3

Reversing the hierarchical structure of capital would be difficult.

Europe and its focus on Great Britain. The political context is that of
industrial capitalism. The place in Wesseling and economically and
politically. The place is that of the pre-1870
primarily a theory of commodity society and
the surplus value. It is indeed, therefore, the self-consciousness of the
capitalist society. Volume I of Marx's Capital was both the peak of classical political

Ordering change

Goethe, Faust II

Who daily conquers them anew?
The only means his freedom and his life
This is the final wisdom, ever true:

Das ist der Weisheit letzter Schluss:

Teodor Shanin

Late Marx: Gods and Emperors
the dialectical negation of Political Economy, a self-consciousness of capitalism turning at its highest level of accomplishment into criticism of its very root, its unmasking, and thereby its subversion and transformation.

To date and place Capital is also to open up a major set of questions concerning the development of Marx's thought in the period which followed. Central to it is the 1872-82 decade of Marx's life in which there was growing interdependence between Marx's analysis, the realities of Russia, and the Russian revolutionary movement – an uncanny forerunner of what was to come in 1917. The questions concern Marx's theory of social transformation – of ordering change not only within capitalism. To understand this one may well begin with Capital but cannot stop at that.

The strength of Capital lay in its systematic, comprehensive, critical, historically sophisticated and empirically substantiated presentation of the way a newly created type of economy – the contemporary capitalist economy of Great Britain – had worked on a societal level. Of paramount significance has been the more general use this model offered for other societies in which capitalism has been in manifest and rapid ascent ever since. Its limitations as well as its points of strength are 'children of their time' – the times of the breakthrough and rush forward of the 'Industrial Revolution', the rise and increasing application of science and the spread of the French Revolution's political philosophies of evolution and progress. Central to it was evolutionism – the intellectual arch-model of those times, as prominent in the works of Darwin as in the philosophy of Spencer, in Comte's positivism and in the socialism of Fourier and Saint Simon. Evolutionism is, essentially, a combined solution to the problems of heterogeneity and change. The diversity of forms, physical, biological and social, is ordered and explained by the assumption of a structurally necessary development through stages which the scientific method is to uncover. Diversity of stages explains the essential diversity of forms. The strength of that explanation lay in the acceptance of change as a necessary part of reality. Its main weakness was the optimistic and unilinear determinism usually built into it: the progress through stages meant also the universal and necessary ascent to a world more agreeable to the human or even to the 'absolute spirit' or God himself. The materialist epistemology of Capital, the dialectical acceptance of structural contradictions and of possible temporary retrogressions within capitalism, the objection to teleology, did not jettison the kernel of evolutionism. 'The country that is more developed industrially' was still destined 'only [to] show, to the less developed, the image of its own future'. Indeed it was a matter of 'natural laws working themselves out with iron necessity'.

Yet Marx's mind was evidently far from happy with the unilinear simplicities of the evolutionist scheme. The richness of the evidence he studied militated against it and so did his own dialectical training and preferred epistemology. Also, the reason why it was the north-west corner of Europe that bred the first edition of the capitalist mode of production was still to be discovered. An admission of simple accident would be far from Marx's requirement for a science of society. In consequence and already by 1853 Marx had worked out and put to use the concepts of Oriental Despotism and of the Asiatic Mode of Production, its close synonym, as a major theoretical supplement and alternative to unilinear explanations.

Marx's new societal map has assumed the global co-existence of potentially progressive social formations and of essentially static 'a-historical' ones. The nature of such static societies, of Oriental Despotism, was defined by a combination of environmental and social characteristics: extensive arid lands and hydraulic agriculture necessitating major irrigation schemes, a powerful state, and state monopoly over land and labour, multitudes of self-contained rural communities tributary to the state. Following Hegel's turn of phrase, Marx saw such societies as 'perpetuating natural vegetative existence', i.e. showing cyclical and quantitative changes while lacking an inbuilt mechanism of necessary social transformation. Marx's case-list included China, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Turkey, Persia, India, Java, parts of Central Asia and pre-Columbian America, Moorish Spain etc., and also, less definitely, Russia, defined as semi-Asiatic. The heterogeneity of global society, the differential histories of its parts, could be easier placed and explained by a heuristically richer scheme – a combination of evolutionary stages of the progressing societies and of the a-historical Oriental Despotisms, with space left between for further categories such as 'semi-Asiatic'. Capitalism comes as a global unifier which drags the a-historical societies of Oriental
Lace Marx: God and Classmen...
1877, Marx rebuked in a letter the 'supra-historical theorising', i.e. an evolutionist interpretation of his own writings as related to Russia, and rejected it again, much more specifically, in 1881 in relation to the Russian peasant commune. Marx's quip of those very times about himself 'not being a marxist' was coming true with particular vengeance in so far as Russia was concerned.

The Russian connection

An aside concerning Russian revolutionary populism is necessary to place Marx's new interests, insights and friends for Western audiences. The label 'populist', like that of 'marxist', is badly lacking in precision; the heterogeneity of both camps was considerable. In Russian speech a populist (narodnik) could have meant anything from a revolutionary terrorist to a philanthropic squire. What makes it worse is the fact that there are today no political heirs to claim and defend the heritage of Russian populism - political losers have few loyal kinsmen, while the victors monopolise press, cash and imagination. Lenin's major work, from which generations of socialists learned their Russian terminology, used 'populism' as a label for a couple of writers who stood at that time on the extreme right wing of the populists, an equivalent of using the term marxism for the so-called 'legal marxists' of Russia. This made Lenin's anti-populist argument of 1898 easier, while increasing the obscurity of the populist creed to his readers of today.

Populism was Russia's main indigenous revolutionary tradition. Its particular mixture of political activism and social analysis commenced with A. Herzen and produced a long line of names well known and respected in the European socialist circles, e.g. P. Lavrov, Marx's personal friend and ally. It reached its full revolutionary potency in the writings of N. Chernyshevskii, and its most dramatic political expression in Marx's own time in Narodnaya Volya, i.e. the People's Will party. This clandestine organisation rose to exercise considerable impact during the 1879-83 period and was finally smashed in 1887 by police action, executions and exile.

Russian populists challenged both the Slavophile belief in the innate specificity (not to say intrinsic supremacy) of Russia or its peasants and the liberal's propagation of West European capitalism as Russia's bright future. Secondly, Russian populists assumed the ability and desirability of Russia 'bypassing the stage' of West-European-like capitalism on its way to a just society. That possibility resulted, however, not from Russia's uniqueness, exalted by the Slavophiles, but from Russia's situation within a global context, which had already seen the establishment of capitalism in Western Europe. The 'world-historical' analytical paradigm led to the assumption of substantively different roads along which different societies proceed toward the similar goals of a better world. In judging those roads, the 'social costs' of capitalist progress were rejected for Russia and the increase in social equality and the level of livelihood of the majority treated as the only measure stick of true social advance. A third major marker, fully expressed only by the People's Will, the tsarist state was assumed to be the main enemy of the people of Russia, both an oppressor and an economically parasitic growth. It differed from Western Europe in its ability to keep people in slavery, not only as the plenipotentiary of the propertied classes. It was the state, in that view, which was Russia's main capitalist force, both the defender and the creator of the contemporary exploitative classes.

As against the force of order, oppression and exploitation, the revolutionary populists put their trust in a class war of the Russian labouring class seen by Chernyshevskii as 'peasants, part-time workers (podeshchiki) and wage-workers' (this trinity became peasants, workers and working intelligentsia in later populist writings). The idea of 'uneven development' (first expressed by P. Chadayev) was to provide the theoretical core of political analysis. Uneven development was seen as turning Russia into a proletarian among nations, facing at disadvantage the bourgeois nations of the West. Internally, it polarised Russia. On the other hand, it enabled and indeed necessitated revolutionary leaps in which relative backwardness could turn into revolutionary advantage. That made an immediate socialist revolution in Russia possible. The overthrowing of tsardom by revolutionary means was to be followed by the establishment of a new regime in which an interventionist government, serving the democratically expressed needs of the people of Russia, would act in tandem with the active organisation of local popular power.

In the early debates, the revolution envisaged by the Russian
A major determinant of the nature of development is the character of the population. The impact of the population is assessed and communicated to the population. The population of the developing countries is in the minority and consists of a minority of the population of the developed countries. The population is mainly in the developing countries and in the minority of the developed countries.

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formed a *volost*, its officers local but authorised and controlled by state authorities. Despite its surveillance by the state, the commune played (also) the role of a *de facto* peasant political organisation, a collective shield against a hostile external world of squire, policeman, tax officer, robber, intruder or neighbouring village. To the revolutionary populist the peasant commune was the proof of the collectivist tradition of the majority of Russian people, which stayed alive in spite of its suppression by the state. They were not uncritical of it, but, on balance, considered the peasant commune a major asset to their plans. It was seen as a possible tool for the mobilisation of the peasants for the anti-tsarist struggle. It was to be a basic form of the future organisation of local power which would eventually rule Russia together with a democratically elected national government. For Chernyshevskii, it was also an effective framework for collective agricultural production in post-revolutionary Russia, which was to operate alongside the publicly owned industry and a minority of the private (and transitional?) enterprises. The image bears remarkable similarity to some of the realities, images and plans in Russia of the New Economic Policy period, 1921-7.

The most significant challenge to the revolutionary populism of the 1880s (and its substitution on the political map of Russia of the 1890s) was neither the Slavophiles and liberals to their ‘right’ nor the few Bakunist admirers of mass spontaneity to their ‘left’, but people who originated from the ‘moderate’ wing of their own conceptual fold. The main reason for the decline of revolutionary populism by the late 1880s was the defeat of their revolution, as the hope for an uprising receded, and the gallows, death in action and exile to Siberia silenced most of the People’s Will activists, while their critics’ voices gained in strength. A major argument against revolutionary populism came from an influential group which gathered around the journal *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, especially V. Vorontsov (who signed himself V. V.). They called for a moderate and evolutionary populism, with education as the major road forward and even with possible part-cooperation with government – a ‘legal populism’. They were finding an audience and a carrier in the type of the well-meaning, highly talkative but rather ineffectual provincial intellectual – often an employee of the educational and welfare service of the local authorities and the co-operative movement. It was they who came increasingly to dominate populism in the 1890s (and once again in 1907-17 after the defeat of the Revolution in 1905-7), diluting its content, turning its revolutionary wing into a ‘wild’ minority, and determining the whole movement’s eventual destruction. It was mostly they who ‘spoke on behalf of populism’ between 1887 and the end of the century.

A second attack on revolutionary populism came from the members of the Black Repartition group who parted company with People’s Will in 1879 over its insurrectionist designs. The leaders of that group, Plekhanov, Axelrod, Deutch and Zasulich, emigrated to Switzerland and after failing to make any headway with their own brand of populism, reorganised by 1883 and declared for marxism, scientific socialism, the necessity of a capitalist stage and a proletarian revolution on the road to socialism. They explained the failures of People’s Will accordingly. The new name adopted by the group was Emancipation of Labour (*Osvobozhdenie Truda*). Their eyes were now on Germany, its economy as well as the rapid increase of the German Social Democratic Workers’ Party, with an explicit expectation that Russia would follow a similar route. Their conceptual ‘Europisation’ and increasing conversion to ‘Westernism’, i.e. the type of strict evolutionism we would call today a marxian Modernisation Theory, meant that the Russian peasant commune, and by the 1890s the peasantry *in toto*, were to them no longer an asset but a sign of backwardness and stagnation, a reactionary mass. All of that had to be first removed to clear the way for the proletariat and its revolutionary struggle, and the sooner the better. They were consequently to watch with eager anticipation the development of capitalism in Russia – once more – the sooner the better, for the advance of socialism. It was to that vision that Marx referred in 1881 deservingly as that of the ‘Russian capitalism admirers’. His own views were moving in an opposite direction.

**Archaic commune and forerunner theory**

In 1881 Marx spent three weeks contemplating, one can say struggling with, an answer to a letter concerning the Russian peasant commune. It came from Vera Zasulich, made famous by her earlier attempt on the life of a particularly vicious tsarist
Laoc, Marx: Geis and Carman 15

The consideration of the Russian commune in itself as an asset to the majority of the people, which could and should be fought. The consideration of the Russian commune in the history of the German working class is a result of the history of the German working class. A new historical and logical method of human evolution is modelled through the Marxian Disposition. The expression of an essential process is, in the context of our previous consideration, an essential process. The expression of an essential process is, in the context of our previous consideration, an essential process.

After the 1825 Marx had not yet extrapolated his 1825 ideas to the Russian commune. As for the issue of the 1825 Marx, the issue of the 1825 Marx, the issue of the 1825 Marx, the issue of the 1825 Marx, the issue of the 1825 Marx.
the drafts of the ‘Letter of Zasulich’ brought all this to the surface. It will be best to present the essence of the message in Marx’s own words.29

To begin with, ‘what threatens the life of the Russian commune is neither historical inevitability nor a theory but oppression by the State and exploitation by capitalist intruders whom the State made powerful at the peasant’s expense.’ The type of society in question was singled out by its international context, i.e. ‘modern historical environment: it is contemporaneous with a higher culture and it is linked to a world market in which capitalist production is predominant,’ while the country ‘is not, like the East Indies, the prey of a conquering foreign power.’ The class-coalition of peasant-destroyers – the power-block in societies with peasant numerical predominance – was defined as ‘the state . . . the trade . . . the landlords and . . . from within [the peasant commune] . . . the usey’ (italics added), i.e. state, merchant capitalists, squires and kulaks – in that order. The whole social system was referred to as a specific ‘type of capitalism fostered by the state at the peasants’ expense’.

To Marx the fact that the Russian commune was relatively advanced in type, being based not on kinship but on locality, and its ‘dual nature’ represented by ‘individual’ as well as ‘communal land’ ownership, offered the possibility of two different roads of development. The state and the specific variety of state-bred capitalism were assaulting, penetrating and destroying the commune. It could be destroyed, but there was no ‘fatal necessity’ for it. The corporate aspect of the commune’s existence could prevail, once revolution had removed the anti-commune pressures and the advanced technology developed by Western capitalism was put to new use under the communal control of the producers. Such a solution would indeed be best for Russia’s socialist future. The main limitation of the rural commune, i.e. their isolation, which facilitated a Russian edition of ‘centralised despotism’, could be overcome by the popular insurrection and the consequent supplementing of the state-run volost by ‘assemblies elected by the communes – an economic and administrative body serving their own interest’. That is, shockingly, peasants running their own affairs, within and as a part of socialist society. Indeed, the Russian peasants’ ‘familiarity with corporate (“artel”) relations would greatly smooth their transition from small plot to collective

farming’ but there is a condition to it all: ‘the Russian society having for so long lived at the expense of the rural commune owes it the initial resources required for such a change,’ i.e. the precise reverse of ‘primitive accumulation’ was now defined by Marx as the condition for successful collectivisation of the Russian peasant agriculture. Also, it would be gradual change . . . [in which] the first step would be to place the commune under normal conditions [i.e. in a non-exploitive context] on its present basis.

In conclusion, to Marx, a timely revolutionary victory could turn the Russian commune into a major ‘vehicle of social regeneration’. A ‘direct starting point of the system to which the contemporary society strives’ and a grass root framework for ‘large-scale co-operative labour’ and the use of ‘modern machinery’. Moreover, that may make some chiefly peasant countries ‘supreme in that sense to the societies where capitalism rules’. That is, indeed, why ‘the Western precedent would prove here nothing at all.’ Moreover, ‘the issue is not that of a problem to be solved but simply of an enemy, who had to be beaten . . . to save the Russian commune one needs a Russian revolution.’ Note the expression Russian revolution, twice repeated within the text. Finally, to understand it all ‘one must descend from pure theory to Russian reality’ and not be frightened by the word ‘archaic’, for ‘the new system to which the modern society is tending will be a revival in a superior form of an archaic social type."

The issue of the peasant commune was used by Marx also as a major way to approach a set of fundamental problems, new to his generation, but which would be nowadays easily recognised as those of ‘developing societies’, be it ‘modernisation’, ‘dependency’ or the ‘combined and uneven’ spread of global capitalism and its specifically ‘peripheral’ expression. There were several such components of Marx’s new itinerary of topics for study and preliminary conclusions, none of which worked out in full. At the centre lies the newly perceived notion of ‘uneven development’, interpreted not quantitatively (i.e. that ‘some societies move faster than others’) but as global interdependence of societal transformations. The ‘Chronological Notes’, i.e. a massive conspectus of Marx written in 1880-2, is directly relevant here. As rightly noticed in an interesting contribution of B. Porshnev (who refers it to the ‘last 9-12 years period of Marx’s life’), it shows Marx’s attention turning to ‘the problem of historical interdependence of people and
Revolutions

Radical backwardness and conservative

Revolution. In this respect, which would be valid in the country as a whole, the new things present an odd, unanimous, broad perspective that from the Russian peasants, Marx learned that the Russian peasants were not to be found in a country that demands a new way of life. The Russian peasants, Marx believed, were not the only group in Russia that was ready for change.
come. The triple origins of Marx's analytical thought suggested by Engels—German philosophy, French socialism and British political economy—should in truth be supplemented by a fourth one, that of Russian revolutionary populism. All that is easier to perceive when looked at in the late twentieth century, but the massive brainwashing of interpretation initiated by the second International is still powerful enough to turn it into a 'blind spot'.

To proceed with that line of argument somewhat further in order to test it, the other major departure of Marx from an evolutionist view which assumed an inexorable course of history towards capitalist centralisation, and used the index of global economic 'progress' in political judgment, was also related to a direct experience of struggle at the close 'peripheries' of capitalism *sensu strictu*. The Fenian Rebellion of the Irish made Marx write to Engels in 1868, 'I used to think that Ireland's separation from England would be impossible. Now I consider it to be inevitable.' (Italics added).36 As a leader of the International he had also taken a public stand in that matter. In 1867 Marx defined Irish independence and the setting up of protective tariffs against England, together with agrarian revolution, as the country's major needs. Not only the conclusion but also the way he argued his case were important steps from the nineteenth-century ideas of progress towards the understanding of what our own generation would call 'dependent development' and its pitfalls. In the same year Marx spoke also of the way the Irish industry was being suppressed and its agriculture retarded by the British state and economy. By 1870 Marx went so far as to say that, 'The decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this blow is decisive for the working man's movement all over the world) is to be struck not in England but only in Ireland.'37 With full awareness of what such a stand might mean at the very centre of the imperialist nationalism, he called British workers to support the Irish independence struggle. The beautiful phrase coined in the days of their revolutionary youth by Engels, that 'people who oppress other people cannot themselves be free',38 came back, this time with a distinctly 'Third-Worldish' sound.

Secondly, Marx asserted his political preferences loud and clear. His sympathy was with fighters and revolutionaries, be the 'small print' of their creed as it may, and against doctrinaire marxists, especially when on theoretical grounds they rebuked revolutionary struggle. That was clear when he wrote of the Paris communards 'storming heaven' in 1871. In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) he scorned socialists who 'keep themselves within the limits of the logically permissible and of the permissible by the police'.39 The members of People's Will on trial for life were to him not only right in the essentials of their political stand but 'simple, objective, heroic'. Theirs was not 'tyrannicide as "theory" and "panaceas" but a lesson to Europe in a "specifically" Russian historically inevitable mode of action; against which any moralising from a safe distance was offensive.'40 In contrast he had sharply turned against their critics in Plekhanov's Black Repartition group in Geneva.41

It has been the way of many sophisticates of marxology to scoff at such utterances of Marx or to interpret them patronisingly as 'determined rather by . . . emotional motives'42 (an antonym, no doubt, of 'analytical', 'scientific' or 'sound'). To understand political action, especially the struggle for a socialist transformation of humanity, as an exercise in logic or as a programme of factory building only, is utterly to misconstrue it, as Marx knew well. Also, he shared with the Russian revolutionaries the belief in the purifying power of revolutionary action in transforming the very nature of those involved in it—the 'educating of the educators'.43 The Russian revolutionary populists' concern with moral issues found ready response in him. Moral emotions apart (and they were there and unashamedly expressed), revolutionary ethics were often as central as historiography to Marx's political judgment. So was Marx's distaste of those to whom the punch-line of marxist analysis was the adoration or elaboration of irresistible laws of history, used as the license to do nothing.

Finally, and especially after Marx's death, the difference of emphasis between Marx and Engels came to anticipate a dualism which was increasingly conspicuous within the post-Engels marxist movement. Hobsbawm's caution against the 'modern tendency of contrasting Marx and Engels, generally to the latter's disadvantage' must be kept in mind here, but also its qualification: 'the two men were not Siamese twins.'44 The two were partners, allies and friends, while Engels's devotion to Marx and his heritage has justly become famous. On a number of issues it was Engels who led and, indeed, often taught Marx, especially in so far as political and military issues were concerned. All that is not at issue, however. In his views Engels was less inclined to move in the new directions.
The Russian Revolution. All of the European left was surprised by the process of a revolutionary party. In a process of the party taking power, the revolutionaries stand at the forefront. The Russian Revolution was a result of the collapse of the Tsarist regime and the collapse of the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, seized power in November 1917. The October Revolution established the Soviet Union and marked the beginning of a new era in world politics. The Bolsheviks implemented a number of radical measures, including land reform, an end to the war, and the establishment of workers' councils (SOVIETS). The new government faced many challenges, including economic collapse and foreign intervention. Despite these difficulties, the Bolsheviks were able to maintain their power and implement a number of policies, including the nationalization of industry and the introduction of a planned economy.
provided with light relief when in 1875 Engels came to exercise his
wit on Tkachev. Such 'green schoolboy's views' by which Russia
may do more for socialism than just to facilitate the beginning of
the socialist revolution where it must actually begin, i.e. in the
West, or even more outrageously, a vision of a socialist regime in
muzhik-full Russia, even before industrialised Western Europe
would see it, was 'pure hot-air' and only proved that it was
Tkachev who was 'suspended in mid-air' and still had 'to learn the
ABC of Socialism'. \(^{51}\) All very funny, but with an unexpected twist
when seen retrospectively, two generations after November 1917
in Russia, and a generation after October 1949 in China.

In so far as the issue of the Russian commune was concerned,
Engels loyal ly defended to the end both the view that it may serve
as a unit of socialist transformation and the provision that for that
to happen a proletarian revolution in the West must show 'the
retarded countries . . . by its example how it is done'. \(^{52}\) 'it' being
the establishment of post-capitalist society. "It should be borne in
mind," he added in 1894, 'that the far-gone dissolution of Russian
communal property has [since 1875] considerably advanced. \(^{53}\)
Plekhanov was by now Engels's major guide to Russia and the head
of the Russian marxist organisation, involved as it was in a violent
dispute about peasantry's future with the (mostly 'legal', i.e.
reformist) populists of the day. \(^{54}\) The Russian peasant commune
was increasingly seen by Engels, accordingly, as on its last legs,
with capitalism in overwhelming presence. The only thing left to
those who liked it little seemed to be 'to console ourselves with the
idea that all this in the end must serve the cause of human
progress'. \(^{55}\) As to the European peasantry, he had even more
poignant things to say, in 1894, laying bare the general attitude
prevailing in the second International: 'in brief our small peasant,
like every other survival of the past modes of production, is
hopelessly doomed . . . in view of the prejudices arriving out of
their entire economic position, the upbringing and isolation . . .
we can win the mass of the small peasants only if we make them a
promise which we ourselves know we cannot keep' \(^{56}\) — which was,
of course, out of the question.

But Engels was also a revolutionary and so were many of his and
Marx's intellectual heirs. It was their support of revolutionary
strategies which was increasingly at odds with the theoretical
doctrine. While on the level of theory Marx was being 'engelsised'
and Engels, still further, 'kautskised' and 'plekhanovised' into an
evolutionist mould, revolutions were spreading by the turn of the
century through the backward/"developing" societies: Russia 1905
and 1917, Turkey 1906, Iran 1909, Mexico 1910, China 1910 and
1927. Peasant insurrection was central to most of them. None of
them were 'bourgeois revolutions' in the West European sense and
some of them proved eventually socialist in leadership and results.
At the same time, no socialist revolution came in the West nor did a
socialist 'world revolution' materialise. In the political life of the
socialist movements of the twentieth century there was an urgent
need to revise strategies or go under. Lenin, Mao and Ho chose the
first. It meant speaking with 'double-tongues' — one of strategy and
tactics, the other of doctrine and conceptual substitutes, of which
the 'proletarian revolutions' in China or Vietnam, executed by
peasants and 'cadres', with no industrial workers involved, are not
particularly dramatic examples.

The alternative was theoretical purity and political disaster.
Once again using personalities to pinpoint a broader issue, the end
of the lives of Plekhanov and Kautsky, the 'father of Russian
marxism' and the world's most erudite marxist respectively,
provide to it a tragic testimony and a sign. The first died in 1918, an
'internal exile' in the midst of revolution — an embittered,
bewildered and lonely foe of the experiment he fathered. The
second died in 1938, an exile watching incomprehensibly and
aghast the double shadow over Europe of Nazism in the industrially
progressive and electorally mass-socialist Germany, and of Stalin-
ism in the first-born socialist Russia. The terrible fate of finding
oneself 'on the rubbish heap of history' had claimed its first
generation of marxist theorists.

Reading Marx: gods and craftsmen

Back to Marx: what adds significance to discussion of the last stage
in the development of his thought is what it teaches us about his
intellectual craftsmanship and about him as a human being. The
very fact of transformation in Marx's thought and not just of its
logical unfolding shocks those to whom Marx is god. Was he god
or human? As against gods and godlings the test of humanity is that
of being context-bound, changeable in views, and fallible. Human
The task in the eyes of the proponents of this School of Marxism was to expose the economic contradictions and conflicts within capitalism and to demonstrate the inevitability of the socialist transformation. Marx, who lived through the economic crises and revolutions of his time, was acutely aware of the contradictions and contradictions inherent in the capitalist system. His theory of historical materialism, which he developed in his works such as "The Communist Manifesto" and "Das Kapital," provided a framework for understanding the development of human society.

Marx's analysis of capitalism included the concept of the division of labor, which he saw as a fundamental characteristic of capitalist society. He believed that the division of labor not only increased productivity but also led to the alienation of the workers from their work and their own humanity. Marx argued that the possibility of social change lay in the inherent contradictions of capitalism, which would eventually lead to its collapse.

Marx's theories were later developed and expanded by figures such as Lenin and Engels, who applied them to the conditions of their own time and place. Lenin's ideas, in particular, played a crucial role in the Russian Revolution, which brought about the establishment of the first Marxist state.

Marx's ideas continue to influence political and social movements around the world, and his critique of capitalism remains a central feature of contemporary debates about economics, politics, and society.
to emerge. For, consequently, there could be only two truly
credible explanations of failure of prediction based on absolute
wisdom: (a) the misreading of what is already in the Scriptures —
caused by surrender to the poison of bourgeois scholarship (that is,
of course, pseudo-scholarship); and (b) wilful treason in the service
of the enemies of the people. We know what were the ways of
rectification for each of those. We should also know by now how
immense and self-destructive the cost of it is in terms of socialist
thought, deed, and blood.

Another, more sophisticated way ‘to keep Marx in line’ was to
salvage his unilinearism by temporarily giving up his infallibility.
An interesting and very erudite book by Nikoforov has done just
that.\(^1\) The author has convincingly argued out of court the
attempts of his colleagues in the USSR to de-emphasise the
significance of Oriental Despotism in Marx’s writings. He then
proceeds to demolish the concept – Marx and Engels were simply
wrong on the matter. Marx’s studies of prehistory and of the
Russian peasant and Indian peasant communes make him see by
1879 some difficulties with that idea, but he still did not ‘overcome
it’. Then a most dramatic conclusion strikes one dumb. Under
the impact of Morgan, in the last moments of his life Marx finally
‘overcomes it’, rejecting Oriental Despotism (and the mistaken
theories of state attached to it) to return to unilinearism, i.e. to the
belief in the ‘Highway of History’ (Magistralnaya Doroga), which all
societies are bound to tread. Marx’s date of divine incarnation, i.e.
when he has eventually got things right and final, is 1881.\(^2\) The
proof of this lies, once again, not in Marx but in a review of Engels’s
later writings and especially of The Origins... etc. As a secondary
proof comes the fact that in Marx’s drafts of ‘Letter to Zasulich’ and
in his consecrus of Morgan’s book the term ‘Oriental Despotism’
did not appear. A comment by Marx related to a study of India (in
the same notebook which contain the notes on Morgan), ‘this ass
Phear calls the organisation of the rural commune feudal’, is
reproduced but dismissed as inconclusive. The fact that Marx
actually speaks of ‘central despotism’ (‘centralised’ in further texts)
in the drafts of 1881 is not even noticed.\(^3\) There is nothing else – an
outstandingly thin evidence for the size of the claim made. The
happy end of Marx’s return to the unilinear fold reminds one of the
well-known eighteenth-century tale about Voltaire on his death
bed returning to the bosom of the Catholic Church, the clergy at

his bedside bearing faithful evidence to it. Engels’s views are, of
course, quite another matter.

It is time to recapitulate briefly. The last decade of Marx’s life
was a distinctive period of his analytical endeavour: a fact
recognised, if for different reasons, by a steadily growing number
of scholars. Central to it was his involvement with Russian society,
both as a source of fundamental data and as a vehicle of analysis
and exposition of the problems of a specific type of society which
differed structurally from the ‘classical case of capitalism’ on which
Capital, Volume 1, was based. Already in the Grundrisse (1857-8)
Marx had assumed the multiplicity of roads of social development
in pre-capitalist societies. Hobsbawm’s non-consecutive interpreta-
tion of it as ‘three or four alternative routes out of primitive
communal systems’, each commencing in a different area, i.e. as
‘analytical, though not chronological, stages in... evolution’, is
important here.\(^4\) If accepted, it is already much more sophisticated
and realistic than any simple evolutionist model would have it.
Marx shifted his position further as from the 1873-4 period of
extensive contacts with Russian scholars, revolutionaries and
writings, but more clearly and consciously so since 1877. Marx had
come now to accept the multiplicity of roads also within a world in
which capitalism existed and became a dominant force. It meant (a)
an anticipation of future societal histories as necessarily uneven,
interdependent and multilinear in the ‘structural’ sense; (b) the
consequent inadequacy of the unilinear ‘progressive’ model for
historical analysis as well as for political judgments concerning the
best way the socialist cause can be promoted; (c) first steps toward
the consideration of the specificity of societies which we call today
‘developing societies’; and, within that context, (d) a re-evaluation
of the place of peasantry and its social organisation in the
revolutionary processes to come; (e) a preliminary step to look
anew at the ruling-class coalition and the role of the state in the
‘developing societies’; and (f) a new significance given the decentral-
isation of socio-political power within the post-revolutionary
society in which the rejuvenation of ‘archaic’ communes may play
an important role.

Remarkably for a man who died in 1883, the Marx of those days
was beginning to recognise for what they really are the nature,
problems and debate concerning ‘developing’ and post-
revolutionary societies of the twentieth century. The expression
In a more historical level Marx's party withings are not only run, without which Marx's life would have made much sense. In the next section of this paper, we shall have a look at the development of the Hegelian concept of the dialectical method in the works of Marx and Engels. The works of Marx and Engels, with their critical and polemical approach, are not only central to our understanding of the development of Marxist thought, but also to our understanding of the development of political thought. Since 1847, the influence of the ideas of political doctrine, economic and social evolution, and intellectual analysis, have been both far-reaching and profound. Marx's ideas are one of his most important ideas, and only a person who is in his personal censure, ethical, and moral, can fully understand Marx and his ideas. The work of Marx's ideas is closely related to the development of the ideas of political doctrine, economic, and social evolution, and intellectual analysis. The concept of the Hegelian concept of the dialectical method in the works of Marx and Engels is one of the most important ideas in the development of Marxist thought. Since 1847, the influence of the ideas of political doctrine, economic and social evolution, and intellectual analysis, have been both far-reaching and profound. Marx's ideas are one of his most important ideas, and only a person who is in his personal censure, ethical, and moral, can fully understand Marx and his ideas. The work of Marx's ideas is closely related to the development of the ideas of political doctrine, economic, and social evolution, and intellectual analysis. The concept of the Hegelian concept of the dialectical method in the works of Marx and Engels is one of the most important ideas in the development of Marxist thought.
clues to his personal dreams and insurrection against human poverty and oppression but also to his philosophical anthropology, his ideas about the essence of being human. It still offers the only available ‘objective’ base for socialist ethics, alternative to either simple political expedience, i.e. the party line as defined by a current leader, or else to theology – an issue as urgent as it is understated in socialist thought. For it is not only an issue of fine spirit and detached discourse, but of political action and of the actually existing socialisms (remember Poland).

While clearly impatient with banal sentimentality, Marx was a humanist and an heir to the culture of the Enlightenment, in which he was steeped. His scholarship was a chosen tool in the service of a grand ethical design of liberation of human essence from its alienation caused by the grip of nature as well as by the man-made worlds of class-split societies. The best evidence of that side to Marx is his unwaning appeal today, which, is after all, not like an adoration of the multiplication table. To purify ‘mature’ Marx from the philosophical ethics of early Marx, to divide aspects of his thought into separate boxes, or to be ashamed ‘on his behalf’ of the claim for the moral content of socialism, is to do him indeed ‘too much honour’ (by someone else’s code of practice) and ‘too much injury’ (by that of his own).66

Gods remain unchanged by the process of creation and, it was said, can think only of themselves. If metaphors are to be used, Marx was not a god but a master craftsman. Craftsmen change matter while changing themselves in the process of creation. Also, if a dilettante is indeed ‘a man who thinks more of himself than of his subject’, Marx was professional in his analytical skills and therefore self-critical to the utmost. He was often tart in his critical comments and polemics, but for a man greatly admired by his own circle he was remarkably free from self-deification.

That is, in all probability, the root of the long public silence during the last decade of Marx’s life. He was ailing, but then he was never a very healthy man. He was tired and at times depressed by the post-1871 revolutionary low in Europe, but fatigue and defeat were not new to him either. He was working on the further volumes of Capital but did fairly little to it. Biographers have faithfully rewritten Mehring’s note that Marx’s last decade was ‘slow death’, failing to acknowledge that even Mehring actually described this as (before 1882) ‘grossly exaggerated’.67 The subse-

quent discovery of 30,000 pages of notes written over ten years, as much as the quality of the work he did, militate against the solicitous remarks about Marx’s failing powers. In the period directly following the publication of Volume 1 of Capital Marx faced critical comments and an increasing influx of ‘stubborn data’ which did not fully fit, and had to be digested. He was rethinking intensively, once more, his theoretical constructs, and moving into new fields. Lack of lucidity and a ‘heavy pen’ are often the price of depths in a path-breaking effort. Must a scholar be ill or senile not to ‘rush into print’, while still thinking through new theoretical thresholds?

To conclude, there was neither ‘epistemological rupture’ in Marx’s thought nor decline or retreat but constant transformation, uneven as such processes are. His last decade was a conceptual leap, cut short by his death. Marx was a man of intellect as much as a man of passion for social justice, a revolutionary who preferred revolutionaries to doctrinaire followers. The attempts to single out as truly scientific, external and a-moral Marx from Marx the scholar, the fighter and the man, are as silly as they are false. That is why one should not ‘read Capital’ but read Marx (Capital included) and also Goethe, Heine and Aeschylus whom Marx admired and, together with the tale of Prometheus, made into a part of his life. To give his due to the greatest revolutionary scholar, we should see him as he was as against the caricatures and icons drawn by his enemies and his worshippers. To know him is to see him change and to see in what sense he did not. To be ‘on his side’ is to strive to inherit from him the best in him – his grasp of new worlds coming into being, his critical and self-critical faculty, the merciless honesty of his intellectual craftsmanship, his tenacity and his moral passion.

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For further discussion, see A. Walicki, The Controversy over Capitalism, Oxford, 1969, pp. 16-22.

16. The word volontar mean in nineteenth-century Russian both 'will' and 'liberty'.

17. For biographical details, see pp. 172-8, this volume. For a selection of relevant writings, see Part Three. For studies of the Russian populist tradition available in English, see in particular F. Venturi, Roots of Revolution, London, 1960, i. Berlin, Russian Thinkers, Harmondsworth, 1979, and Walicki, op. cit. See also T. Dan, The Origins of Bolshevism, London, 1964, chs 3, 6 and 7, and L. Haimson, The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism, Boston, 1966. There is considerable Russian literature on the topic of which the most recent is the excellent study by V. Kharos, Idëinye techeniya narodnicheskogo tipa, Moscow, 1980. Contrary to an often held view, the Russian populists did not reject industrialisation but wanted it socially controlled and adjusted to regional needs, ideas which often bridge directly with some of the demands of the most contemporary 'environmentalists' and socialists. See Walicki, op. cit., pp. 114-16, and Khoros, op. cit., pp. 36-40, 220-5.


19. See the last wills of members of the People's Will, pp. 394-90.

20. Statistika zemlevladeniya 1905 g. St. Petersburg, 1907. The figures referred to the fifty guberniya's of European Russia, i.e. excluded Russian Poland and the Caucasus.


22. E.g. already Herzen spoke of the need to overcome simultaneously 'the British canibalism', i.e. total surrender to the rules of capitalist competition, and the total immersion of the Russian peasant in his commune, to keep the personal independence of the first and the collectivist elan of the second.

23. See Venturi, op. cit., chs 20 and 21; also Dan, op. cit., chs 6, 7 and 8. For a good self-description of the Black Repartition group see L. Haimson, Istoriiko-revolutsionnyi sbornik, Leningrad, 1924, vol. 2, pp. 280-350. For biographical details, see pp. 177-8, this volume.

24. See below, Part Two. This line of analysis has been reflected subsequently with particular strength in the works of the Russian 'legal marxists', e.g. M. Tugan Baranovskii Russkaya fabrika, St Petersburg, 1901, vol. 1, ch. 4.

25. Central to that line of argument were the works and views of B. Chicherin adapted in Marx's time by A. Wagner and in the latter generations by P. Miliukov, K. Kocharovskii, etc., as well as by G. Plekhanov and I. Chernyshchev in the marxist camp. This view was often referred to as the 'state school'. It was opposed by an equally impressive list of scholars and political theorists of whom N. Chernyshchevski and I. Belyaev were paramount to Marx's own generation. Marx himself spoke up sharply against Chicherin (Marks i Engels, op. cit., vol. 33, p. 482). For a good historiography of the debate see Aleksandrov, op. cit., pp. 3-46.

26. Marx wrote the passage in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852) referring to France but deleted it in the reprint of 1869. The dates are significant for reasons discussed in our text.

27. Marx and Engels, Sochineniya, op. cit., vol. 32, p. 158. Relatedly in time, Marx has attacked Herzen's view in 1867 and spoke in absolute terms of the French peasantry's conservatism (e.g. in the 1871 notes on the Paris Commune, ibid., vol. 17, pp. 554-7).


29. For full text, see Part Two.


31. See below, p. 631.

32. See below, p. 129. How much all that still 'aches' can be best exemplified by a short aside from P. Konyushaya, Karl Marx i revolyutsionnyy rossiya, Moscow, 1975, where after a stream of invectives against the multiplicity of 'falsifiers of Marx', i.e. everybody who discussed him outside Russia, tells us that Plekhanov 'based his argument on the position formulated by Marx in his letter to "Otechestvennye Zapiski"' (p. 357). She forgets to inform us when, where and how.

33. David Ryazanov, see below, Part Two. For contemporary Western equivalents of that view see Marx and Engels, The Russian Menace to Europe, op. cit., p. 266, and on the left, J. Elster in K. Marx, Verker i Utlag, Oslo, 1970, p. 46.

34. See below p. 130.

35. Plekhanov's speech at the Fourth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party in 1906 stated it explicitly. On the other hand, the year 1905 has seen also the appeals of the Saratov Bolsheviks and of Nikolim (A. Shestakov, the chief of the agrarian section of the Bolsheviks Moscow committee) against Lenin's new agrarian programme, treated by them as 'capitation' to the populist petty bourgeoisie.


37. Ibid., p. 254. For further discussion, see the paper by K. Mohri in Monthly Review, 1979, vol. 30, no. 11.

38. From the 1847 speech about the independence of Poland, Marx and Engels, Sochineniya, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 273.

39. Ibid., vol. 19, p. 28.


41. For Marx's sharply critical view about the 'boring doctrines' of the Black Repartition, see his letter to Sorge of 5 October 1880, ibid., vol.
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34. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class. The Grundrisse, 1857-58, p. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

35. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

36. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

37. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

38. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

39. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

40. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

41. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

42. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

43. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

44. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

45. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

46. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

47. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

48. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

49. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.

50. Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, pp. 380. The way Marx (and in the 1880s, Engels) related their theory of the alienation of the working class to the demands of a more general social and political emancipation of the working class.