Marx, Theoretician of Anarchism

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Contents

Marx has been badly served by disciples who have succeeded neither in assessing the limits of his theory nor in determining its standards and field of application and has ended up by taking on the role of some mythical giant, a symbol of the omniscience and omnipotence of *homo faber*, maker of his own destiny.

The history of the School remains to be written, but at least we know how it came into being: Marxism, as the codification of a misunderstood and misinterpreted body of thought, was born and developed at a time when Marx's work was not yet available in its entirely and when important parts of it remained unpublished. Thus, the triumph of Marxism as a State doctrine and Party ideology preceded by several decades the publication of the writings where Marx set out most clearly and completely the scientific basis and ethical purpose of his social theory. That great upheavals took place which invoked a body of thought whose major principles were unknown to the protagonists in the drama of history should have been enough to show that Marxism was the greatest, if not the most tragic, misunderstanding of the century. But at the same time this allows us to appreciate the significance of the theory held by Marx that it is not revolutionary ideas or moral principles which bring about changes in society, but rather human and material forces; that ideas and ideologies very often serve only to disguise the interest of the class in whose interests the upheavals take place. Political Marxism cannot appeal to Marx's science and at the same time escape the critical analysis which that science uses to unmask the ideologies of power and exploitation.

Marxism as the ideology of a master class has succeeded in emptying the concepts of socialism and communism, as Marx and his forerunners understood them, of their original meaning and has replaced it with the picture of a reality which is its complete negation. Although closely linked to the other two, a third concept — anarchism — seems however to have escaped this fate of becoming a mystification. But while people know that Marx had very little sympathy for certain anarchists, it is not so generally known that despite this he still shared the anarchist ideal and objectives: the disappearance of the State. It is therefore pertinent to recall that in embracing the cause of working class emancipation, Marx started off in the anarchist tradition rather than in that of socialism or communism; and that, when finally he chose to call himself a "communist," for him this term did not refer to one of the communist currents which then existed, but rather to a movement of thought and mode of action which had yet to be founded by gathering together all the revolutionary elements which had been inherited from existing doctrines and from the experience of past struggles.

In the reflections which follow we will try to show that, under the name communism, Marx developed a theory of anarchism; and further, that in fact it was he who was the first to provide a rational basis for the anarchist utopia and to put forward a project for achieving it. In view of the limited scope of the present essay we will only put this forward as an item for discussion. Proof by means of quotations will be reduced to a minimum so as to better bring out the central argument: Marx theoretician of anarchism.

I

When in Paris in February 1845, on the eve of his departure for exile in Brussels, Marx signed a contract with a German publisher he committed himself to supplying in a few months a work in two volumes entitled "A Critique of Politics and Political Economy" without suspecting that he

had imposed on himself a task which would take up his while life and of which he would be able to carry out only a largish fragment.

The choice of subject was no accident. Having given up all hope of a university career, Marx had carried over into his political journalism the results of his philosophical studies. His articles in the *Rheinische Zeitung* of Cologne led the fight for freedom of the press in Prussia in the name of a liberty which he conceived of as the essence of Man and as the attire of human nature; but also in the name of a State understood as the realisation of rational freedom, as "the great organism, in which legal, moral, and political freedom must be realised, and in which the individual citizen in obeying the laws of the state only obeys the natural laws of his own reason, of human reason."[1] But the Prussian censorship soon silenced the philosopher-journalist. Marx, in the solicitude of a study retreat, did not take long to ask himself about the real nature of the State and about the rational and ethical validity of Hegel's political philosophy. We know what was the fruit of this meditation enriched by the study of the history of the bourgeois revolutions in France, Great Britain and the United States: apart from an incomplete and unpublished work, *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State* (1843), two polemical essays, *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On the Jewish Question* (Paris, 1844). These two writings in fact form a single manifesto in which Marx identifies once and for all and condemns unreservedly the social institutions — the State and Money — which he saw as at the origin of the evils and defects from which modern society suffered and would go on suffering until a new social revolution came to abolish them. At the same time Marx praised the force — the modern proletariat — which, after having been the main victim of these two institutions, was going to put an end to their reign as well as to every other form of class domination, political and economic. The self-emancipation of the proletariat would be the complete emancipation of humanity; after the total loss of humanity the total victory of the human.

In the intellectual development of Marx the rejection of the State and Money and the affirmation that the proletariat was a liberating class came before his studies of political economy; they preceded also his discovery of the materialist conception of history, the "guiding line" which directed his later historical researches. His break with Hegel's philosophy of law and politics on the one hand and his critical study of bourgeois revolutions on the other allowed him to establish clearly the ethical postulates of his future social theory for which the scientific basis was to be provided by the critique of political economy. Having understood the revolutionary role of democracy and legislative power in the genesis of the bourgeois State and governmental power, Marx made use of the illuminating analysis of two shrewd observers of the revolutionary possibilities of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville and Thomas Hamilton, to lay down a rational basis for an anarchist utopia as the conscious aim of the revolutionary movement of the class which his master Saint Simon had called "the most numerous and most poor." Since the critique of the State led him to envisage the possibility of a society free from all political authority, he had to go on to make a critique of the economic system which ensured the material basis of the State. The ethical rejection of money also implied an analysis of political economy, the science of the enrichment of some and of the impoverishment of others. Later he was to describe the research he was about to begin on the "anatomy of bourgeois society" and it was by engaging in this work of social anatomy that he was to work out his methodology. Later the rediscovery of the Hegelian dialectic would help him to establish the plan of the "Economy" under six "headings"

[1] "The Leading Article in No. 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung." *Rheinische Zeitung*, 10–14 July 1842.

or "books": *Capital*, Landed Property, Wage Labour; *The State*, Foreign Trade, World Market (see *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859). In fact, this double "triad" of items for research corresponds to the two problems which he had proposed to deal with fourteen years previously in the work which was to contain a critique of both political economy and politics. Marx began his work with the critical analysis of the capitalist mode of production, but he hoped to live and work long enough not only to complete this but also, once he had completed the first triad of headings, to begin on the second triad which would thus have found the *Book on the State*.[2] The theory of anarchism would thus have found in Marx its first recognised exponent without there being any need to prove this indirectly. The misunderstanding of the century of Marxism as an ideology of the State was the result of the fact that Marx never wrote this book. It was this which has allowed the masters of a State apparatus labelled socialist to include Marx among the proponents of State socialism or communism, indeed even of "authoritarian" socialism.

Certainly, like every revolutionary teaching, that of Marx is not free from ambiguities. It is by cleverly exploiting these ambiguities and by referring to certain personal attitudes of the master that some of his unscrupulous disciples have succeeded in putting his work at the service of doctrines and actions which represent, in relation to both its basic truth and its declared objective, its complete negation. At a time when many decades of regression in human relations have called into question all theories, values, systems and projects, it is important to gather together the intellectual heritage of an author who, aware of the limits of his research, made the call for critical self-education and revolutionary self-emancipation the permanent principle of the workers' movement. It is not up to posterity burdened with overwhelming responsibilities to judge a man who can no longer plead his cause; but on the other hand it is our duty to take up a teaching which was completely oriented towards the future, a future which certainly became our catastrophic present but which mostly still remains to be created.

II

We repeat: the "Book" on the State, foreshadowed in the plan of the *Economy* but which remained unwritten, could only have contained the theory of society freed from the State, anarchist society. Although not directly intended for this work, the materials and works prepared or published by Marx in the course of his literary activity allow us both to put forward this hypothesis about the content of the planned work and to work out what its general structure would have been. While the first triad of headings was part of the critique of political economy, the second would have put forward essentially a critique of politics. Following on from the critique of capital, the critique of the State would have established what determined the political evolution of modern society, just as the purpose of *Capital* (followed by the Books on "Landed Property" and "Wage Labour") was to "lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society" (cf. Preface to *Capital*, 1867). In the same way that the principles and postulates which motivated Marx when making his critique of capital are to be found in his published and unpublished writings prior to the *Critique of Political Economy* (1859), so we can extract from these writings those which would have guided him in developing his criticism of the State. It would however be a mistake to suppose that at this time Marx's thought on the nature of politics was established in its final form, with no possibility of modifying details and closed to all theoretical enrichment. Quite the

[2] See "plan et méthode de l'Economie" in M. Rubel, *Marx, Critique du Marxisme*, Payot, Paris, 1974, pp. 369–401.

contrary. The problem of the State never ceased to concern Marx not only because he failed to keep the moral engagement to finish his master work, but above all because it was constantly kept in his mind by his participation and polemical confrontations after September 1864 within the International Workingmen's Association and by political events, particularly the rivalry for leadership between France and Prussia on the one hand and Russia and Austria on the other. The Europe of the Treaty of Vienna had then become no more than a fiction, while two important social phenomena had made their appearance on the scene of history: movements for national liberation and the workers' movement. The struggle between nations and the class struggle, which were difficult to reconcile from a purely conceptual point of view, were to raise problems of theory requiring decisions by Marx and Engels which could not but bring them into contradiction with their own revolutionary principles. Engels made a speciality of differentiating between peoples and nations according to how, in his eyes, they could or could not claim the historical right to national existence. Their sense of historical realities prevented the two friends from following Proudhon in the way of a federalism which, in the situation of the time, must have seemed both a pure abstraction and an impure utopia; but they risked falling into a nationalism which was incompatible with the universalism of the modern proletariat they had posited.

If Proudhon, by his federalist aspirations, seems to be nearer than Marx to the anarchist position, the picture changes when we consider Proudhon's overall conception of the reforms which should lead to the abolition of capital and the State. The almost excessive praise of which Proudhon is the object in the *Holy Family* (1845) should not mislead us. From this time on there were deep theoretical differences between the two men; the praise had only been conceded to the French socialist with a very important reservation: Proudhon's critique of property was implicit in the bourgeois economic system, but however valid it might be it did not call into question the social relations of the system which it criticised. Quite the contrary. In Proudhon's doctrine, the economic categories, which were theoretical expressions of the institutions of capital, were all systematically preserved. Proudhon's merit was to have revealed the inherent contradictions of economic science and to have shown the immorality of bourgeois morality and law; his weakness was to have accepted the categories and institutions of the capitalist economy and to have respected, in his programme of reforms and solutions, all the instruments of the bourgeois class and its political power: wages, credit, banks, exchange, price, value, profit, interest, taxes, competition, monopoly. After applying the dialectic of the negation in his analysis of the evolution of law and legal systems, he stopped half-way by not extending his critical method of the negation to the capitalist economy. Proudhon opened the way for such a criticism, but it was Marx who was to create this new method of criticism and to try to use it as a weapon in the struggle of labour against capital and the State.

Proudhon had made his critique of bourgeois economics and law in the name of bourgeois morality; Marx was to make his criticism in the name of proletarian ethics, whose standards of judgement were taken from quite a different vision of human society. To do this he only had to follow to its logical conclusion Proudhon's — or rather Hegel's — principle of negation: the Justice of which Proudhon dreamed could only be established by the negation of justice just as philosophy could only be put into practice by the negation of philosophy, i.e., by a social revolution which would at last allow humanity to become social and society to be become human. This would be the end of the pre-history of humanity and the beginning of individual life, the appearance of fully-developed Man, with all-round faculties, the coming of complete Man. Marx opposed the realist morality of Proudhon, which sought to save the "good side" of bourgeois insti-

tutions, with the ethic of a utopia whose demands would be measured by the possibilities offered by a science and technology sufficiently developed to provide for the needs of the race. Marx opposed an anarchism which respected the plurality of classes and social categories, which favoured the division of labour and which was hostile to the associationists proposed by the utopians, with an anarchism which rejected social classes and the division of labour, a communism which took over all in utopian socialism that could be achieved by a proletariat which was conscious of its emancipating role and which had become master of the forces of production. However, in spite of these divergent means — in particular, as we shall see, a different attitude towards political action — the two types of anarchism aimed at a common end which the *Communist Manifesto* defined in these terms:

> "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

III

Marx refused to invent recipes for the cooking pots of the future, but he did better — or worse — than this: he wanted to show that historical necessity — like some blind fate — was leading humanity to a situation of crisis where it would face a decisive dilemma: to be destroyed by its own technical inventions or to survive thanks to a leap in consciousness which would allow it to break with all the forms of alienation and servitude which had marked the stages of its history. Only this dilemma was fated, the actual choice would be left to the social class which had every reason to reject the existing order and to establish a fundamentally different mode of existence. The modern proletariat was potentially the material and moral force that was capable of taking up this universally significant task of salvation. However this potential force could not become real until the bourgeois period had been completed. For the bourgeoisie too had a historical role to play. If it had not always been conscious of this, then its apologists had had the task of reminding it of its civilising role. In creating the world in its image, the bourgeoisie of the industrially developed countries embourgeoisified and proletarianised the societies which progressively fell under its political and economic control. Seen from the viewpoint of proletarian interests, these instruments of conquest, capital and the State, were just means of servitude and suppression, but when the relations of capitalist production and therefore of capitalist States had been firmly established on a world scale, then the internal contradictions of the world market would reveal the limits of capital accumulation and provoke a state of permanent crisis which would endanger the foundations of the enslaved societies and threaten the very survival of the human race. The hour of the proletarian revolution would sound the world over.

By extrapolating reasonably we have been able to see the logical conclusions of the dialectical method employed by Marx in laying bare the economic law of movement of modern society. We could back up this view with textual references beginning with the remarks on methodology which can be gleaned from many of Marx's writings dating from different periods. It is no less true that the hypothesis which Marx most frequently offers us in his political works is that of the proletarian revolution in the countries which have known a long period of bourgeois civilization and capitalist economy; such a revolution would mark the beginning of a process of development which would gradually involve the rest of the world, historical progress being hastened through

the revolution being contagious. But whatever the hypothesis Marx had in mind, one thing is clear: his social theory had no place for a third revolutionary way where countries which lacked the historical experience of developed capitalism and bourgeois democracy would show the way to proletarian revolution to countries which had had a long capitalist and bourgeois past.

We recall with particular insistence these elementary truths of the conception of history called materialist because the Marxist mythology born with the 1917 Russian revolution has succeeded in imposing on the uniformed — and they were legion — another view of the process of this revolution: humanity divided into two economic and political systems, the capitalist world dominated by the industrially developed countries and the socialist world the model for which, the USSR, had reached the rank of second world power following a "proletarian" revolution. In fact, the industrialisation of Russia has been due to the creation and exploitation of an immense proletariat and not to its triumph and abolition. The fiction of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" forms part of the arsenal of ideas which the new masters have imposed in the interests of their own power: six decades of nationalist and military barbarism on a world scale explain the mental confusion of an intelligentsia which has been completely misled by the myth of "socialist October."[3]

Since we cannot deepen the discussion here we will restrict ourselves to expressing our point of view in the form of an alternative: either the materialist theory of social development has some scientific validity — Marx himself was naturally persuaded of this — and in this case the "socialist" world is a myth or the socialist world really exists and the materialist theory of social development is completely and totally invalidated. On the first hypothesis the myth of the socialist world is perfectly explained: it would be the fruit of a well-organised ideological campaign by the "first workers' State" aimed at disguising its real nature. On the second hypothesis the materialist *theory* of how the world would become socialist would certainly be disproved, but the ethical and utopian demands of Marx's teaching would have been achieved; in other words, refuted by history as a man of science, Marx would have triumphed as a revolutionary.

The myth of "really existing socialism" has been constructed in order to morally justify one of the most powerful forms of dominating and exploitative society that history had known. The problem of the nature of this society has completely confused those most informed about the theories, doctrines and ideas which together form the intellectual heritage of socialism, communism and anarchism. Of these three schools — or currents — of the movement of ideas which seeks a fundamental change in human society, anarchism has suffered the least from this perversion. Not having created a real theory of revolutionary practice, it has been able to preserve itself from the political and ideological corruption which has struck the two other schools of thought. Originating from dreams and longings for the past as well as from rejection and revolt, anarchism was formed as a radical criticism of the principle of authority in all its forms, and it is above all as such that it was incorporated into the materialist conception of history. This latter is essentially the view that the historical evolution of humanity passes by progressive stages from a permanent state of social antagonism to a mode of existence based on social harmony and individual development. The common aim of pre-Marxian radical and revolutionary doctrines became an integral part of Marx's anarchist communism just as the social criticism transmitted by the anarchist utopia had. With Marx, utopian anarchism was enriched by a new dimension, that of the dialectical understanding of the workers' movement as an ethical self-liberation embracing the

[3] See *Marx, Critique du Marxisme*, pp. 63–168, for a further development of the themes of the myth of "proletarian October" and of Russian society as a form of capitalism.

whole of humanity. The dialectical element in a theory claiming to be scientific, indeed naturalistic, caused an intellectual strain which was inevitably the source of the fundamental ambiguity with which Marx's teaching and activity is indelibly marked. Marx, who was a militant as well as a theorist, did not always seek to harmonise in his political activity the ends and means of anarchist communism. But the fact that he failed as a militant does not mean that he therefore ceased to be the theoretician of anarchism . It is thus right to apply to his own theory the ethical thesis which he formulated with regard to Feuerbach's materialism (1845):

> "The question whether human thinking can pretend to objective truth is not a theoretical but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the 'this-sideness' of his thinking in practice."[4]

IV

The negation of the State and capitalism by the most numerous and most poor class appears in Marx as an ethical imperative before he demonstrated dialectically that it was a historical necessity. In its first form, in Marx's critical assessment of the French Revolution, it represented a decisive choice to be made: the objective which according to Marx humanity should strive to achieve. This objective was precisely human emancipation by going beyond political emancipation. The freest political State — of which the Unites States of America provided the only example — made Man a slave because it intervened as mediator between Man and his freedom, just like the Christ in whom the religious person vests his own divinity. Man when politically emancipated still only had an imaginary sovereignty. As a sovereign being enjoying the Rights of Man he led a double existence: that of a citizen of the political community and that of an individual member of society; that of a heavenly and that of an earthly being. As a citizen he was free and sovereign in the skies of politics, that universal kingdom of equality. As an individual he was degraded in his real life, bourgeois life, and reduced to the level of a means for his neighbour; he was the plaything of alien forces, material and moral, such as the institutions of private property, culture, religion, etc. Bourgeois society separated from the political State was the realm of egoism, of the war of each against all, of the separation of man from man. Political democracy had not freed Man from religion by ensuring his religious liberty, any more than it freed him from property in guaranteeing him the right to property. Similarly when it granted everyone the freedom to choose his occupation political democracy maintained occupational slavery and egoism. Bourgeois society was the world of trafficking and profiting, the reign of money, the universal power which had subjected politics and hence the State.

Such, in summary, was Marx's initial thesis. It was a critique of the State and capital and it belonged to anarchist thought rather than to any socialism or communism. There was not yet anything scientific about it, but it implicitly appealed to and based itself on an ethical conception of the destiny of humanity in that it insisted on the need of doing something within the framework of historical time. This is why he did not just make a critique of political emancipation — that it reduced man to being an egoistic monad and an abstract citizen — but put forward both the end to be achieved and the means of achieving it:

[4] Second Thesis on Feuerbach, as translated in *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, edited T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, Pelican, 1963, p. 82.

> "Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a *species-being* in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his "own powers" as *social* powers, and, consequently, no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished."[5]

Marx developed his own theory by starting from the *Social Contract* of Rousseau, the theoretician of the abstract citizen and precursor of Hegel. Rejecting only partially the political alienation which these two thinkers proposed, he arrived at the vision of a human and social emancipation that would re-establish the individual as a complete being with fully developed faculties. This rejection was only partial because this state of political alienation, as a fact of history, could not be abolished by an act of will. Political emancipation was "a great progress," it was even the last form of human emancipation *within* the established order, and it is as such that it could serve as a means to overthrow this order and inaugurate the stage of real human emancipation. The means and the end were dialectical opposites but were reconciled ethically in the consciousness of the modern proletariat which thus became the bearer and historical subject of the revolution. The proletariat, as a class in which were concentrated all the evils and which embodied the well-known crimes of all society, possessed a universal character as a result of its universal poverty. It could not emancipate itself without emancipating all spheres of society, and it was by putting into practice the demands of this ethic of emancipation that it would abolish itself as a proletariat.

Where Marx speaks of philosophy as the "head" and intellectual arm of the human emancipation of which the proletariat would be the "heart," we prefer to speak of an ethic in order to show that it is not a question of metaphysical speculation but a problem of existence: people should not interpret a caricature of the world but should change it by giving it a human face. No speculative philosophy had any solution to offer Man for his problems of existence. This was why Marx, when he made the revolution a categorical imperative, reasoned from a normative ethic and not from a philosophy of history or a sociological theory. Because he could not and did not want to limit himself to a purely ethical demand for the regeneration of humanity and society Marx's interest was then aroused by one particular science: the science of the production of the means of existence according to the law of capital.

Marx thus undertook the study of political economy as a means of struggling for the cause to which from that time on he was to devote his whole declassé "bourgeois" existence. What till then had only been a visionary institution and an ethical choice was to become a theory of economic development and a study of what determined societies. But it was also to be active participation in the social movement whose task was to put into practice the ethical demands which derived from the conditions of existence of the modern proletariat. Both the vision of a society without State, without classes, without monetary exchange, without religious and intellectual fears and the analysis which revealed the process of evolution that would lead by successive steps to forms of anarchist and communist society implied a theoretical critique of the capitalist mode of production. Marx was to write later:

> "Even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement ... it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal en-

[5] "On the Jewish Question," *Deutsch-französische Jarbücher*, February 1844.

> actments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs." (Preface to *Capital*, Volume I)

In short, Marx set out to demonstrate scientifically what he was already persuaded of intuitively and what appeared to him to be ethically necessary. It was in his first attempt at a critique of political economy that he came to analyse capital from a sociological point of view as the power to command labour and its products, a power which the capitalist possessed not by virtue of his personal or human qualities but as the owner of property. The wages system was a form of slavery; any authoritarian raising of wages would only mean better rations for the slaves:

> "Even the equality of wages, which Proudhon demands, would merely transform the relation of the present-day worker to his work into the relation of all men to work. Society would then be conceived as an abstract capitalist."[6]

Economic slavery and political servitude went together. Political emancipation, i.e., the recognition of the Rights of Man by the modern State, had the same significance as the recognition of slavery by the State of antiquity (*The Holy Family*, 1845). The worker was a slave to his paid occupation and also to his own egoistic needs experienced as alien needs. People were just as much subject to political servitude in the democratic representative State as in a constitutional monarchy. "In the modern world, everybody is at the same time a slave and a member of the community," although the servitude of bourgeois society takes the form of the maximum of freedom (*ibid.*). Property, industry and religion, which are generally regarded as guarantees of individual liberty, were in fact institutions which sanctified this state of servitude. Robespierre, Saint-Just and their partisans failed because they did not distinguish antiquity based on real slavery from the modern representative State based on emancipated slavery, i.e., bourgeois society with its universal competition, its unbridled private interests and its alienated individualism. Napoleon, who understood perfectly the nature of the modern State and modern society, considered the State as an end in itself and bourgeois society as the instrument of his political ambitions. To satisfy the egoism of the French nation, he instituted permanent war in place of permanent revolution. His defeat confirmed the victory of the liberal bourgeoisie which in 1830 was finally able to make its dreams of 1789 become true: to make the constitutional representative State the social expression of its monopoly of power and sectional interests.

Marx, as a permanent observer of both the political evolution and economic development of French society, was constantly concerned with the problem of Bonapartism.[7] He considered that the French Revolution was the classic period of the political idea and that the Bonapartist tradition was a constant of the internal and external politics of France. He also outlined a theory of modern Caesarism which, even if it seemed to contradict in part the methodological principles of his theory of the State, did not modify his initial anarchist vision. For at the very time he was getting ready to set out the basic principles of his materialist conception of history he had formulated the following conception of the State which places him amongst the most radical anarchism:

> "The existence of the state is inseparable from the existence of slavery ... The more powerful a state and hence the *more political* a nation, the less inclined it is to explain

[6] *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, section on "Estranged Labour," 1844.

[7] See M. Rubel, *Karl Marx devant le bonapartisme*, Mouton & Co., Paris-The Hague, 1960.

> the *general* principle governing *social* ills and to seek out their causes by looking at the *principle of the state — i.e.*, at the *actual organization of society* of which the state is the active, self-conscious and official expression."[8]

The example of the French Revolution seemed to him at that time to be sufficiently convincing to make him put forward a view which only corresponded in part to the political sociology which he was soon to set out in the *German Ideology*, but which can be found much later in his reflections on the Second Empire and the 1871 Commune.

> "Far from identifying the principle of the state as the source of social ills, the heroes of the French Revolution held social ills to be the source of political problems. Thus Robespierre regarded great wealth and great poverty as an obstacle to *pure democracy*. He therefore wished to establish a universal system of *Spartan* frugality. The principle of politics is the *will*."[9]

When twenty-seven years later in connexion with the Paris Commune Marx was to return to the historical origins of the political absolutism which the Bonapartist State represented, he was to see in the centralisation carried out by the French Revolution the continuation of the traditions of the monarchy:

> "The centralized State machinery which, with its ubiquitous and complicated military, bureaucratic, clerical and judiciary organs, entoils (enmeshes) the living civil society like a boa constrictor, was first forged in the days of absolute monarchy as a weapon of nascent modern society in its struggle of emancipation from feudalism … The first French Revolution with its task to found national unity (to create a nation) … was, therefore, forced to develop, what absolute monarchy had commenced, the centralization and organization of State power, and to expand the circumference and the attributes of the State power, the number of its tools, its independence, and its supernaturalist sway of real society … Every minor solitary interest engendered by the relations of social groups was separated from society itself, fixed and made independent of it and opposed to it in the form of State interest, administered by State priests with exactly determined hierarchical functions."[10]

This passionate denunciation of the power of the State in some way sums up all the work of study and critical reflection which Marx carried out in this field: his confrontation with the moral and political philosophy of Hegel; the period during which he worked out the materialist conception of history; his fifteen years of political and professional journalism; and, not to be forgotten, his intense activity within the International Workingmen's Association. The Commune seems to have given Marx the opportunity to put the finishing touches to his thoughts on the problem for which he had reserved one of the six books of his *Economy* and to give a picture, if only in outline, of that free association of free men whose coming had been announced by the *Communist Manifesto*.

[8] "Critical Remarks on the Article: The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian," *Vorwärts*, 7 and 10 August 1844.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *The Civil War in France*, First Draft, section on 'The Character of the Commune', 1871.

> "This was, therefore, a revolution not against this or that, legitimate, constitutional, republican or imperialist form of State power. It was a revolution against the State itself, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life."[11]

V

Comparing how the serfs had been emancipated from the feudal regime with the emancipation of the modern working class, Marx noted that, unlike the proletarians, the serfs had to struggle to allow existing social conditions to develop freely and as a result could only arrive at "free labour." The proletarians, on the other hand, had, in order to affirm themselves as individuals, to abolish their own social condition; since this was the same as that of the whole of society, they had to abolish wage labour. And he added this sentence which from then on was to serve as the theme of both his literary work and his activity as a communist militant:

> "Thus they [the proletarians] find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the State. In order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State."[12]

This view, which was nearer to the anarchism of Bakunin than to that of Proudhon, was not uttered in the heat of the moment nor was it the rhetoric of a politician haranguing a workers' meeting. It was the logical conclusion, expressed as a revolutionary demand, of the whole development of a theory whose purpose was to demonstrate the "historical necessity" of the anarchist commune. In other words, in Marx's theory, the coming of "human society" was seen as the outcome of a long historical process. Eventually, a social class would arise which would comprise the immense majority of the population of industrial society and which as such would be capable of carrying out a creative revolutionary task. It was to show the logic of this development that Marx sought to establish a causal link between scientific progress — above all that of the natural sciences — and, on the one hand, political and legal institutions and, on the other, the behaviour of antagonistic social classes. Unlike Engels, Marx did not consider that the future revolutionary transformation would take place in the same way as past revolutions, like a cataclysm of Nature crushing men, things and consciousness. With the coming of the modern working class, the human race began the cycle of its real history; it entered on the way of reason and became capable of making its dreams come true and of giving itself a destiny in accordance with its creative faculties. The conquests of science and technology made such an outcome possible, but the proletariat had to intervene in order to prevent the bourgeoisie and capital from changing this evolution into a march into the abyss:

> "The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy."[13]

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *The German Ideology*, 1845, edited by C.J. Arthur, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1970, p. 85.

[13] Speech at anniversary of the People's Paper, 14 April 1856.

So the proletarian revolution would not be a political adventure; it would be a universal act, carried out consciously by the immense majority of the members of society after they had become conscious of the necessity and the possibility of the total regeneration of humanity. As history had become world history the threat of enslavement by capital and its market extended all over the Earth. As a consequence there had to arise a mass consciousness and will fully oriented towards a fundamental and complete change of human relationships and social institutions. So long as people's survival is threatened by the danger of a barbarism of planetary dimensions, the communist and anarchist dreams and utopias represent the intellectual source of rational projects and practical reforms which can give the human race the taste of a life according to the standards of a reason and an imagination both oriented towards renewing the destiny of humanity.

There is no leap from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom, as Engels thought, and there cannot be a direct transition from capitalism to anarchism. The economic and social barbarism brought about by the capitalist mode of production cannot be abolished by a political revolution prepared, organised and led by an elite of professional revolutionaries claiming to act and think in the name and for the benefit of the exploited and alienated majority. The proletariat, formed into a class and a party under the conditions of bourgeois democracy, liberates itself by struggling to conquer this democracy: it turns universal suffrage, which up till then had been "an instrument of deception," into a means of emancipation. A class which comprises the immense majority of modern society only takes alienating political action in order to triumph over politics and only conquers State power to use it against the formerly dominant minority. The conquest of political power is by nature a "bourgeois" act; it only becomes a proletarian action by the revolutionary aim which the authors of this overthrow give to it. This is the meaning of the historical period which Marx was not afraid to call the "dictatorship of the proletariat," precisely to differentiate it from a dictatorship exercised by an elite, dictatorship in the Jacobin and Blanquist sense of the term. Certainly, Marx, in claiming the merit of having discovered the secret of the historical development of modes of production and domination, could not have foreseen that his teaching would be usurped by professional revolutionaries and other politicians claiming the right to personify the dictatorship of the proletariat. In fact, he only envisaged this form of social transition for countries whose proletariat had been able to make use of the period of bourgeois democracy to create its own institutions and made itself the dominant class in society. Compared with the many centuries of violence and corruption that capitalism had needed to come to dominate the world, the length of the process of transition to anarchist society would be shorter and less violent to the extent that the concentration of political power would bring a mass proletariat face to face with a numerically weak bourgeoisie:

> "The transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labour, into capitalist private property is, naturally, a process, incomparably more protracted, violent, and difficult, than the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialized production, into socialized property. In the former case, we had the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; in the latter, we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people."[14]

[14] *Capital*, Vol. I, end of chapter XXXII.

Marx did not work out all the details of a theory of the transition; in fact noticeably different views can be found in the various theoretical and practical outlines which are scattered throughout his works. Nevertheless, throughout these differences, indeed contradictory statements, a basic principle remains intact and constant to the extent of allowing a coherent reconstruction of such a theory. It is perhaps on this point that the myth of the founding of "Marxism" by Marx and Engels is seen at its most harmful. While the former made the postulate of a proletarian self-activity the criterion of all genuine class action and all genuine conquest of political power, the latter ended up, particularly after the death of his friend, by separating the two elements in the creation of the workers' movement: the class action — the *Selbsttätigkeit* — of the proletariat on the one hand and the policy of the party on the other. Marx thought that communist and anarchist self-education was, more than any isolated political act, an integral part of the revolutionary activity of the workers: it was the workers' task to make themselves fit for the conquest and exercise of political power as a means of resisting attempts by the bourgeoisie to reconquer and recover its power. The proletariat had to temporarily and consciously form itself into a material force in order to defend its right and project to transform society by progressively establishing the Human Community. It was in struggling to affirm itself as a force of abolition and creation that the working class — which "of all the instruments of production is the most productive" — took up the dialectical project of creative negation; it took the risk of political alienation in order to make politics superfluous. Such a project had nothing in common with the destructive passion of a Bakunin or the anarchist apocalypse of a Coeurderoy. Revolutionary purism had no place in this political project whose aim was to make real the potential supremacy of the oppressed and exploited masses. Marx thought that the International Workingmen's Association, which combined the power of numbers with a revolutionary spirit conceived of in a quite different way from Proudhonian anarchism, could become such a fighting organisation. In joining the IWMA, Marx did not abandon the position he had taken against Proudhon in 1847, when he put forward an anti-political anarchism to be achieved by a political movement:

> "Does this mean that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination culminating in a new political power? No ... The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society. Meanwhile the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution. Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the *opposition* of classes should culminate in brutal *contradiction*, the shock of body against body, as its final denouement? Do not say that social movement excludes political movement. There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social. It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that *social evolutions* will cease to be *political revolutions*."[15]

Marx's point here is quite realistic and free from all idealism. This address to the future must be clearly understood to be the expression of a normative project committing the workers to behave as revolutionaries while struggling politically. "The working class is revolutionary or it

[15] *Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847, chapter II, part 5.

is nothing" (letter to J.B. Schweitzer, 1865). This is the language of a thinker whose rigorous dialectic, in contrast to a Proudhon or a Stirner, rejects impressing people by the systematic use of gratuitous paradox and verbal violence. And while everything is not and cannot be settled by this demonstration of means and ends, its merit is at least to urge the victims of alienated labour to understand and educate themselves through undertaking together a great work of collective creation. In this sense, Marx's appeal remains relevant, despite the triumph of Marxism and even because of it.

The limits of this essay do not allow us to go further in proving this. So we will limit ourselves to citing three texts which demolish in advance the legend — Bakuninist and Leninist — of a Marx "worshipper of the State" and "apostle of State communism" or of the dictatorship of the proletariat as the dictatorship of a party, indeed of a single man:

a. "Marginal Notes on Bakunin's book *State and Anarchy* (Geneva, 1873, in Russian)." Main themes: dictatorship of the proletariat and the maintenance of small peasant property; economic conditions and social revolution; disappearance of the State and the transformation of political functions into administrative functions of self-managed co-operative communes.

b. *Critique of the Programme of the German Workers Party (Gotha Programme*) (1875). Main themes: the two phases of communist society based on the co-operative mode of production; the bourgeoisie as a revolutionary class; the international action of the working class; criticism of the "iron law of wages"; revolutionary role of workers' productive co-operatives; primary education freed from the influence of religion and the State; revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat as a political transition to the transformation of State functions into social functions.

c. *The Peasant Commune and Revolutionary Perspectives in Russia* (Reply to Vera Zasulitch)(1881). Main themes: the rural commune as an element of regeneration of Russian society; ambivalence of the commune and influence of historical background; development of the commune and the crisis of capitalism; peasant emancipation and taxation; negative influences and risks of disappearance of the commune; the Russian commune, threatened by the State and capital, will only be saved by the Russian revolution.

These three documents to some extent make up the essence of the book which Marx considered writing on the State.

It can be seen from these remarks that Marx expressly presented his social theory as an attempt at an objective analysis of a historical movement and not as a moral or political code of revolutionary practice aimed at establishing an ideal society; as the laying bare of a process of development involving things and individuals and not as a collection of rules for use by parties and elites seeking power. This, however, is only the external and declared aspect of a theory which has two conceptual tracks, one rigorously determined, the other freely making its way towards the visionary aim of an anarchist society:

> "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past."[16]

[16] *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, 1851.

The past is an unchangeable necessity; and the observer, equipped with all the instruments of analysis, is in a position to explain the series of phenomena which have been perceived. But while it is a vain hope that all the dreams which humanity, through its prophets and visionaries, has entertained will come true, the future could at least bring an end to the institutions which have reduced people's lives to a permanent state of servitude in all social fields. This is, briefly, the link between theory and utopia in the teaching of Marx who expressly proclaimed himself an "anarchist" when he wrote:

> "All socialists see anarchy as the following program: Once the aim of the proletarian movement — i.e., abolition of classes — is attained, the power of the state, which serves to keep the great majority of producers in bondage to a very small exploiter minority, disappears, and the functions of government become simple administrative functions."[17]

Post Script[18]

The essay above does not take into account the ideas of Frederick Engels on the State and anarchism. Without entering into the details of his view, we can say that it does not completely coincide with that of Marx, although it too proposes the final disappearance of the State. The most important passages in this connection are to be found in *Anti-Dühring* (1877–8) which to some extent had Marx's imprimatur. Engels here sees the conquest of State power and the transformation of the means of production into State property as the self-abolition of the proletariat and the abolition of class antagonisms, indeed of "the suppression of the State as State." Further on he describes this "abolition" of the State as "a dying out" of the State: "Der Staat wird nicht 'abgeschafft', *er stirbt ab*." After Marx's death, drawing his inspiration from the notes left by his friend on Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*, Engels again dealt with the subject but in a wider socio-historical context. The highest form of the State, the democratic republic, is considered by Engels as the final phase of politics during which the decisive struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat will take place; the exploited class becomes ready for self-emancipation and forms itself into an independent party: "universal suffrage is the gauge of the maturity of the working class" — and that suffices to do away with capitalism and the State, and hence with class society. "Along with them [i.e., classes] the State will inevitably fall. The society ... will put the whole of the machinery of State where it will then belong: into the Museum of Antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe."[19] See also Engels's letters to Philip Van Patten of 18 April 1883 and to Edward Bernstein of 28 January 1884. In the latter Engels quotes some passages from the *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) and the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) to prove "that we proclaimed the end ["Aufhören"] of the State before there were really any anarchists." Engels undoubtedly exaggerated — a mention only of William Godwin would invalidate this view, without referring to the others who were won over to anarchism through reading *Political Justice* (1793).

[17] *Fictitious Splits in the International*, 1872.

[18] 1976, for this translation.

[19] *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, chapter IX.

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Marx, Theoretician of Anarchism
1973

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