is an actual conspiracy going on wherein the Hindus and Mussolmans co-operate; the British government is aware that something is brewing but these shallow people (I mean the governmental men) stultified by their own parliamentary ways of thinking and doing, do not even desire to see clearly, to realize the whole extent of the imminent danger! (Marx, 1955:317)

Marx's hostility to unilinearism, determinism, stagification, rings out

throughout these writings as strongly as his denunciation of imperialism, racism, capitalism. But while Marx took the village commune as a potential germ for a Third World socialism, he by no means viewed it uncritically. On the contrary, his notebooks are filled with devastating critiques of the patriarchal, cast, class-ridden social relations of pre-capitalist societies. Only a total social revolution, he came to believe, could free Asian society from the contradiction between the communal form and despotic content of the Asiatic Mode of Production. The "deep seated dualism" within the commune could move Asian societies either towards capitalism or socialism, depending on the "specific historical environment it finds itself in." The caste/class hierarchy of the communes' despotic content could, when taken over by British imperialism, become a basis for private ownership in land and capitalistic relations; the communal forms of possession and working of the land could, in conjunction with an anti-imperialist revolution against the British and their indigenous allies, become a basis for communal ownership of the land and socialistic relations. The tracing out of this contradiction came full blown in Marx's excerpts from Morgan's Ancient Society.

PART III: MARX'S NEW MOMENTS IN THE  
LAST DECADE, ESPECIALLY THE  
ETHNOLOGICAL NOTEBOOKS.

Morgan's work dealt not with the period of the Asiatic Mode of Production, but with a period far preceding it--"Primitive Communism". Despite the vast time distance between the period covered by Morgan compared to other writers Marx excerpted there was the closest affinity between the two in the mind of Marx, who was constantly digging ever deeper to discover the seeds of new, alternate, heretofore unexperienced pathways to social revolution.

According to Marx,

The rural communities in Asia...among other people's ...appears everywhere as the most recent type of...the archaic organization of society. (Blackstock, 1952:219)

Marx often referred to the village commune as "the last stage of the primitive form of society." (Blackstock, 1952:221)

In the East Indies we encounter it (the rural commune) as the last period of the archaic formation. (Blackstock, 1952 :223)



As one of the first in-depth studies of that "archaic" formation in its full-blown stage of primitive communism, Morgan's work shed much light on the contemporary realities of land possession and social organization. Marx accepted, in part, Morgan's enthusiasm for the "higher" social relations evidenced in the Iroquois democracy; he also viewed, like Morgan, communal possession of the land in the "Primitive" era as an alternative to the atomized individualism of modern capitalism. Marx also accepted in part Morgan's finding that man/woman relations were freer in many "primitive" societies. But Marx was by no means uncritical either of Morgan or the subject matter he presented, as Engels was to be in his own work, Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State (written after Marx's death). Where Engels--and, indeed, all post-Marx Marxists--took Morgan's views to be in complete agreement with Marx, analysis of Marx's newly-transcribed Ethnological Notebooks tells a quite different tale.

First, Marx was not satisfied with Morgan's analysis of the dissolution of primitive communal society during the transition to "political" society. Morgan traced this dissolution to the rise of patriarchy, which imposed itself, as it were, in spite of the egalitarian relations of the Commune. While Engels later popularized Morgan's "discovery" into the now-famous phrase, "world historic defeat of the female sex", (Engels, 1978:65) Marx held no such view. Instead, Marx tied the emergence of

political society, not to the rise of patriarchy, but to the division of labor between chiefs and ranks within the primitive commune. As each tribe came to accumulate more and more property, the nascent social divisions of labor between chief and ranks ossified, ultimately, into caste, and later class formations. Marx wrote,

This shows that, as soon as differences of rank between blood relatives of gens exist, these come into conflict with the gentile principle and gens in its contradictoriness can petrify into caste. (Marx, 1972:183; my translation)

He added,

Aside from locality, property different within the same gens had transformed the unity of their interests into antagonism of its members; in addition, besides land and cattle, money capital had become of decisive importance with the development of slavery. (Marx, 1972:213)

Marx discerned these contradictions, not only in the period of transition from primitive communism to political society, but even earlier, in the very originating principle of primitive communism itself. Where Morgan pointed to the elective democracy of the Iroquois, Marx viewed

chief selection as "only theoretically" democratic.

Naturally, because he is the chief (and theoretically always 'elected') as artificial and mere administrative authority... (Marx, 1972:309)

This is as normal as everything else: the chief remains only theoretically elective, only independent, within the gens, respectively, within the tribe. (Marx, 1972:310)

Likewise, Marx did not consider communal possession of land and the existence of patriarchy to be necessarily antithetical. On the contrary, he pointed to limitations of freedom among the Iroquois woman, since their vote was only a consultative one.

The woman 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 action among the Iroquois. Military questions usually left to the action of the voluntary principle. (Marx, 1972:162)

Marx noticed elements of "Patriarchy", women's oppression, all through the period Morgan analyzed. This

by no means infers that he considered it "natural". Instead, he saw no reason to assume that mere absence of private ownership and presence of communalism guaranteed freedom for women. As he wrote in paraphrasing Morgan,

The propensity to pair, now so powerful in the civilized races, is also not normal to mankind, but a growth through experience, like all the great powers and passions of the mind. (Marx, 1972:118)

In his notes on Phear's The Aryan Village, Marx stressed the oppression of women in the Indian sub-continent and in particular singled out religion as a factor helping to solidify patriarchal relations. He wrote,

wives may now worship the family idol of any visible thakur, except the clay figure of Siwa made for everyday worship. The shastras forbid to women and Sudras all knowledge and use of sacred texts. (Marx, 1972:259)

The prevalence of sexism, women's oppression, and patriarchy not only held back the self-development of women, but also made it all the easier for British imperialism to introduce capitalist social relations in the communes. Marx noted how British imperialism intervened in India by taking the patriarchal, despotic forms of rural life as a foundation for creating a



new foreign and indigenous ruling class, who through private ownership in land undermined, if not destroyed, the communal content of rural life. As Marx wrote in a different context,

The process of dissolution of the communal associations... leads infallibly to large land-ownership. The entry...into the bosom of a community, of a class of capitalists alien to it, eliminates its patriarchal character, and thereby the influence of the community head; the war of all against all begins.  
(Kradner, 1975:397)

As the last surviving form of primitive society, the Asian village commune exhibits many of the attributes and defects of primitive communism itself. The communal form of economic life contains a possible germ for a Third World socialism; but the social and sexual divisions of labor which exist within the communal form easily solidify social inequalities and pave the way for their dissolution into "capitalistic" methods of ownership and production. Marx's fullest treatment of this contradiction--and its most direct relevance for today--is contained in a series of draft letters written to the exiled Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich in 1881.

In the Winter of 1881 Marx received a letter from Zasulich asking him whether it was necessary for Russia to first pass through an extended period of capitalism

before arriving at socialism; or, whether it was possible for the Russian village commune to serve as a "starting point for communist development". Marx, to the chagrin of both Zasulich and Plekhanov (the founder of Russian Marxism responded in the following way:

After having put temporarily in a normal state of functioning in its present form, it (the rural commune) can become the direct point of origin for the economic system towards which modern society develops and it can cast off its old skin without first committing suicide. (Blackstock, 1952:222)

Marx held that the communal ownership of land in rural Russia provided it with the opportunity of by-passing the capitalist stage; but this was by no means an inevitable occurrence:

There is no question that the archaic type to which the Russian community belongs, is invested with a deep-seated dualism which, given certain historical conditions, may bring about its dissolution. Ownership of the soil is communal, but every person cultivates and exploits his field on his own account, just as the small peasant in the West.

But does this mean that the

historical development of the village commune must inevitably lead to that outcome? Not at all. Its innate dualism permits an alternative development; either the factor favoring private property overcomes its factor favoring collectivism, or the latter becomes the former. It all depends on the historical environment in which the community finds itself. (Blackstock, 1952:221)

Marx noted several "historical conditions" which would be needed in order for the village commune to become the direct originator for Russian socialism: 1) the absorption of Western technology, which would allow the communes to escape economic backwardness without having to first dissolve into capitalist industrialization; 2) the removal of the political bureaucracy which restricts communal forms to the terrain of economic relations alone; 3) the destruction of the state, which was intentionally trying to destroy the village communes in order to 'catch up with the West'; 4) the necessity for communal forms of association to be expanded to nationwide scale; (5) (in the case of India) the need to get rid of British imperialism which was destroying the communal forms.) In a word, Marx concludes, "to save the Russian commune, a Russian revolution is necessary." (Blackstock, 1952:226)

Hence, there is no "economic" answer to Zasluch's question. The ultimate



answer depends on what people do to strip the village commune of the factors inhibiting its full revolutionary potential. Marx concludes:

If the revolution takes place at an opportune time, if it concentrates all its forces to assure the free upswing of the rural commune (and if the intelligent sector of Russian society, the Russian intellect, concentrates all the living forces of the country) the village commune will soon develop as a regenerating element of Russian society and as an element of superiority over the countries enthralled by the capitalist regime.<sup>10</sup> (Blackstock, 1952 226)

The alternative to unilinear evolutionism is hereby posed: the dialectics of liberation. In order to "know" the future of the village commune, comprehension of the objective elements within Russia and India is necessary; equally as important is rootedness in those subjective forces of human freedom, such as the peasantry, who in revolutionary life can strip the commune of those factors inhibiting its forward development towards human freedom. More implicit, but indeed the conception which underlies the whole, is Marx's insistence that a theory of liberation, the action of cognition, "intellect" is as necessary an "historical condition" as all other



factors. For it is "intellect", consciousness, philosophy of revolution which allows the revolutionist to discern what in the "objective situation" should be fortified or attacked by the "subjective forces" striving to achieve liberation. Thereby, is the future revealed in the present. As Marx wrote in another letter,

The intellectual movement now taking place in Russia testifies to the fact that fermentation is going on deep below the surface. Minds are always connected by invisible threads with the body of a people. (Marx, 1955:241)

In the last work we examine from Marx's last decade, his preface to the 1882 Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto, revolution as the ingredient needed to "save" the Russian commune gets ever-deepened into a global concept:

The crucial question now is: can the Russian village community, an already seriously undermined form of the age old communal property of the soil, become transformed directly into the superior form of communist ownership of land, or will it have to pass through the same process of decomposition which is in evidence by the course of the historical evolution of the West?

Today only one answer is possible to this question. If the Russian revolution sounds the tocsin for a proletarian revolution in the West (the decomposition of the communal ownership of land in Russia can be evaded) so that each complement each other, the prevailing form of communal ownership of land in Russia may form the starting point for a communist course of development. (Blackstock, 1952:227)

For an under-developed nation to achieve independence and socialism, there must not only be a national revolution, but one with so total, internationalist a vision as to spark revolutions in the developed lands. Revolution is not its first act alone; it strives to become global, total, continuous, permanent. Just as the mere abolition of private property does not, by itself, abolish the oppression of woman, so the national revolution in the under-developed land does not, by itself, overcome conditions of backwardness and dependency. We have seen that the national revolt can become such a bacillus for world revolution if the "historical condition" of revolutionaries capturing the permanence of revolution in a philosophy of revolution is met.

The totality of vision of Marx's last decade proves that Marx was no unilinear evolutionist, determinist, or stagifier of

human development. He was instead a philosopher and practitioner of the dialectics of "revolution in permanence". As against the modern mis-users of that phrase (Trotsky and Mao included),<sup>11</sup> Marx's concept was forever rooted in new subjects of revolution, such as the peasantry, and in new methods of revolutionary consciousness, such as dialectics. At no time, we have seen, did Marx separate the analysis of Third World economic formations from discerning new forces, new pathways, new subjects of revolution.

As Dunayevskaya writes,

What is needed is a new unifying principle, on Marx's ground of humanism, that truly alters both human thought and human experience. Marx's Ethnological Notebooks are an historic happening that proves, one hundred years after he wrote them, that Marx's legacy is no mere heirloom, but a live body of ideas and perspectives that is in need of concretization. Every moment of Marx's development, as well as the totality of his works, spells out the need for "revolution in permanence". This is the absolute challenge to our age. (Dunayevskaya, 1982:195)

Today's Third World is caught in the vortex of the super-power rivalry between

the U.S. and Russia, and yet many indigenous elements exist within Third World societies (large disenfranchised peasantry, communal relations of tilling the land, reliance on non-capital intensive technologies in rural areas) which can, if articulated and grappled with anew, become building blocks for socialism. Despite a century of unmitigated imperialist intrusion and "independent" capitalist development in India and Pakistan, the majority of the peoples of both lands continue to live within the rural sector. While the indigenous "communal relations" of possession of land of the type Marx encountered are very different today (and in large measure do not exist) the persistence of communal forms of human association in the countryside can be taken up as a potential foundation for by-passing either a private capitalist or state-capitalist form of human relations.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the discovery of new moments in Marx's last decade shows us how deep, profound, and open must our view of forces of revolution be. Just as the dissolution of the primitive commune was accelerated by the existence of unfree man/woman relations, so in today's Third World the effort to create new, non-capitalist methods of production has been stifled by the persistence of sexism both in society at large and within the revolutionary Left. Our age has seen, over and over again, that where women's liberation fails to become, not just a component, but the very Reason of revolution, no genuine



liberation is possible. At the same time, many Third World nations have fallen prey to a centralized state bureaucracy which consumes the life and labor of the people in the name of "catching up with the West" (or the "East", as the case may be). Indigenous forms of socialism will not truly flower until these state despots, whether annointed as "capitalist", "Communist", "nationalist" or Islamic" are smashed, completely smashed, in the course of popular revolution.

We are not arguing that Marx's analysis of the Third World in his last decade is any sort of blueprint, much less a provider of answers, for the Third World of our day. Instead, we argue that the method embodied in Marx's research must come alive in revolutionary practice so the unfinished freedom struggles of today's Third World may reach completion. Achieving such "revolution in permanence" requires several factors: we must dig out and discern those objective forces that can become building blocks for socialism, but this alone is not enough; we must also have a view of new forces of revolution, who can strip these forms of any and all elements that interfere with the attainment of total human freedom; but this too is not enough. The task of completing today's unfinished revolts will not be accomplished until that other force of revolution--"intellect", cognition, dialectic, philosophy of revolution is also present to give direction to the struggles to achieve human emancipation. This is the enduring legacy of Marx's writings from his last decade for our day.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The conspiracy of silence on these writings can be traced to a phrase used by Franz Mehring (Marx's biographer) which referred to the last decade as a "slow death". This view (accepted by most Marx biographers from Ryazanov to Padover) hardly prompted Marxists to dig into the voluminous material which has only recently seen actual publication.

<sup>2</sup>The connection between proletarian revolution and other freedom struggles was spelled out by Marx in his now-famous 1844 Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts at the precise moment when he formulated his conception of "alienated labor". He wrote on the oppression of women, noting that "the direct, natural and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man to woman...from the character of this relationship it follows how much man as a species being, as man, has come to be himself and comprehend himself." See his "Private Property and Communism" in Collected Works, Vol. 3, International Publishers, 1975.

<sup>3</sup>The Russian edition of Marx/Engels Correspondence wrongly translates this as "this time the revolution begins in the East, hitherto the unbroken bulwark and reserve army of counter-revolution", thereby muting Marx's acknowledged change of views concerning Russia and the East during his last decade.

George Lichtheim was one of the few scholars to grasp that, far from remaining enamored of capitalist technological revolutions, Marx actually developed greater hatred of capitalist-imperialism with his deeper appreciation of "the East". See his "Marx and the 'Asiatic Mode of Production'" in St. Anthony's Papers, no. 14 (Carbondale, Ill: Southern Illinois University Press).

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph was not included by Engels in subsequent English editions of Capital. It appears in the Ben Fowkes translation of Vol. I as a footnote. For an illuminating analysis of the vicissitudes of the French edition of Capital in the hands of post-Marx Marxists, see Kevin Anderson, "The French Edition of Capital, 100 Years After", paper presented to the Conference of the Eastern Sociological Association, Philadelphia, 19 March 1982.

<sup>5</sup> This addition has yet to find its way into any English edition of Capital. Such disregard of Marx's Marxism by post-Marx Marxists find its expression in the intellectual arrogance of Ben Fowkes (the latest English translator of Capital) who so slavishly follows Engels' editing as to separate Part VIII ("The so-called Primitive Accumulation") from Part VII ("The Process of Accumulation of Capital"). The two parts were joined in the original German edition and in all other editions edited by Marx. Through such "re-editing" Fowkes fell into the



trap of the bourgeois attacks on Marx which Marx himself answered so profoundly in his letter to Mihailovsky.

<sup>6</sup>This is actually a composite of four draft letters written in the Winter of 1882. It is a sad commentary on the state of Marxist scholarship that these seminal letters to Zasulich have yet to be collected in English in one place in the form in which they were written. For a fine discussion of how the Russian Marxists sought to bury dissemination of the one letter of Marx to Zasulich that was published, see Teodor Shanin, "Marx and the Peasant Commune" in History Workshop, Autumn 1981, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup>Morgan's book was by no means the only one which served this purpose for Marx. The concreteness with which Marx connected seemingly "abstruse" studies to the question of pathways to social transformation can even be discerned in the fact that his Notebooks on Ethnology included, in addition to excerpts from the work of Phear, Maine, Lubbock and Morgan, notes from the book of E. Hospitalier, The Principle Applications of Electricity. Hospitalier's book partly consisted of an analysis of the feasibility of using electrical techniques to increase the productivity of the soil. Lawrence Krader chose not to include these notes in his transcription of the other writings in the Ethnological Notebooks. That Krader chose not to indicate the narrowness of comprehension of Marx's legacy which results when analysis of empirical facts



are separated from developing new pathways to revolution. For a view of how Marxists' inability to grasp the profundity and concrete totality of Marx's voluminous studies during his last decade led them to label much of Marx's work "inexcusable pedantry" see D. Ryazanov, Marx-Engels Archiv, Vol. 1, 1926. pp. 316-342.

<sup>8</sup> For a full treatment of the difference between Marx's and Engel's views on primitive communism, see Dunayevskaya, 1982, pp. 180-87. Also see Krader's introduction to the Ethnological Notebooks, pp. 76-85. Krader has also written on other writings from Marx's last decade, concluding that "the various writings by Marx on the Asiatic mode of production are to be taken developmentally, forming a series of consecutive contributions to his critique of the political economy of capital." (Asiatic Mode of Production, p. 317.) This is true, but not quite true enough--for what is also at stake in Marx's analysis is the development of a philosophy of revolution. This is something which does not enter Krader's mind, so weighed down is he with viewing Marx's discoveries as "inter-disciplinary studies" tacked onto an analysis of political economy. Such inability to hear Marx think as he relates empirical matter and dialectics in such a way as to open up new pathways to revolution makes it impossible for him to comprehend the totality and todayness of Marx's Marxism. For a view of Marxism as a philosophy of

revolution, see Dunayevskaya's Marxism and Freedom (1958) and her Philosophy and Revolution (1973), as well as Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution (1982).

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the logic of Marx's argument would not be fundamentally changed even if the communal ownership of land were completely destroyed by this date. For also serving as a basis for socialism, and inextricably bound up with the question of land possession, are the communal relations of working the land which often persist long after the land itself has fallen into private ownership.

<sup>10</sup> In the original manuscript Marx had crossed out the phrase here in parenthesis; it has not been reproduced in any of the English translations of the Zasulich letters. The full quotation, with the parenthesis on the "Russian intellect" included, can be found quoted in Haruki Wada's "Marx and Revolutionary Russia" in History Workshop, Autumn 1981, p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> While Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution" created on the eve of the 1905 Revolution in Russia was certainly a brilliant prognostication, it can hardly be considered Marxian, insofar as it was developed without reference or relation to a revolutionary subject--the peasantry most of all. Where Mao's phrase "continuous revolution" won him accolades

as the "great helmsman", it can likewise hardly be considered Marxian, insofar as it was a political slogan projected from the power of will, lacking any foundation in the material surroundings, either as class struggles or material relations. It is the opinion of this writer that by failing to develop Marxism as a philosophy of revolution, Trotsky and Mao, as well as other Marxists, stood on different ground than that of Marx's concept of "revolution in permanence".

12. A glimpse into how deep one must probe into such "indigenous" elements within every society is seen in Marx's correspondence from Algeria in 1882. Marx wrote to Laura Lafargue, "Sometimes Maures were dressed pretentiously, even richly, others in, for once I dare call it blouses, sometime of white woollen appearance, now in rags and tatters--but in the eyes of a true Musulman such accidents, good or bad luck, do not distinguish Mahomats children. Absolute equality in their social intercourse ... (nevertheless they will go to the devil without a revolutionary movement.)", in Marx/Engels: Werke, (Berlin, 1967), Vol. 35, pp. 308-09.



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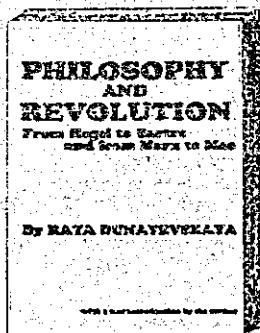
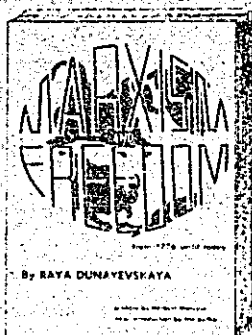
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