

Notes On
Marx's
Conception of
Democracy

MARXISM AS A POLITICAL CONCEPT and an ideological current, often has antedated factual knowledge of Marx's doctrines. Thus at a time when one-third of the world is living under "Marxist" systems, there is still no complete, scholarly edition of Marx's works available. Some of the difficulties faced by Marx scholarship today center around the publication of documents in closed collections: the unpublished materials at Amsterdam and Moscow; the suspension of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) in Moscow in 1935.

Many "Marxist" concepts have been originated and propagated by others, in the absence of a Marx-dictum or in ignorance of his true position. Thus "dialectical materialism" was an invention of Plekhanov; the term "historical materialism" derives from Engels, and the entire concept is based on a few passages in the Introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy of 1859*.

Considering the contrast between the actual writings of Marx and their fate in succeeding decades, one can say that there exists today a myth of Marx and a mythology of "Marxism." This myth or mythology can be shaped to various purposes, although with the same effect: to exploit politically the paradoxical and sometimes sensational character of certain of Marx's ideas. As an illustration of this fact, let us quote two judgments on Marx's political teachings as expressed by two American scholars. The first: "The theory and practice of communism, and this is true not only in the Soviet Union, but in every country in which communists have come to power, cannot in essential respects be identified with some of the central doctrines, right, wrong, or confused, of Marxism."¹ The second: "Here . . . is a philosophy of liberation and freedom that in our day has given fruit in two of the most despotic and bureaucratic states history has seen."²

¹ Sidney HOOK: *Historical Determination and Political Fiat in Soviet Communism*, in "Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society," Philadelphia, 1955 (vol. 99, No. 1, p. 5).

² Adam B. ULAM: *The Unfinished Revolution*, New York, 1960, p. 3.

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES I shall try to comment on Marx's concept of democracy. My purpose is not so much to expound doctrinal interpretations as to arrive at certain conclusions based on an examination of the main documentary sources.

During the forty years of his career as a scientific and political writer, Karl Marx was not only an acute witness and interpreter of the world events of his time, he also fought, in this dual capacity, for radical changes in the social structure of continental Europe and of Great Britain. Each writing of Marx, whether it be scientific or political, shows him to be a passionate observer and a stern judge of deeds and men, pronouncing his verdicts in conformity with certain norms and values underlying the *Weltanschauung* he built up in the first five or six years of his intellectual formation,—first as a student of law and philosophy, then, after he had to give up his function as the editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, in the voluntary seclusion of Kreuznach where he devoted himself to historical and sociological studies; and finally during his exile in Paris and Brussels where he voraciously read political economy. It was in this period that Marx conceived of the method of inquiry in social history which he modestly called the "Leitfaden," the guiding thread for his subsequent scientific work, and which Engels was mistakenly led to call "historical materialism."

ONE CAN DISTINGUISH in the political career of Karl Marx two phases: first when he was a liberal and democratic writer, and second when he presents himself as a communist. It seems natural that the idea of democracy Marx held in the first period would be different from that which he had as a communist. In fact, most of the commentators even see an opposition between the two conceptions. A current opinion is that Marx in becoming a communist abandoned his philosophical and political ideas; in other words, that he left behind the idealism and the liberalism of the preceding period.³

Now, it is highly significant that Marx adopted communism before he became what he called a "materialist": he came to communism through the adoption of an ethics of democracy and he never denied the positive nature of his earlier conceptions, neither in theory nor in his political attitudes. If I wished to give my thesis a paradoxical form, I would say that Marx was a revolutionary communist only in theory, while he was a bourgeois democrat in practice. And I could add, to attenuate the irony of the paradox, that what may seem ambiguous or contradictory

³To quote one example, Auguste Cornu, in his biography of Marx and Engels dealing with their earlier political career, asserts that Marx remained "on the soil of bourgeois ideology" insofar as he accepted Hegel's model of "universal reason" realized in the state, a model which idealized the class character of the bourgeois state. In criticizing Hegel's philosophy of law, Marx, in Cornu's opinion, did not yet arrive at communism but at "a rather vague conception of democracy," which implied a justification of universal suffrage; in short, a political program which was not essentially different from that of bourgeois democracy. See A. CORNU: *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, I. Band (1818-1844), Berlin, 1954.

in Marx's thought and activity, is only, after all, the logical consequence of his dialectic method which, in his belief, disclosed to him the "historical necessities" within which he was constrained to act.

BEFORE ENTERING INTO MORE DETAILS on the philosophical and historical studies to which Marx devoted himself before he became a communist, and which have been neglected by almost all who have traced Marx's intellectual biography, we have to remember the following: Since 1927-1932, when the first three volumes of section I of the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) were published, containing sources unknown before, the understanding and the evaluation of the author of *Capital* have been considerably modified. An enormous number of commentary studies have been devoted, for example, to the philosophy of alienation as worked out in Marx's so-called *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. However, except for a few commentaries, there has not been a serious analysis of the important, though unfinished, work written by Marx in Kreuznach to prove the inconsistency of Hegel's philosophy of law and of the state. This writing reveals, as we will see soon, a concept of democracy — as opposed to Hegel's apology for monarchism — which goes much further than the usual notion held by the radicals in Germany when the Young Hegelians struggled to replace the Prussian absolutism by a constitutional monarchy. This was already visible in Marx's articles written for Ruge's *Anekdotia* and the *Rheinische Zeitung* against the Prussian censorship of the press and on the debates of the Prussian Landtag relating to liberty of the press and to certain local facts of social misery.

There is, so far as I know, no English translation of these, so that I cannot help offering you a brief illustration of Marx's style: (Marx views a Prussian ordinance which instructs writers to impose on themselves stern restrictions in commenting on facts and ideas):

Is it not the first duty of one who seeks the truth to pounce on it without looking left or right? . . . You admire the inspiring diversity, the inexhaustible richness of nature. You don't ask the rose to have the perfume of the violet, but you want the mind, the richness of all things to exist in only one way? I am humorous, but the law commands me to write gravely. I am bold but the law orders that my style be modest. Gray on gray, the only color of liberty which the law *authorizes* me to employ . . . the true control, inherent in the liberty of the press is criticism; it is the court which the liberty of the press provides for itself and by itself.⁴

When Marx wrote this he already had a serious philosophic culture, classical and modern. This can be seen, among other testimonies, from the notebooks he used to fill regularly with excerpts from and sometimes with comments on the authors he read.⁵

WE ARE CONCERNED HERE PARTICULARLY with one of Marx's notebooks belonging to the time when he was student in Berlin, in 1841-42. It

⁴ *Bemerkungen über die neueste preussische Zensurinstruktion*, in "Anekdotia", February, 1843. MEGA, I/1, p. 153.

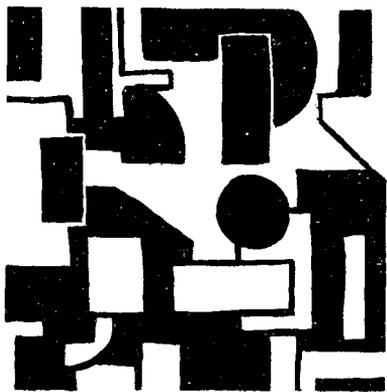
⁵ The original, until now unpublished notebooks of Marx are in the possession of the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. See my articles published in the *Intern. Rev. for Soc. Hist.* in 1957 and 1960.

contains about one hundred and sixty excerpts from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* dealing with such themes as miracles, faith and philosophy, reason and theology, the liberty of teaching, the Republic of the Hebrews, the Foundations of the Republic, the authority of the apostles, prophecy and prophets, the divine law, etc. The copy book does not contain a single personal note, comment or criticism, yet on the cover we can read (in German): "Spinoza: Political and Theological Treatise, by Karl Heinrich Marx, Berlin, 1841."

What does it mean? Simply that Marx appropriated what seemed to him necessary for his own Weltanschauung. In doing this he obviously asserted his conviction, that human truth is the work of mankind rather more than of the individual; he held this conviction from Goethe, whom he admired and who avowed himself a disciple of Spinoza.⁶

Marx found in Spinoza, and thus in himself, the main arguments which stimulated him to start in Germany the fight for liberty and democracy. Spinoza's concepts of the republic of democracy and of human liberty are the component parts of a rational ethics which conceives of men and human happiness in the realm of nature and society, while it yields to the individual the chances of freedom by consciousness, knowledge and love. It is with Spinoza and not with Hegel that Marx learned to conciliate necessity and liberty, so that in undertaking the demolition of Hegel's mystifying and moralizing anti-democratic metaphysics of the state, he was well prepared to accomplish this act of mental recovery. One would not go wrong in asserting that Marx's criticism of Hegel is no more than a poetical and satirical transposition of Spinoza's detached pleadings for the best form of government, namely democracy.

We will deal later with the reasons which impelled Marx to expand and to amplify Spinoza's concept of democracy (a concept which discards the social implications of the accomplishment of human liberty), or to speak more precisely, led him to integrate the Spinozan concept of democracy with his own concept of communism. We have to know, first of all, something of Marx's concept of democracy as exposed in his *pre-communist* period, and we turn of course to the main source, namely to the unfinished and posthumous manuscript on Hegel's philosophy of the state.



⁶ Besides the *Tractatus*, Marx copied himself or had copied, in two copy books, about sixty excerpts from Spinoza's Correspondence.

Marx's early and unconditional rejection of Hegel's political philosophy makes all the more dramatic the subsequent return to Hegel. Marx himself, when he begins to work on *Capital*, will euphemistically — if not ironically — call this return a “flirting” with Hegelian dialectics. One can say that, spellbound by Hegel during his university years, as he confessed, Marx never succeeded in escaping completely from Hegel's philosophy of history. But at the same time we must recognize that the revolutionary inspiration is fundamental in Marx's socialist ethics, — and that the incompatibility of the Hegelian element with the ethical in Marx's teachings, constitutes premises in their essential ambiguity. This ambiguity appears as the result of the misunderstandings which are usually designated as “Marxism.”

In Spinoza's views on democracy, Marx found what he could find neither in Hegel's political philosophy nor in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract*, namely: the chance offered to the individual to reconcile social existence and natural life. Spinoza put it clearly in his *Tractatus*: Democracy is a society which wields all its power as a whole and which, therefore, is “of all forms of government the most natural, and the most consonant with individual liberty.” And Spinoza adds: “In it no one transfers his natural right so absolutely that he has no further voice in affairs; he only hands it over to the majority of a society, whereof he is a unit. Thus all men remain, as they were in the state of nature, equals.”

NOW I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE some literary proof of my argument dealing with the Spinozan influence on Marx's early political thought. We will undoubtedly recognize at the same time a certain echo of Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel.

Democracy is the solved enigma of all constitutions. There, the constitution is constantly brought back to its actual contents, to real man, to the real people, and laid down as its own work, and this not only in itself, according to its essence, but according to its existence, and according to reality. The constitution appears to be what it is, a free production of man.⁷

Continuing his criticism, Marx argues that while Hegel's state is a hypostasis and the starting point from which man derives, democracy starts from man and makes the state an object, an instrument of man. And as a variant of Feuerbach's criticism of religion, Marx gives the following description of political constitutions:

Just as religion does not create man, but man who creates religion, it is not the constitution which creates the people, but the people who create the constitution. Democracy is, in certain sense, to other political forms what Christianity is to all the other religions. Christianity is the religion *par excellence*, the essence of religion, man defined in the system of a particular religion. In the same way, democracy is the essence of all political constitutions, man socialized as a particular political constitution. Democracy is, as it were, the Old Testament of all other political forms. Man does not exist for the law, the law exists for man; it is a human existence, while in the other forms man is a legal existence. This is the basic uniqueness of democracy.⁸

It is obvious from these quotations, that the connotations inferred by Marx from the concept of democracy are in fact self-created ingredients

⁷ *Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts*. Posthumous work, written in 1843. MEGA I/I, p. 434.
⁸ *Op. cit.*

which burst the conceptional framework supporting the ordinary definition of democracy. So far, Marx gives no empirical evidence to prove why extending the content of the concept of democracy is valid. But when he found this empirical evidence he associated his concept of democracy with another concept, which he derived from democracy, namely *communism*.



Marx acquired this empirical evidence during his scholarly retreat at Kreuznach, having been forced to abandon the editorship of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. During this retreat, Marx studied intensively the revolutionary history of France, England and America. There is no doubt that these studies led him to the conviction that the normal and even inevitable outcome of democracy is communism.

FOR THE SAKE OF MY ARGUMENT, I shall confine myself to a single source of Marx's notes in one of his copybooks dating from his Kreuznach period (1843). My choice is all the more plausible as it concerns a document on the United States, which has been unjustly forgotten. This document is the record of a Scotsman's visit to the United States, whose conclusions are, in a sense, more radical than those of Alexis de Tocqueville. The Scottish visitor, Thomas Hamilton, published his book in 1833, two years before *Democracy in America* appeared, under the title *Men and Manners in America*. (He was known as the author of a valuable novel, *Cyril Thornton*, published in 1827.) He visited the United States in 1830-31 and his book on America had three editions. Marx read it in a German translation published in 1834 and he selected and noted from it about fifty passages. These excerpts deal with the main American problems as seen by Thomas Hamilton: federalism and universal suffrage; legal and real position of the citizens; the conflict of interests between the North and the South; the constitutions of the different New England states, etc.

But what interested Marx particularly is the way Thomas Hamilton — whose ideas are a curious mixture of liberal generosity and aristocratic taste — understands, or, more exactly, resents, the social tendencies in the functioning of American democracy. Hamilton's description of the Republican and Federalist parties, of the "silent revolution" which started with Jefferson's accession to power, and the rise of the "numbers," in opposition to men of property and intelligence, testifies to a remarkable "historical instinct." Marx could not remain indifferent to certain striking facts as reported by the Scottish traveler. In Thomas Hamilton he found what Tocqueville failed to notice: the revolutionary implications of American democracy. Tocqueville was convinced that America was "the image of democracy itself," namely "an almost complete equality of conditions."

In spite of his fear that democracy may lead to the tyranny of the majority, Tocqueville was essentially optimistic about the social and

economic prospects of democratic regimes. On the other hand, Thomas Hamilton's insight upon certain economic features of American society allowed him to recognize a tendency which in Marx's opinion, could become a decisive factor in America's future, namely: the class struggle.

Here are some passages noted by Marx in the German translation and which are quoted from the original edition. Thomas Hamilton had conversations with "enlightened Americans" on the social prospects of the American Constitution and he gained the conviction that there was no will to "counterpoise . . . the rashness of democracy by the caution and wisdom of an aristocracy of intelligence and wisdom." Then he gives the following illustration of what he calls the "progress and tendency of opinion among the people of New York":

In that city a separation is rapidly taking place between the different orders of society. The operative class have already formed themselves into a society under the name of "THE WORKERS," in direct opposition to those who, favored by nature or fortune, enjoy the luxuries of life without the necessities of manual labor. These people make no secret of their demands, which to do them justice, are few and emphatic. . . . Their first postulate is "EQUAL AND UNIVERSAL EDUCATION." It is false, they say, to maintain that there is at present no privileged order, no practical aristocracy, in a country where distinctions of education are permitted. That portion of the population whom the necessity of manual labor in fact excluded from all the valuable offices of the State. There does exist then—they argue—an aristocracy of the most odious kind—an aristocracy of knowledge, education, and refinement, which is inconsistent with the true democratic principle of absolute equality. They pledge themselves, therefore, to exert every effort, mental and physical, for the abolition of this flagrant injustice. They proclaim it to the world as a nuisance which must be abated, before the freedom of an American can be something more than a mere empty boast. They solemnly declare that they will not rest satisfied, till every citizen in the United States shall receive the same degree of education, and start, in fair competition for the honors and the offices of the state. As it is of course impossible—and these men know it to be so—to educate the laboring classes to the standard of the richer, it is their professed object to reduce the latter to the same mental condition with the former . . .

But those who limit their views to the mental degradation of their country, are in fact the MODERATES of the party. There are others who go still farther, and boldly advocate the introduction of an AGRARIAN LAW, and a periodical division of property. These unquestionably constitute the EXTREME GAUCHE of the WORKY parliament, but still they only follow out the principles of their less violent neighbors, and eloquently dilate on the justice and propriety of every individual being equally supplied with food and clothing; on the monstrous iniquity of one man riding in his carriage while another walks on foot, and, after his drive, discussing a bottle of champagne while many of his neighbors are shamefully compelled to be content with the pure element. Only equalize property, they say, and neither would drink champagne or water, but both would have brandy, a consummation worthy of centuries of struggle to attain. (pp. 160-61)

Dealing with the labor policy of the American government and the vast internal resources of the United States, Thomas Hamilton has no doubt "that the Americans are destined to become a great manufacturing nation." And then he makes the following prognostication:

Huge manufacturing cities will spring up in various quarters of the Union, the population will congregate in masses, and all the vices incident to such a condition of society will attain speedy maturity. Millions of men will depend for subsistence on the demand for a particular manufacture, and yet this demand will of necessity be

liable to perpetual fluctuation. When the pendulum vibrates in one direction, there will be an influx of wealth and prosperity; when it vibrates in the other, misery, discontent and turbulence will spread through the land. A change of fashion, a war, the glut of a foreign market, a thousand unforeseen and inevitable accidents are liable to produce this, and deprive multitudes of bread, who but a month before were enjoying all the comforts of life.

And now Thomas Hamilton enunciates a prophecy in the purest "Marxian" style:

Let it be remembered that in the suffering class will be practically deposited the whole political power of the state; that there can be no military force to maintain civil order, and protect property; and to what quarter, I should be glad to know, is the rich man to look for security, either of person or fortune?

Not one of the "eminent" Americans with whom Thomas Hamilton conversed on the future prospects of his country denied that a period of trial such as he had ventured to describe, was inevitable. But the general answer was that this period was very distant and that people feel very little concern about evils which may afflict their posterity. At this, the Scottish visitor notes:

I cannot help believing, however, that the period of trial is somewhat less distant than such reasoners comfort themselves by imagining; but if the question be conceded that democracy necessarily leads to anarchy and spoliation, it does not seem that the mere length of road to be travelled is a point of much importance. This, of course, would vary according to the peculiar circumstances of every country in which the experiment might be tried. In England, the journey would be performed with railway velocity. In the United States, with the great advantages they possess, it may continue a generation or two longer, but the termination is the same. The doubt regards time, not destination. (p. 166)

In becoming a communist, Marx had only to substitute the word "communism" for Hamilton's words "anarchy and spoliation." And in becoming an economist, Marx will give to Thomas Hamilton's premonitory warnings the theoretical coating in the famous chapter of *Capital* entitled "Historical tendency of capitalist accumulation."

Tocqueville expressed in a general and somehow Hegelian formula the guesses about times to come which Thomas Hamilton expressed in the various passages scattered through his record. For Tocqueville, gradual development of the equality of social conditions was a divine, a providential fact. "Is it credible," he asked, "that the democracy which has annihilated the feudal system and vanquished kings will respect the citizen and the capitalist?" He spoke of an "irresistible revolution," and believed that any attempt to check democracy would be a violation of a "divine decree;" he addressed the Christian nations and rulers to remind them of their first duty, namely education of democracy, and he called for a "new science of politics . . . which is indispensable to the new world."

ONE MAY BE TEMPTED TO SAY that Karl Marx was the spiritual executor of the legacy of Tocqueville in carrying out his demand for a "new social science," in which the dialectics of "historical necessity" takes the place of the belief in a divine providence. But it is not our task to deal here with the problem which occupies the central place in the academic

debate on Marx's so-called historicism. What I have tried to demonstrate so far is the existence, in Marx's political formation and development, of an intimate link between his pre-communist convictions and his adherence to communism, between Marx the democrat and Marx the communist, between his early, non-economic writings in which his communism takes the form of a vehement indictment against the modern cult of money (as in the *Jewish Question*) and *Capital* in which the same indictment is inherent in the scientific pattern of the capitalist system of production.

To give my argument a final piece of evidence, I will recall that in 1850, seven years after he became a communist and while he was a militant leader of the Communist League, Marx authorized Hermann Becker, one of his friends in Germany and a member of the same League, to publish a selection of his writings in separate volumes. In April, 1851, the first volume appeared in Cologne. It contained exclusively Marx's liberal and democratic articles from the *Anekdotia* and the *Rheinische Zeitung*. It is clear from this that Marx did not consider his first political writings and his fight for democratic liberties as superseded. On the contrary, he was convinced that his early concept of democracy contained virtually all the elements of his subsequent humanism of which communism was only a specific aspect, as Marx states in his *Manuscripts of 1844* — the first variants of *Capital*.



IN MARX'S INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL development, the separation of the two concepts, democracy and communism, corresponds to the distinction inherent in his pre-communist writings and explicitly formulated after his conversion to communism, between a *political* revolution and a *social* revolution; in other words; between two stages of the proletarian revolution: the first stage is described as the "conquest of democracy" (*Communist Manifesto*) by the working class, leading to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (a concept forged by Marx after the failure of the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions of 1848-1849); the second stage is described as the abolition of social classes and political power, as the genesis of human society.

The distinction made by Marx between a political and a social revolution is fundamental for the understanding of his attitudes as a Party man. We cannot deal here with the various aspects of Marx's political sociology, but one thing has to be emphasized: in Marx's views, the social

development was subjected to the historical laws of motion and consequently social revolutions are subjected to certain conditions, materials and moral, which are involved in the process of social evolution. This process is characterized by the growth of "productive forces" in their dual manifestation as technical progress on the one hand and as the maturing of human consciousness on the other hand. There are undoubtedly certain epistemological ambiguities in Marx's thesis of the determination of social consciousness by social existence. However, what we have to point out is the ethical character of Marx's thesis — or postulate — of proletarian consciousness.

Marx's dualistic conception of the revolution has its parallel in the dualistic aspect of his political thought and activity. It would be easy to show by means of concrete examples the exoteric and the esoteric aspects of Marx's political fighting during his whole career as a Party man. Let us choose two or three examples among many others: In 1847, Marx agreed to be elected vice-president of the "Association Democratique" in Brussels and at the same time he became a member of the Communist League. In January, 1848, he wrote the *Communist Manifesto* and in the same month he gave a public speech in favor of free trade, which was published by the Democratic Association. In that year, the year of the Revolution, he founded and edited in Cologne the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* with the subtitle "Organ of Democracy." In 1847, Marx wrote: "The domination of the bourgeoisie hands to the proletariat not only entirely new weapons for the battle *against* the bourgeoisie, but also a completely different position as an officially recognized party." Eighteen years later, when fighting against the spirit of Lassalle in the German workers movement, Marx and Engels made a public statement in which they reaffirmed their position of 1847 and denounced the delusions of Lassalle's followers who worked for an alliance of the proletariat with the Royal Prussian Government against the liberal bourgeoisie. It contains the following sentence: "We still subscribe today to every word of our statement made at this time."⁹

DEALING WITH MARX'S CONCEPT of democracy, in a general way, we may recall the main episodes in Marx's political career, which make him appear as in indefatigable and convinced fighter for democratic liberties:

- in the early fifties, Marx's connection with the Chartist movement;
- during the whole reign of Napoleon III, Marx combated Bonapartism in hundreds of writings (most of them published in the *New York Daily Tribune* and not yet re-printed completely;¹⁰
- the same can be said of his struggle against *tsarism* and of *Prussianism* as an instrument of *tsarism*;
- during the Civil War of the United States, Marx was a fierce partisan of the North, taking a position in favor of the system of free labor against the slavery. In 1861, Marx wrote that "the true people of England, of France, of Germany, of Europe consider the cause of the Uni-

⁹ Marx-Engels: *Selected Correspondence*. Moscow, (s.d.) p. 201.

¹⁰ See my *Marx devant le Bonapartisme*, Paris, 1960.

ted States as their own cause, as the cause of liberty, and that despite all paid sophistry, they consider the soil of the U. S. as the free soil of the landless millions of Europe, as their land of promise, now to be defended sword in hand, from the sordid grasp of the slaveholder."¹¹ In 1865, he drew up in the name of the General Council of the First International, an address to Abraham Lincoln, where we read:

. . . From the commencement of the titanic American strife, the working men of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class. When an oligarchy of 300,000 slave-holders dared to inscribe, for the first time in the annals of the world, "slavery" on the banner of armed revolt; when on the very spots where hardly a century ago the idea of one *great democratic republic* had first sprung up, whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued, and the first impulse given to the European revolution of the eighteenth century . . . then the working classes of Europe understood . . . that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic . . . The workmen of Europe feel sure that as the American War of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle classes, so the American anti-slavery war will do for the working classes. They consider it an earnest of the epoch to come, that it fell to the lot of Abraham Lincoln, the single-minded son of the working class, to lead his country through the matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of a social world.¹²

In 1871, Marx magnified the Commune of Paris as "the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society, and therefore the truly national government," but also as "the working man's government," as "the bold champion of the emancipation of labor," as the antithesis of bonapartism and imperialism, as the "self-government of the producers;" it was essentially a working class government, chosen by universal suffrage, responsible and revocable at short terms; it was "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor."¹³

To cite a last episode, let us recall that in 1872, Marx had Bakunin excluded from the International because he was convinced that the anarchist would use the International as a screen for his own conspiratorial undertakings, which he meant to direct as an absolute master. He wrote Bakunin's society was "the reconstitution of all the elements of the authoritarian state under the name of *Revolutionary 'Commune'* . . . The executive body . . . is a revolutionary staff office, numerically few . . . The unity of thought and action mean nothing other than orthodox and blind obedience. *Perinde ac cadaver*. We are 'en pleine Compagnie de Jesus' . . ." ¹⁴

LET US NOW SUMMARIZE the conclusions of the foregoing pages. We disclaim any pretension of being exhaustive.

1. Marx's concept of democracy can be understood only in relation to his general conception of human history and social development,

¹¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, November 7, 1861. See Marx-Engels: *The Civil War in the United States*, New York, 1937, pp. 22-23.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 279-281.

¹³ *Address on the Civil War in France*.

¹⁴ See *L'Alliance de la Democratie socialiste et L'Association Internationale des Travailleurs*, 1873. The conclusion of this pamphlet from which we have quoted is by Marx.

and in relation to the general conditions of his time. As a theorist and a party man he participated in the struggles of the workers and the middle class for democratic rights, and in the struggle for national emancipation from the yoke of absolute or reactionary regimes. Democracy and national liberation thus become the immediate aims which he deemed necessary to be attained, as historical prerequisites of a classless society. The first goal — democracy — was the starting point from which the workers' movement should conduct its own struggle, using the general suffrage as a means to conquer political power, as a necessary stage on the way to social emancipation.

2. Marx's concept of socialism and communism is derived from the concept of democracy he held before his conversion to communism. He forged his concept of democracy through a criticism of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, rejecting Hegel's doctrine of bureaucracy, of princely power and constitutional monarchy. Thus Marx's conversion to communism was not a break with his earlier conception of democracy, but a stimulation: in communism, as understood by Marx, democracy is maintained and raised to higher significance.

3. The first positive result of Marx's study of classical and modern philosophy and history was a humanist ethics which he later tried to base on scientific premises. The adoption of this humanism caused Marx to abandon philosophical speculation in favor of social theory and political action. Marx's conversion to communism took place *before* he began to study political economy and before he had any idea of the bourgeois mode of production and of capitalism! It was only after he published his communist confession that he gave himself up completely to the study of the great economists. His critical and passionate commentaries prove that he already possessed the criteria and values which, in his belief, authorized him to speak of the "infamy" of political economy. In short: Marx became a socialist before he arrived at "scientific socialism."

4. Democracy signifies for Marx, as for the radicals of his generation, self-government of the people. But democracy is not an aim in itself; it is only a means. As an aim, democracy should be realized jointly by the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in their common struggle against the feudal and absolutist past. This aim attained, the proletariat is bound to win its emancipation by its own means, an emancipation which is identical to the emancipation of mankind. The concept of democracy implies political struggle for a higher stage of society, democracy being the legal basis for political self-education, for the *Stäteigkeit*, the autonomy of the proletariat. The main vehicle of this struggle is the proletariat, which is defined by the inhuman conditions (the alienation) of its existence as well as by its historical mission. Class struggle changes from a historical fact into an ethical postulate. The modern proletariat has to organize itself into a class; it must change from a class in itself to a class for itself. This becomes possible only when democracy has become a permanent element in social life. Engels put this clearly when he wrote: "For the ultimate triumph of the ideas set

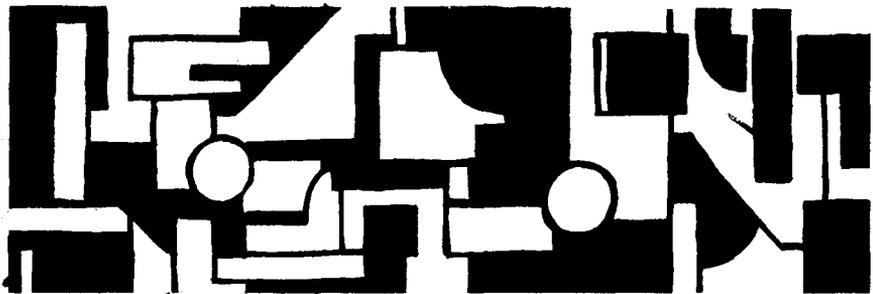
forth in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx relied solely upon the intellectual development of the working class, as it necessarily had to ensue from united action and discussion.”

5. What Marx calls the “conquest of democracy,” namely the achievement of political power by the proletariat, is theoretically guaranteed to the workers through the normal functioning of democracy, excluding violence in the fight for social equality. Violence is not a *natural law* in human history but only a natural *result* of class conflicts which characterize societies in which the forces of production also become forces of social alienation. Formal democracy, then, hides a *real* dictatorship relationship between exploiting and exploited classes, a real divorce between fundamental rights and material oppression, the exploitation of the majority by the ruling minority. The historical and moral antithesis of this permanent phenomenon of past and present social history is the rule of the majority, which is the normal result of social conflicts, when universal suffrage is changed, as Marx wrote “from an instrument of dupery into a means of emancipation.”¹⁵ Democracy offers to the producers, organized in trade unions and in parties, the legal means to conquer power and consequently to work progressively for the transformation of the whole society, to build, as Marx called it, “an association in which the free development of each [individual] is the condition for the free development of all.”¹⁶

¹⁵ See *Considerants du programme electoral des travailleurs socialistes*, published in “L’Egalité,” Paris, 1880.

¹⁶ *The Communist Manifesto*.

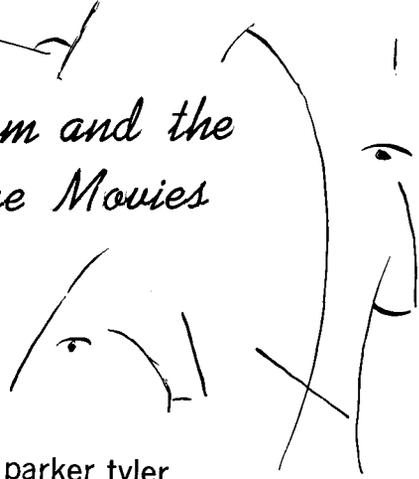
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Mass Film Criticism and the Modernization of the Movies

ONE OF THE MOST TANGIBLE, if dubious, myths of the century is that the movies are a mass art—i.e., as both art and commodity, “the movies belong to everybody.” This presumed axiom is not at all limited to the ad-writers, the newspaper critics and the makers themselves (who at least *want* them to belong to everybody) but compasses the sociologists, the psychiatrists and—grace permitting!—the aesthetic and technical academicians. Epidemically oppressive, this idea is mainly responsible for the severe lag of film criticism as a respectable and effective entity. For serious critics, the movies function on the one hand as a set of symbolic texts for socio-psychological-mythical interpretation, with aesthetic overtones, and on the other as a supposed laboratory where it is possible to show the Film has inexhaustible ways to produce what theoretically has every right to be termed “art,” but which is art only because it *must be* in order to save “everybody’s” face.

The movies’ commercialization is responsible, of course, for the hypersensitive professionalism that imbues all occupations connected with them, including supposedly disinterested “criticism.” If the very term “disinterested” comes into question, it is because film critics are distinguishable from, say, literary or art critics only by the fact that Shakespeare, for instance, does not need the praise or blame of literary critics to stand or fall: his plays perennially endure in



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theatre and library. Yet a filmic *Hamlet* by Laurence Olivier must be shifted critically to a fresh dimension to decide if “the Bard”—as I think Broadway reviewers still refer to him in 1961—has been proved screenworthy. The legitimate theatre also is a thing so much belonging to “everybody”—to everybody, at least, in New York’s five boroughs and environs—that mass-minded newspaper critics never fail to get in a dig at the supposed fact that Shakespeare’s dramaturgy, especially in his comedies, distinctly “dates.” It is easy to see why the impression should gain head that “the Bard,” some of his comedies having been successfully rewritten as musicals in our time, needs refurbishing for the modern stage. Indeed, Shakespeare, in his relation to both the stage and the movies, provides an excellent case for deciding to what extent the process of modernization has blanket application, these days, to the arts.

If we glance at the ever-indicative realm of high fashion, we are struck by the presence there of the widest eclecticism. In recent decades, designers have pilfered the centuries, period by period, for ideas on decors and women’s clothes. Shakespeare, also