

## KARL MARX

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(A9)	page 9 in the cut typescript
[9]	page 9 begins in first edition

I *must* finish K. Marx, of which now only 7000 words remain to be cut: it is an absolutely hateful process, every evening I count up little drops of blood & measure the cup: all the purple passages are gone, & now the turn of the facts has come, towards which I now feel vindictive & eliminate them gaily.

Letter to Cressida Bonham Carter, 28 August 1938

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INTRODUCTION

Things and actions are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be; why then should we seek to be deceived?

BISHOP BUTLER

No thinker in the nineteenth century has had so direct, deliberate and powerful an influence upon mankind as Karl Marx. Both during his lifetime and after it he has exercised an intellectual and moral ascendancy over his followers, the strength of which was unique even in that golden age of democratic nationalism, an age which saw the rise of **revolutionaries and demagogues (A1)**, great popular heroes and martyrs, romantic, almost legendary figures, whose lives and words dominated the imagination of the masses and created a new revolutionary tradition in Europe. Yet Marx could not, at any time, be called a popular figure in the ordinary sense: certainly he was in no sense a popular writer or orator. He wrote extensively, but his works were not, during his lifetime, read widely; and when, in the late seventies, they began to reach the immense public which several among them afterwards obtained, the desire to read them was due not so much to a recognition of their intrinsic qualities as to the growth of the fame and notoriety of the movement with which he was identified.

Marx totally lacked the qualities of a great popular leader or agitator, was not a publicist of genius like the Russian democrat Alexander Herzen, nor did he possess Bakunin's marvellous eloquence; the greater part of his working life was spent in comparative obscurity in London, at his writing-desk and in the reading-room of the British Museum. He was little known to the [10] general public, and while towards the end of his life he became the **undisputed (A2)**, recognised and admired leader of a powerful international movement, **treated by both his adherents and his opponents with a peculiar mixture of fear, respect and admiration (A2)**, nothing in his life or character stirred the imagination or evoked the boundless devotion, the intense, almost religious, worship, with which such men as Kossuth, Mazzini, **Garibaldi (A2)**, and even Lassalle in his last years, were regarded by their followers.

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His public appearances were neither frequent nor notably successful. On the few occasions on which he addressed banquets or public meetings, his speeches were overloaded with matter, and delivered with a combination of monotonousness and brusqueness, which commanded the respect but not the enthusiasm of his audience. He was by temperament a theorist and an intellectual, and instinctively avoided direct contact with the masses, to the study of whose interests his entire life was devoted. To many of his followers he appeared in the role of a **cold and relentless (A3)**, dogmatic and sententious German schoolmaster, prepared to repeat his theses indefinitely, with rising sharpness, until their essence became irremovably lodged in his disciples' minds. The greater part of his economic teaching was given its first expression in lectures to working men: his exposition under these circumstances was by all accounts a model of lucidity and conciseness. But he wrote slowly and painfully, as sometimes happens with rapid and fertile thinkers, scarcely able to cope with the speed of their own ideas, impatient at once to communicate a new doctrine, and to forestall every possible objection; the published versions were generally turgid, clumsy, and obscure in detail, although the central doctrine is never in serious doubt. He was acutely conscious of this and once compared himself with the hero of Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece*, who tries to paint the picture which has formed itself in his mind, touches and retouches the canvas endlessly, to produce at last a shapeless mass of colours, which to his eye seems to express [11] the vision in his imagination. He belonged to a generation which cultivated the emotions more intensely and deliberately than its predecessors, and was brought up among men to whom ideas were often more real than facts, and personal relations meant far more than the events of the external world; by whom indeed public life was commonly understood and interpreted in terms of the rich and elaborate world of their own private experience. Marx was by nature not introspective, and took little interest in persons or states of mind or soul; the failure on the part of so many of his contemporaries to **comprehend and assess the importance, the true nature (A4)**, of the revolutionary transformation of the society of their day, due to the swift advance of technology with its accompaniment of sudden increase of wealth, and, at the same

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time, of social and cultural dislocation and confusion, merely excited his anger and contempt.

He was endowed with a powerful, active, unsentimental mind, an acute sense of injustice, and exceptionally little sensibility, and was repelled as much by the rhetoric and emotionalism of the intellectuals as by the **smugness (A4)**, stupidity and complacency of the bourgeoisie; the first seemed to him aimless, **idiotic (A4)** chatter, remote from reality and, whether sincere or false, equally irritating; the second at once **shallow (A4)**, hypocritical and self-deceived, blinded to the salient features of its time by absorption in the pursuit of wealth and social status, **and by the near-sighted and petty desire for self-preservation (A4)**.

This sense of living in a hostile and vulgar world, intensified perhaps by his dislike of the fact that he was born a Jew, increased his natural harshness and aggressiveness, and produced the formidable figure of popular imagination. His greatest admirers would find it difficult to maintain that he was a sensitive or tender-hearted man, or in any way concerned about the feelings of those with whom he came into contact; the majority of the men he met were, in his opinion, either fools or sycophants, and towards such he beheld with open suspicion or contempt. But if his attitude in public was overbearing and offensive, in the intimate circle composed of his family and his friends, in which he felt completely secure, he was considerate and gentle; his married life was exceptionally happy, he was warmly attached to his children, and he treated his lifelong friend and collaborator, Engels, with uniform loyalty and devotion. He was a charmless man, and his behaviour was often boorish, but even his enemies were fascinated by the strength and vehemence of his personality, the boldness of his views, and the breadth and brilliance of his analyses of the contemporary situation.

He remained all his life an oddly isolated figure among the revolutionaries of his time, equally hostile to their persons, their methods and their ends. His isolation was not, however, due merely to temperament or to the accident of time and place. However widely different the majority of European democrats were in character, aims and historical environment, they resembled each other in one fundamental attribute, which made co-operation between them possible, at least in principle. Whether or not they believed in violent revolution, the great majority of them were, in

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the last analysis, liberal reformers, and appealed explicitly to moral standards common to all mankind. They criticised and condemned the existing condition of humanity in terms of some preconceived ideal, some system, whose desirability at least needed no demonstration, being self-evident to all men with normal moral vision; their schemes differed in the degree to which they could be realised in practice, and could accordingly be classified as less or more utopian, but broad agreement existed between all schools of democratic thought about the ultimate ends to be pursued. They disagreed about the effectiveness of the proposed means, **about what could and what could not be altered by human effort (A6)**, about the extent to which compromise with the exist[13]ing powers was morally or practically advisable, about the character and value of specific social institutions, and consequently about the policy to be adopted with regard to them. But they were essentially reformers in the sense that they believed that there was little which could not be altered by the determined will of individuals; they believed, too, that powerfully held moral ends were the sole effective springs of action, themselves justified by an appeal not to facts but to some universally accepted scale of values. It followed that it was proper first to ascertain what one wished the world to be: next, one had to consider in the light of this how much of the existing social fabric should be retained, how much required to be condemned: finally, one was obliged to look for the most effective means of accomplishing the necessary transformation.

With this attitude, common to the vast majority of revolutionaries and reformers at all times, Marx came to be wholly out of sympathy. He was convinced that human history is governed by laws which, like the laws which govern nature, cannot be altered by the intervention of individuals actuated by this or that ideal. He believed, indeed, that the inner experience to which men appeal to justify their ends, so far from revealing a special kind of truth called moral or religious, is merely a faculty which engenders myths and illusions, both individual and collective. Being conditioned by the material circumstances in which they come to birth, the myths embody in the guise of objective truth, whatever men in their misery wish to believe; under their treacherous influence men misinterpret the nature of the world in which they live, misunderstand their own position in it, and

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therefore miscalculate the range of their own and others' power, and the consequences both of their own and their opponents' acts. In opposition to the majority of the democratic theorists of his time, Marx believed that values could not be contemplated in isolation from facts, but necessarily depended upon the manner in which the facts were viewed. True insight into the nature and laws of the historical process will of itself, without the aid of independently known moral standards, **introduced *ab extra* (A8)**, make clear to a rational being what step it is proper for him to adopt, that is, what course would most accord with the requirements of the order to which he belongs. Consequently Marx had no new ethical or social ideal to press upon mankind; he did not **exhort, or preach, or (A8)** plead for a change of heart; a change of heart was necessarily but the substitution of one set of illusions for another. He differed from the other great ideologists of his generation by making his appeal, at least in his own view, solely to reason, to the practical intelligence, denouncing only intellectual vice or blindness, insisting that all that men need, in order to know how to save themselves from the chaos in which they are involved, is to seek to understand their actual condition; believing that a correct estimate of the precise balance of forces in the society to which men belong will itself indicate the form of life which it is rational to pursue. Marx denounces the existing order by appealing not to ideals but to history: he denounced it not as bad, or unfortunate, or due to human wickedness or folly, but as being caused by the laws of social development, which make it inevitable that at a certain stage of history one class should dispossess and exploit another. The oppressors are threatened not with deliberate retribution on the part of their victims, but with the inevitable destruction which history has in store for them, as a class doomed shortly to disappear from the stage of history.

Yet, designed though it is to appeal to the intellect, his language is that of a herald and a prophet, speaking in the name not of human beings but of the universal law itself, seeking not to rescue nor to improve, but to warn and to condemn, to reveal the truth, and above all [15] to refute falsehood. *Destruam et aedificabo* ('I shall destroy and I shall build'), which Proudhon placed at the head of one of his works, far more aptly describes Marx's conception of his own appointed task. In 1845 he had completed the first state of his programme, and acquainted himself with the nature, history

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and laws of the evolution of the society in which he found himself. He concluded that the history of society is the history of struggles of opposed classes, one of which must emerge triumphant, although in a much altered form: progress is constituted by the succession of victories of one class over the other, and that man alone is rational who identifies himself with the progressive class in his society, either, if need be, by deliberately abandoning his past and allying himself with it, or if history has already placed him there, by consciously recognising his situation and acting in the light of it.

According to Marx, having identified the rising class in the struggle of his own time with the proletariat, devoted the rest of his life to planning a victory for those at whose head he had placed himself. This victory the process of history would in any case secure, but human courage, determination and ingenuity could bring it nearer and make the transition less painful, accompanied by less friction and less waste of human substance. His position henceforth is that of a commander, actually engaged in a campaign, who therefore does not continually call upon himself and others to show reason for engaging in a war at all, or for being on one side of it rather than the other: the state of war and one's own position in it are given, they are facts not to be questioned but accepted and examined; one's sole business is to defeat the enemy; all other problems are academic, based on unrealised hypothetical conditions, and so beside the point. Hence the almost complete absence in Marx's later works of discussions of ultimate principles, of all attempts to justify his [16] opposition to the bourgeoisie. The merits or demerits of the enemy, or what might have been the case, if there were no enemy and no war, is of no interest during the battle. To introduce these irrelevant issues during the period of actual fighting is to deflect the attention of one's supporters from the crucial issues with which, whether or not they recognise them, they are faced, and so to weaken their power of resistance.

All that is important during the actual war is accurate knowledge of one's own resources and of those of the adversary, and knowledge of the previous history of society, and the laws which govern it, is indispensable to this end. *Das Kapital* is an attempt to provide such an analysis. The almost complete absence

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from it of explicit moral argument,<sup>1</sup> of appeals to conscience or to principle, and the equally striking absence of detailed prediction of what would or should happen after the victory, follow from the concentration of attention on the practical problems of action. The conceptions of natural rights, and of conscience, as belonging to every man irrespective of his position in the class struggle, are rejected as liberal illusions: socialism does not appeal, it demands; it speaks not of rights, but of the new form of life before whose inexorable approach the old social structure has visibly begun to disintegrate.

**Marx's disciple Wilhelm Liebknecht, who by nature was inclined to humanitarian liberalism, had been so well schooled by Marx in this respect that in later life he emphasised almost to excess that Marx's socialism, as opposed to other forms of it, did not appeal to the moral sense of mankind, nor indeed to any sentiment at all. It did not appeal, it demanded: not rights as understood by liberals, but a new form of life, when the individual would be emancipated from the tyranny of outworn institutions, and human history, in the true sense of the word, would begin. The march of events would in any case inevitably bring about this order; the consciousness of its proximity had already begun to assume concrete shape in the growth of the new revolutionary. (A15)**

Moral, political, economic conceptions and ideals alter no less than the social conditions from which they spring: to regard any one of them as universal and immutable is tantamount to believing that the order to which they belong – in this case the bourgeois order – is eternal. This fallacy underlies the ethical and psychological doctrines of idealistic humanitarians from the eighteenth century onwards. Hence the contempt and loathing poured by Marx upon the common assumption, made by liberals and utilitarians, that since the interests of all men are ultimately and have always been the same, a measure of goodwill and benevolence on the part of [17] everyone may yet make it possible to manufacture some sort of general compromise. If the war is real, these interests are totally incompatible. A denial of this fact can be due only to stupid or cynical disregard of the truth, a

<sup>1</sup> sentiment (A12).

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peculiarly vicious form of hypocrisy or self-deception, repeatedly exposed by history. This fundamental difference of outlook, and no mere dissimilarity of temperament or natural gifts, is the property which distinguished Marx sharply from the bourgeois radicals and utopian socialists whom, to their own bewildered indignation, he fought and abused servile and unremittingly for more than forty years.

He detested romanticism, emotionalism, and humanitarianism of every kind, and, in his anxiety to avoid any appeal to the idealistic feelings of his audience, systematically removed every trace of the old democratic vocabulary from the propagandist literature of his movement. He neither offered nor invited concessions at any time, and did not enter into any dubious political alliances, since he declined all forms of compromise. The manuscripts of the numerous manifestos, professions of faith and programmes of action to which he appended his name, still bear the strokes of the pen and the fierce marginal comments, with which he sought to obliterate all references to eternal justice, the quality of man, the rights of individuals or nations, the liberty of conscience, the fight for civilisation, and other such phrases which were the stock in trade (and had once genuinely embodied the ideals) of the democratic movements of his time; he looked upon these as so much worthless cant, indicating confusion of thought and ineffectiveness in action.

The war must be fought on every front, and since contemporary society is politically organised, a political party must be formed out of those elements which in accordance with the laws of historical development are destined to emerge as the conquering class. They [18] must ceaselessly be taught that what seems so secure in existing society is, in reality, doomed to swift extinction, a fact which men may find it difficult to believe because of the immense protective façade of moral, religious, political and economic assumptions and beliefs, which the moribund class consciously or unconsciously creates blinding itself and others to its own approaching fate. It requires both intellectual courage and acuteness of vision to penetrate this smoke-screen and perceive the real structure of events. The spectacle of chaos, and the imminence of the crisis in which it is bound to end, will of itself convince a clear-eyed and interested observer – for no one who is not virtually dead or dying, can be a disinterested spectator of the

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fate of the society with which his own life is bound up – of what he must be and do in order to survive. Not a subjective scale of values revealed differently to different men, determined by the light of an inner vision, but knowledge of the facts themselves, must, according to Marx, determine rational behaviour. The society which is judged to be progressive, and so worthy of support, is that which is capable of further expansion in its initial direction without an alteration of its entire basis. A society is reactionary when it is inevitably moving into an impasse, unable to avoid internal chaos and ultimate collapse in spite of the most desperate efforts to survive, efforts which themselves create irrational faith in its own ultimate stability, the anodyne with which all dying institutions necessarily delude themselves. Nevertheless, what history – to Marx an almost active agency – has condemned will be inevitably swept away: to say that it ought to be saved, even when that is not possible, is to deny the rational plan of the universe. To criticise the facts themselves was for Marx a form of childish subjectivism, due to a morbid or shallow view of life. **This emphasis on the necessity, before all, of scientific exploration of social factors in the light of the new evolutionary hypothesis, accompanied by a dry, bitter, ‘unpleasant’ style of thought, struck an entirely new note in the literature of revolutionary socialism.**

Even more than the literature of the declared enemy, Marx detested that form of sentimental socialism which seemed to him to spring from a subjective evaluation of the situation (A18), from some irrational prejudice in favour of this or that [19] virtue or institution; it revealed attachment to the old world and was a symptom of incomplete emancipation from its values. It seemed to him that under the guise of earnest **goodwill and sincere (A18)** philanthropic feeling there throve, undetected, seeds of weakness and treachery, due to a fundamental desire to come to terms with the reaction, a secret horror of revolution based on fear of the truth of the full light of day. With the truth there could, however, be no compromise: and humanitarianism was a softened, face-saving form of **cowardice and (A19)** compromise, due to a desire to avoid the perils of an open fight and even more the risks and responsibilities of victory. Nothing stirred his indignation so much as cowardice: hence the furious and often brutal tone with which he refers to it, the beginning of

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that harsh **anti-romantic (A19)**, ‘materialist’ style which struck an entirely unfamiliar note in the literature of revolutionary socialism. This fashion for ‘naked objectivity’ took the form, particularly among Russian writers of a later generation, of searching for the sharpest, most unadorned, most shocking form of statement in which to clothe what were sometimes not very startling propositions – **a form which combined very oddly with the elaborately ornamented, pretentious neo-Hegelian idiom from which neither Marx nor his followers ever succeeded in freeing themselves completely. (A19)**

He had, by his own account, begun to build his new instrument from almost casual beginnings: because, in the course of a controversy with the Government on an economic question of purely local importance in which he was involved in his capacity as editor of a radical newspaper, he became aware of his almost total ignorance of the history and principles of economic development. This controversy occurred in 1843. By 1848 his education as a political and economic thinker was complete. With prodigious thoroughness he had constructed a complete theory of society and its evolution, which indicated with absolute precision where and how the answers to all such questions must be sought and found. Its originality has often been questioned: it is original, not indeed in the sense in [20] which works of art are original, when they embody some hitherto unexpressed individual experience, but as scientific theories are said to be original, when they provide a new solution to a hitherto unsolved problem, which they may do by modifying and combining existing views to form a new hypothesis. Marx never attempted to deny his debt to other thinkers; **indeed, in the case of his predecessors, he was at pains to emphasise it (A20)**: ‘I am performing an act of historical justice, and am rendering to each man his due,’ he loftily declared. But he did claim to have provided for the first time a wholly adequate answer to questions which had been previously either misunderstood, or answered wrongly or insufficiently or obscurely. The characteristic for which Marx sought was not novelty but truth, and when he found it in the works of others, he endeavoured, at any rate during the early years in Paris, in which his thought took its final shape, to incorporate it in his new synthesis. What is original in the result is not any one component element, but the central hypothesis by which each is connected with the others, so that the parts are made

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to appear to follow from each other and to support each other in a single systematic whole.

To trace the direct source of any single doctrine advanced by Marx is, therefore, a relatively simple task which his numerous critics have been only too anxious to perform. It may well be that there is not one among his views which embryo cannot be found in some previous or contemporary writer. Thus the doctrine of communal ownership founded upon the abolition of private property, has probably, in one or other form, possessed adherents at most periods during the last two thousand years. Consequently the often debated question whether Marx derived it directly from the writings of Mably, or from some German account of French Communism, is too purely academic to be of great importance. As for the more specific doctrines, historical materialism of a sort is to be found fully developed in [21] a treatise by Holbach printed a century before, which in its turn owes much to Spinoza; a modified form of it was restated in Marx's own day by Feuerbach. The view of human history as the history of war between social classes is to be found in Saint-Simon, and was to a large extent adopted by such contemporary liberal French historians as Thierry and Mignet, and equally by the more conservative Guizot. The scientific theory of the inevitability of the regular recurrence of economic crises was probably first formulated by Sismondi; that of the rise of the Fourth Estate may be derived from Linguet and was certainly held by the early communists, popularised in Germany in Marx's own day by von Stein and Hess. The dictatorship of the proletariat was adumbrated by Babeuf in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and was explicitly developed in the nineteenth in different fashions by Weitling and Blanqui; the present and future position and importance of workers in an industrial State was more fully worked out by Louis Blanc and the French State Socialists than Marx is prepared to admit. The labour theory of value derives from Locke, Adam Smith and the classical economists; the theory of exploitation and surplus value, and of its remedy by deliberate State control, is found both in Fourier, and in the writings of early English socialists, such as Bray, Thompson and Hodgskin; the list could easily be continued further.

There was no dearth of such doctrines, particularly in the eighteenth century. Some died at birth; others, when the intellectual climate was favourable, **during the upward wave of**

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**some social or intellectual crisis, had a polemical importance, (A23)** modified opinion and influenced action. Marx sifted this immense mass of chaotic material and detached from it whatever seemed to him original, true and important; and in the light of it constructed a new instrument of social analysis, whose merit consists not in its beauty or consistency, nor in its emotional [22] or intellectual power – the great utopian systems are nobler works of the speculative imagination – but in the remarkable combination of simple fundamental principles with comprehensiveness, detail and realism. The environment which it assumed actually corresponded to the personal, first-hand experience of the public to which it was addressed; its analyses, when stated in their simplest form, seemed at once novel and penetrating, and the new hypotheses which represent a peculiar synthesis of German idealism, French rationalism, and English political economy, seemed genuinely to co-ordinate and account for a mass of social phenomena hitherto thought of in comparative isolation from each other. This provided a concrete meaning for the formulae and popular slogans of the new communist movement. Above all, it enabled it to do more than stimulate general emotions of rebellion and discontent by attaching to them, as Chartism had done, a collection of specific but loosely connected political and economic ends. It directed these feelings to systematically interconnected, immediate, feasible objectives, regarded not as ultimate ends valid for all men at all times, but **as the demands of the actual situation, as so many attainable aims which arose logically from the nature of the given situation (A24)** – as the proper objectives of a revolutionary party representing a specific stage of social development.

To have given clear and unified answers in familiar empirical terms to those theoretical questions which most occupied men's minds at this time, and to have deduced from them direct practical consequences without creating obviously artificial links between the two, was the principal achievement of Marx's theory, and endowed it with that singular vitality which enabled it to defeat and survive its rivals in the succeeding decades. It was composed largely in Paris during the troubled years between 1843 and 1850, when, under the stress of a world crisis, economic and political tendencies normally concealed below the surface of social life, increased in scope and in intensity until they [23] broke through

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the framework which was secured in normal times by established institutions, and for a brief instant revealed their real character during the luminous interlude which preceded the final clash of forces in which all issues were obscured once more. Marx fully profited by this rare opportunity for scientific observation in the field of social theory; to him, indeed, it appeared to provide full confirmation of his hypotheses.

The system as it finally emerged was a massive structure, heavily fortified against attack at every strategic point, incapable of being taken by direct assault, containing within its walls elaborate resources to meet every conceivable contingency of war. Its influence has been immense on friends and foes alike, and in particular on social scientists, historians and critics. It has altered the history of human thought in the sense that after it certain things could never again be said. No subject loses, at least in the long run, by becoming a field of battle, and the Marxist emphasis upon the primacy of economic factors in determining human behaviour led directly to an intensified study of economic history, which, although it had not been entirely neglected in the past, did not attain to its present prominent rank, until the rise of Marxism gave an impulse to exact historical scholarship in that sphere – much as in the previous generation Hegelian doctrines acted as a powerful stimulus to historical studies in general. The sociological treatment of historical problems which Comte and, after him, Spencer and Taine, had discussed and mapped, became a precise and concrete study only when the attack of militant Marxism made its conclusions a burning issue, and so made the search for evidence more zealous and the attention to method more intense.

**The permeation of Marxism, whose consequences, direct and indirect, can by this time hardly be overestimated, took over half a century to achieve. Its founder was fully armed in 1847, before he had reached his thirtieth year. (A27)** In 1849, Marx was forced to leave Paris, and came to live in England. Life in that country hardly affected him at all. To him London meant little more than [24] the library of the British Museum, ‘the ideal strategic vantage point for the student of bourgeois society,’ an arsenal of ammunition whose importance its owners did not grasp. He remained almost totally unaffected by his surroundings, living encased in his own, largely German, world, formed by his family and a small group of intimate friends and political associates. He

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met few Englishmen and neither understood nor cared for them or their mode of life. He was a man unusually impervious to the influence of environment: he saw little that was not printed in newspapers or books, and remained until his death comparatively unaware of the quality of the life around him or of its social and natural background. So far as his intellectual development is concerned, he might just as well have spent his exile on Madagascar, provided that a regular supply of books and journals could have been secured: certainly the inhabitants of London could hardly have taken less notice of his existence if he had. The formative, psychologically most interesting, years of his life were over by 1849: after this he was emotionally and intellectually set and hardly changed at all. **His education was finished before he was thirty; the rest of his life was spent in the amplification of his theory and on the day to day tactical questions of party policy. (A28)** He had, while still in Paris, conceived the idea of providing a complete account and explanation of the rise and imminent fall of the capitalist system. His work upon it was begun in the spring of 1850, and continued, with interruptions, caused by day-to-day tactical needs and the journalism by which he tried to support his household, until his death in 1883.

His pamphlets, articles and letters during the next thirty years form a coherent commentary on contemporary political affairs in the light of his new method of analysis. They are sharp, lucid, realistic, astonishingly modern in tone, and aimed deliberately against the prevailing optimistic temper of his time. **He relied in his writings almost entirely on the cumulative logical force of vast collections of facts, interspersed with arguments brought to bear upon the demonstration of a few essentials – simple propositions which alone constituted the key to the understanding of human history, and consequently to the solution, entailed by this understanding, of all problems of action. (A29)**

As a revolutionary he disapproved of conspiratorial methods, which he thought obsolete and ineffective, [25] calculated to irritate public opinion without altering its foundations, and instead set himself to create an open political party dominated by the new view of society. His later years are occupied almost exclusively with the task of gathering evidence for, and disseminating, the truths which he had discovered, until they filled the entire horizon

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of his followers, and became consciously woven into the texture of their every thought and word and act. For a quarter of a century he concentrated his entire being upon the attainment of this purpose, and towards the end of his life achieved it.

The nineteenth century contains many remarkable social critics and revolutionaries no less original, no less violent, no less dogmatic than Marx, but not one so rigorously single-minded, so absorbed in making every word and every act of his life a means towards a single, immediate, practical end, to which nothing was too sacred to sacrifice. If there is a sense in which he was born before his time, there is an equally definite sense in which he embodies one of the oldest of European traditions. For while his realism, his empiricism, his attacks on abstract principles, his demand that every solution must be tested by its applicability to, and emergence out of, the actual situation, his contempt for compromise or gradualism as modes of escape from the necessity of drastic action, his belief that the masses are infinitely gullible and must at all costs be rescued, if necessary by force, from the knaves and fools who impose upon them, make him the precursor of the severer generation of practical revolutionaries of the next century, his rigid belief in the necessity of a complete break with the past, in the need for a wholly new social system, as alone capable of saving the individual, who, if left to himself, will lose his way and perish, places him among the great authoritarian founders of new faiths, ruthless **and dogmatic (A30)** subverters and innovators who interpret the world in terms of a single, [26] clear, passionately held principle, denouncing and destroying all that conflicts with it. His faith in his own synoptic vision of an orderly, disciplined world, destined to arise out of the inevitable self-destruction of the chaotic society of the present, was of that boundless, absolute kind which puts an end to all questions and dissolves all difficulties; which brings with it a sense of liberation similar to that which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries men found in the new Protestant religion, and later in the truths of science, in the principles of the great Revolution, in the systems of the German metaphysicians. If these earlier rationalists are justly called fanatical, then in this sense Marx too was a fanatic. But his faith in reason was not blind: if he appealed to reason, he appealed no less to empirical evidence. The laws of history were indeed eternal and immutable – and to grasp this fact a metaphysical

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intuition was required – but what they were could be established only by the evidence of empirical facts. His intellectual system was a closed one, everything that entered was made to conform to a pre-established pattern, but it was grounded on observation and experience. He was obsessed by no fixed ideas. He betrays not a trace of the notorious symptoms which accompany pathological fanaticism, that alternation of moods of sudden exaltation with a sense of loneliness and persecution, which life in wholly private worlds often engenders in those who are detached from reality.

**His glance is directed outwards, not inwards, towards the world of public events, compounded of impersonal tendencies and movements. He was not interested in persons, least of all in himself: the revolutions of 1848 completed the process of emotional and intellectual stabilisation which had begun with his arrival in Paris in the early 1840s. The turbulent formative years of his development were over before he had arrived in England, and his entire existence during the next thirty years was absorbed in gathering evidence, and seeking adequate means of expression, for views reached, almost always in their final form, during earlier, psychologically far more interesting, periods of his life. Later events compelled him to introduce modifications and additions into his general theory, but these were few in number, and of minor importance; they were admitted reluctantly, and in their least emphatic form, and never represented any genuine change of opinion on a major issue. He wrote slowly and painfully, without confidence, as is shown by the state of the manuscript, and by preliminary sketches of his major works. (A33)**

The main ideas of his principal work appear to have matured in his mind as early as 1847. Preliminary sketches had appeared in 1849 and again ten years later, but he was incapable of beginning to write before he had satisfied himself that he had mastered the entire literature of his subject. This fact, together with the difficulty of finding a publisher and the necessity of providing for his own and his family's livelihood, with its accompaniment of overwork and frequent ill[27]ness, put off its publication year by year. The first volume finally appeared twenty years after its conception, in 1867. It is undoubtedly the crowning achievement of his life. It is an attempt to give a single integrated account of the process and

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laws of social development, containing a complete economic theory treated historically and, less explicitly a theory of history as determined by economic factors. It is interrupted by remarkable digressions consisting of analyses and historical sketches of the condition of the proletariat, in particular during the period of transition from manufacture to large-scale industrial capitalism, introduced to illustrate the general thesis, but in fact demonstrating a new and revolutionary method of historical writing: and in all it constitutes the most formidable, sustained and elaborate indictment ever delivered against an entire social order, against its rulers, its supporters, its ideologists, its willing slaves, all whose lives are bound up with its survival. His attack upon bourgeois society was made at a moment when it had reached the highest point of its material prosperity, in the very year in which Gladstone in a budget speech congratulated his countrymen on the 'intoxicating augmentation of their wealth and power' which recent years had witnessed, during a mood of buoyant optimism and universal confidence. In this world Marx is an isolated and bitterly hostile figure, prepared, like the early Christians, or the French revolutionaries, to reject boldly everything that it had to offer, calling its ideals worthless and its virtues vices, condemning its institutions, not because they were bad but because they were bourgeois, because they belonged to a corrupt and tyrannous society which must be annihilated totally and for ever. In an age which destroyed its adversaries by methods not less efficient because they were dignified and slow, which forced Carlyle and Schopenhauer to seek escape in a remote [28] civilisation or an idealised past, and drove its arch-enemy, Nietzsche, to hysteria and madness, Marx alone remained secure and formidable. Like an ancient prophet performing a task imposed on him by heaven, with an inner tranquillity based on clear and certain faith in the rational society of the future, he bore witness to the signs of decay and ruin which he saw on every side. The older order seemed to him to be patently crumbling before his eyes; he did more than any man to hasten the process, seeking to shorten the final agony which precedes the end.

## Chapter II

### CHILDHOOD and ADOLESCENCE

Nimmer kann ich ruhig treiben  
Was die Seele stark befasst,  
Nimmer still behaglich bleiben  
Und ich stürme ohne Rast.<sup>2</sup>

KARL MARX, *Juvenilia*

Karl Heinrich Marx, eldest son of Heinrich and Henrietta Marx, was born on 5 May 1818, in Trier, in the German Rhineland, where his father practised as a lawyer. Once the seat of a Prince-Archbishop, it had, some fifteen years before, been occupied by the French and was incorporated by Napoleon in the Confederation of the Rhine. After his defeat ten years later it was assigned by the Congress of Vienna to the rapidly expanding Prussian kingdom.

The kings and princes of the German States whose personal authority had recently been all but destroyed by the successive French invasions of their territories, were at this time busily engaged in repairing the damaged fabric of hereditary monarchy, a process which demanded the obliteration of every trace of the dangerous ideas which had begun to rouse even the placid inhabitants of the German provinces from their traditional lethargy. Napoleon's defeat and exile had finally destroyed the illusions of those German radicals who hoped that the result of Napoleon's centralising policy would be, if not the liberty, at any rate the unity of Germany. The *status quo* was re-established wherever this was possible; Germany was once[30]divided into feudally organised kingdoms and principalities, whose restored rulers, resolved to compensate themselves for the years of defeat and humiliation, set about reviving the old regime in every detail, anxious to exorcise once and for all the spectre of democratic revolution whose memory was sedulously kept alive by the more enlightened among their subjects. The King of Prussia, Frederick William III, was particularly energetic in this respect. Helped by

<sup>2</sup> 'Never can I pursue in quiet that which holds my soul in thrall, never rest at peace contented, and I storm without cease.'

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the feudal squirearchy and such land-owning aristocracy as there was in Prussia, and following the example set by Metternich in Vienna, he succeeded in arresting the normal development of the majority of his countrymen for many years, and induced an atmosphere of profound and hopeless stagnation, beside which even France and England during the reactionary years seemed liberal and alive. This was felt most acutely by the more progressive elements in German society – not merely by the intellectuals, but by the bulk of the bourgeoisie and of the liberal aristocracy of the towns, particularly in the west, which had always preserved some contact with general European culture. It took the form of economic, social and political legislation designed to retain, and in some cases to restore, a multitude of privileges, rights and restrictions, many of them dating from the Middle Ages, sordid survivals which had long ceased to be even picturesque, which since they were in direct conflict with the needs of the new age, needed and obtained an elaborate and ruinous structure of tariffs to keep them in being. This led to a policy of systematic discouragement of trade and industry and since the obsolete structure had to be preserved against popular pressure, to the creation of a despotic officialdom, whose task it was to insulate German society from the contaminating influence of liberal ideas and institutions.

The increased power of the police, the introduction [31] of rigid supervision over all departments of public and private life, provoked a literature of protest which was rigorously suppressed by the government censors. German writers and poets went into voluntary exile, and from Paris or Switzerland conducted passionate propaganda against the regime. The general situation was reflected particularly clearly in the condition of that section of society which through the nineteenth century tended to act as the most sensitive barometer of the direction of social change – the small but widely scattered Jewish population.

The Jews had every reason to feel grateful to Napoleon; wherever he appeared he set himself to destroy the traditional edifice of social rank and privilege, of racial, political and religious barriers, putting in its place his newly promulgated legal code, which claimed as the source of its authority the principles of reason and human equality. This act, by opening to the Jews the doors of trades and professions which had hitherto remained

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rigidly barred to them, had the effect of releasing a mass of imprisoned energy and ambition, and led to the enthusiastic – in some cases over-enthusiastic – acceptance of general European culture by a hitherto segregated community, which from that day became a new and important factor in the evolution of European society.

Some of these liberties were later withdrawn by Napoleon himself, and what was left of them was for the most part revoked by the restored German princes, with the result that many Jews who had eagerly broken away from the traditional modes of life led by their fathers, **in the hope of assimilating themselves to the general culture of their generation (A39)**,<sup>3</sup> now found that the avenue which had so suddenly been half-opened before them had as suddenly become barred again, and consequently were confronted with a difficult choice. They had either to retrace their steps and painfully re-enter the Ghetto in which their families for the most [32] part continued to live, or else, altering their names and religion, to start new lives as German patriots and members of the Christian Church. The case of Herschel Levi was typical of a whole generation. His father, Marx Levi, and his father before him, were Rabbis in the Rhineland, who, like the great majority of their fellow Jews, had passed their entire existence within the confines of a pious, inbred, passionately self-centred community, which, faced with the hostility of their Christian neighbours, had taken refuge behind a defensive wall of pride and suspicion, which had for centuries almost wholly preserved them from contact with the changing life outside. The enlightenment had, nevertheless, begun to penetrate even this artificial enclave of the Middle Ages, and Herschel, who had received a secular education, became a disciple of the French rationalists and their disciples, the German *illuminati*, and was early in life converted to the religion of reason and humanity. He accepted it with candour and naïveté, nor did the long years of darkness and reaction succeed in shaking his faith in God and his simple and optimistic humanitarianism. **There is nothing to suggest that his relations with his family were warm, and (A40)** he detached himself completely from them, changed his name to Heinrich Marx, and acquired new friends and new interests. His legal practice was moderately successful, and he

<sup>3</sup> towards the prospects of a wider existence

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began to look to a settled future as the head of a respectable German bourgeois family, when the anti-Jewish laws of 1816 suddenly cut off his means of livelihood.

He probably felt no exceptional reverence for the established church, but he was even less attached to the Synagogue, and holding vaguely deist views, saw no moral or social obstacle to complete conformity with the mildly enlightened Lutheranism of his Prussian neighbours. At any rate if he did hesitate, it was not for long. He was officially received into the Church early in 1817, a year before the birth of his eldest son, [33] Karl. The hostility of the latter to everything connected with religion, and in particular with Judaism, may well be partly due to the peculiar and embarrassed situation in which some converts sometimes found themselves. Some escaped by becoming devout and even fanatical Christians, others by rebelling against all established religion. They suffered in proportion to their sensitiveness and intelligence. Both Heine and Disraeli were all their lives obsessed by the personal problem of their peculiar status; they neither renounced nor accepted it completely, but alternately mocked at and defended the religion of their fathers, being incapable of a single-minded attitude towards their ambiguous position, perpetually suspicious of latent contempt or condescension concealed beneath the fiction of their complete acceptance by the society in which they lived.

**Thus Heine, who had deliberately and often, with hatred, rejected Judaism, could not bear to be congratulated on that account, and indeed resented any mention of the matter by others; but towards the end of his life he became increasingly obsessed, and indeed tormented, by it; the writings and conversations of his last years are haunted by the scene of his apostasy, and in every guise he persistently returns to the subject (A42).**

The elder Marx suffered from none of these complications. He was a simple, serious, well-educated man, but he was neither conspicuously intelligent nor abnormally sensitive. A disciple of Leibnitz and Voltaire, Lessing and Kant, he possessed in addition a gentle, timid and accommodating temper, and ultimately became a passionate Prussian patriot and monarchist, a position which he sought to justify by pointing to the figure of Frederick the Great – in his view a tolerant and enlightened prince who compared favourably with Napoleon, with his notorious contempt to

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ideologists. After his baptism he adopted the Christian name of Heinrich, and educated his family as liberal protestants, faithful to the existing order and to the reigning King of Prussia. Anxious as he was to identify that ruler with the ideal prince depicted by his favourite philosophers, the repulsive figure of Frederick William III defeated even his loyal imagination.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the only occasion on which this tremulous and retiring man is known to have behaved with courage, was a public dinner at which he made a speech on the desirability of moderate social [34] and political reforms worthy of a wise and benevolent ruler. This swiftly drew upon him the attention of the Prussian police. Heinrich Marx at once retracted everything, and convinced everyone of his complete harmlessness. It is not improbable that this slight but humiliating *contretemps*, and in particular his father's craven and submissive attitude, made a definite impression on Karl, then sixteen years old, and left behind it a smouldering sense of resentment which later events fanned into a flame.

His father had early become aware that while his other children were in no way remarkable, in Karl he had an unusual and difficult son; with a sharp and lucid intelligence he combined a stubborn and domineering temper, a truculent love of independence, exceptional emotional restraint, and over all a colossal ungovernable intellectual appetite. The timorous lawyer, whose life was spent in social and personal compromise, was puzzled and frightened by his son's intransigence which, in his opinion, was bound to antagonise important persons, and might, one day, lead him into serious trouble. He frequently and anxiously begged him in his letters to moderate his enthusiasms, ***not to rush violently to this or that extreme (A44)***, to impose some sort of discipline on himself, to cultivate polite, civilised habits, not to neglect possible benefactors, above all not to estrange everyone by violently refusing to adapt himself, in short to satisfy the elementary requirements of the society in which he was to live his life. These letters, even at their most disapproving, remained gentle and affectionate. In spite of his growing uneasiness about his character and career, Heinrich Marx treated his son with an instinctive delicacy, and never attempted to oppose or bully him on any

<sup>4</sup> he was too repulsive a figure to stand even for him, as the incarnation of the ideal rule depicted by his favourite French philosophers. (A42)

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serious issue. Consequently their relations continued to be warm, intimate and dignified until the death of the older Marx in 1838.

It seems certain that the father had a definite influence on his son's intellectual development. [35] Marx believed with Condorcet that man is by nature both good and rational, and that all that is needed to ensure the triumph of these qualities is the removal of unnatural obstacles from his path. They were disappearing already, and disappearing fast, and the time was rapidly approaching when the last citadels of reaction, the Catholic Church and the feudal nobility, would melt away before the irresistible march of reason. Social, political, religious, racial barriers were so many artificial products of the deliberate obscurantism of priests and rulers; with their disappearance a new day would dawn for the human race, when all men would be equal, not only politically and legally, in their formal, external relations, but socially and personally, in their most intimate daily intercourse.

His own history seemed to him to corroborate this triumphantly. Born a Jew, a citizen of inferior legal and social status, **but one who had penetrated the artificial wall, the product of irrational custom and the intolerance which springs from ignorance, (A45)** he had attained to equality with his more enlightened neighbours, had earned their respect as a human being, and had become assimilated into what appeared to him as their more rational and dignified mode of life. He believed that a new day was dawning in the history of human emancipation, in the light of which his children would live their lives as free-born citizens in a just and liberal State. Elements of this belief are clearly apparent in his son's social doctrine. Karl Marx did not, indeed, believe in the power of rational argument to influence action, but there is, nevertheless, a definite sense in which he remained both a rationalist and a perfectibilian to the end of his life. He believed in the complete intelligibility of the process of social evolution; he believed that society is inevitably progressive, that its movement from stage to stage is a forward movement, that each successive stage represents development, is nearer the rational ideal than its precursors. He detested, as passionately as any eighteenth-century [36] thinker, emotionalism, belief in supernatural causes, visionary fantasy of every kind, and systematically under-estimated the influence of such non-rational forces as nationalism, and religious and racial solidarity. Although, therefore, it remains true that the

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Hegelian philosophy is the greatest single formative influence in his life, the principles of philosophical rationalism which were planted in him by his father and his father's friends, performed a definite work of inoculation, so that when later he encountered the romantic metaphysical systems developed by Fichte and Hegel, he was saved from that total surrender to their fascination which undid so many of his contemporaries. It was this pronounced taste, acquired early in life, for lucid argument and an empirical approach, that enabled him to preserve a measure of independence in the face of the prevalent philosophy, and later to alter it to his own more positivist pattern. This may perhaps account for his pronounced anti-romantic tendency, so sharply different from the outlook common to such leading radicals of his time as Börne, Heine or Lassalle, whose origins and education are in many respects closely analogous to his own.

Little is known of his childhood and early years in Trier. His mother played a singularly small part in his life; she belonged to a family of Hungarian Jews settled in Holland, where her father was a Rabbi, and was a solid and uneducated woman entirely absorbed in the cares of her large household, who did not at any time show the slightest understanding of her son's gifts or inclinations, was shocked by his radicalism, and in later years appears to have lost all interest in his existence. Of the eight children of Heinrich and Henrietta Marx Karl was the second; apart from a mild affection as a child for his eldest sister Sophia, he showed little interest in his brothers and sisters either then or later. He was sent to the local High School where he obtained equal praise for his industry and the [37] earnest tone of his essays on moral and religious topics. He was moderately proficient in mathematics and theology, but his main interests were literary and artistic: a tendency due principally to the influence of the two men from whom he learned most and of whom all his life he spoke with affection and respect. The first of these was his father; the other was Freiherr Ludwig von Westphalen who lived in the same street as Heinrich Marx and was on friendly terms with his agreeable Jewish neighbour. Westphalen belonged to that educated and liberal section of the German upper class whose representatives were to be found in the vanguard of every enlightened and progressive movement in their country in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was a distinguished Prussian government official, and an attractive and cultivated man.

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He belonged to the generation dominated by the great figures of Goethe, Schiller and Hölderlin, and under their influence had wandered beyond the aesthetic frontiers strictly established by the literary mandarins in Paris, and shared in the growing German passion for the rediscovered genius of Dante, Shakespeare, Homer and the Greek tragedians. He was attracted by the striking ability and eager receptiveness of Heinrich Marx's son, encouraged him to read, lent him books, took him for walks in the neighbouring woods and talked to him about Aeschylus, Cervantes, Shakespeare, quoting long passages to his enthusiastic listener. Karl, who reached maturity at a very early age, became a devoted reader of the new romantic literature: the taste he acquired during these impressionable years remained unaltered until his death. He was in later life fond of recalling his evenings with Westphalen, during what seemed to him to have been the happiest period of his life. He had been treated by a man much older than himself on terms of equality at a time when he was in particular need of sympathy and encouragement; when [38] one tactless or insulting act might have left a lasting mark, he was received with rare courtesy and hospitality. His doctorate thesis contains a glowing dedication to Westphalen, full of gratitude and admiration. In 1837 Marx asked for the hand of his daughter in marriage and obtained his consent without difficulty; an act which, owing to the great difference in their social condition, is said to have dismayed her relations. Speaking of Westphalen in later life Marx, whose judgement of men was not noted for their generosity, grew almost sentimental. Westphalen had humanised and strengthened that belief in himself and his own powers which was at all periods Marx's single most outstanding characteristic. He is one of the rare revolutionaries who were neither thwarted nor persecuted in their early life. Consequently, in spite of his abnormal sensitiveness, his *amour-propre*, his vanity, his aggressiveness and his arrogance, it is a singularly unbroken, positive and self-confident figure that faces us during forty years of illness, poverty and unceasing warfare.

He left the school at Trier at the age of seventeen, and, following his father's advice, in the autumn of 1835 became a student in the faculty of law in the University of Bonn. Here he seems to have been entirely happy: he announced that he proposed to attend at least seven courses of lectures weekly, among them lectures on Homer by the celebrated Schlegel,

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lectures on mythology, on Latin poetry, on modern art. He lived the gay and dissipated life of the ordinary German student, played an active part in university societies, wrote Byronic poems, got into debt and on at least one occasion was arrested by the authorities for riotous behaviour. At the end of the summer term of 1836 he left Bonn and in the autumn was transferred to the University of Berlin.

This event marks a sharp crisis in his life. The conditions under which he had lived [39] comparatively provincial: Trier was a small and pretty town which had survived from an older order, untouched by the great social and economic revolution which was changing the contour of the civilised world: the growing industrial development of Cologne and Düsseldorf seemed infinitely remote; no urgent problems, social, intellectual, or material, had troubled the peace of the gentle and cultivated milieu of his father's friends, a placid preserve of the eighteenth century which had artificially survived into the nineteenth. By comparison with Trier or Bonn, Berlin was an immensely large and populous city, modern, ugly, pretentious and intensely serious, at once the centre of the Prussian bureaucracy and the meeting-place of the discontented radical intellectuals who formed the nucleus of the growing opposition to it. Marx retained all his life a considerable capacity for enjoyment and a strong if rather ponderous sense of fun, but no one could even at that time describe him as superficial or frivolous. He was sobered by the tense and tragic atmosphere in which he suddenly felt himself, and with his accustomed energy began at once to explore and criticise his new environment.[40]

## CHAPTER III

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SPIRIT

Was Ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst  
Das ist im Grund des Herren eigner Geist  
In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.

(What you call the spirit of the age is in reality the  
spirit of the Lord himself, in which the age is  
mirrored.)

GOETHE

La raison a toujours raison.  
(Reason is always right.)

#### I

The dominant intellectual influence in the University of Berlin, as indeed in every other German university at this time, was the Hegelian philosophy. The soil for this had been prepared by gradual revolt from the beliefs and idiom of the classical period, which had begun in the seventeenth, and was consolidated and reduced to a system in the eighteenth century. The greatest and most original figure in this movement among the Germans was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, whose ideas were developed by his followers and interpreters into a coherent and dogmatic metaphysical system, which, so their popularisers claimed, was logically demonstrable by deductive steps from simple premises, in their turn self-evident to those who could use that infallible intellectual intuition with which all thinking beings were endowed at birth. This rigid intellectualism was attacked in England, where no form of pure rationalism had ever found a congenial soil, by the most influential philosophical writers of the age. Locke, Hume, and, towards [41] century, Bentham and the philosophical radicals agreed in denying the existence of any such faculty as an intellectual intuition into the real nature of things. No faculty other than the familiar physical senses could provide that initial empirical information on which all other knowledge of the world **of actual fact (A55)** is ultimately founded. Since all information was conveyed by the senses, reason could not be an independent source of knowledge, and was responsible only for arranging, classifying and fitting together such information, and drawing

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deductions from it, operating upon material obtained without its aid. In France the rationalist position was attacked by the materialist school in the eighteenth century, and while Voltaire and Diderot, Condillac and Helvétius freely acknowledged their debt to the free-thinking English, they constructed an independent system whose influence on European thought and action continues into the present day. Some did not go to the length of denying the existence of knowledge obtained otherwise than by the senses, but claimed that, though such innate knowledge itself exists and indeed reveals valuable truth, it provides no evidence for the propositions whose incontrovertible truth the older rationalists claimed to know, a fact which careful and scrupulous mental self-examination would show to any open-minded man not blinded by religious dogmatism or political and ethical prejudice. Too many abuses had been defended by appeals to authority, or to a special intuition: thus Aristotle, appealing to reason for confirmation, had maintained that men were by nature unequal, that some were naturally slaves, others free men; and so too the Bible, which taught that truth could be revealed by supernatural means, afforded<sup>5</sup> texts which could be invoked to prove that man was naturally vicious and must be curbed – theses used by reactionary governments to support the existing state of political, social, even moral inequality. But experience and reason, properly understood, combined to show the precise opposite of this. Arguments could be produced to show beyond any possible doubt that man was naturally good, that reason existed equally in all sentient beings, that the cause of all oppression and suffering was human ignorance **and malevolence (A57)**, produced partly by social and material conditions, which arose in the course of natural historical development, partly through the deliberate suppression of the truth by ambitious tyrants<sup>6</sup> and unscrupulous priests, most frequently by the interplay of both. These influences could, however, by the action of an enlightened and benevolent government, be exposed and thereby annihilated. For, left to themselves, with no obstacles to obscure their vision and to frustrate their endeavours, men, **being naturally good (A57)**, would pursue virtue and knowledge; justice and equality would

<sup>5</sup> contained (A56)

<sup>6</sup> partly through the deliberate self-interest of ambitious tyrants (A57)

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take the place of authority and privilege; competition would yield to co-operation; happiness and wisdom would become universal possessions.

**Thus both these movements, asserting as they did the validity of individual experience, combined to reject the authority of sacred texts and their interpreters; both assumed the natural perfectibility of man, both believed that the dissemination of knowledge would expose the irrationality, and so automatically undermine the monstrous abuses, of the existing system. (A58)**

The central tenet of this semi-empirical rationalism consisted in boundless faith in the power of reason to explain and improve the world, all previous failure to do so being explained as a result of ignorance of the laws which regulate the behaviour of nature, animate and inanimate. **Man, no less than any other inhabitant of the universe, is regarded as a direct product of his physical and social environment at any given moment: thought, feeling, action; physical, moral and intellectual characteristics, whether of individuals or of societies – these are determined solely by the particular combination of natural forces at work in particular places and times. Man is by nature both good and rational; indeed, these are but two names for one characteristic, since goodness consists in the rational conduct of life, and rationality in the realisation of the proper ends of the agent, that is, in his specific virtue, in the performance of that which he performs best. (A75–6)**

Misery is the result of ignorance not only of nature but of the laws of social behaviour.<sup>7</sup> **A rational being, as the Greek**

<sup>7</sup> Misery and vice both result only from the abuse of natural reason, with which every human being is endowed at birth, either from ignorance or wanton folly, which lead to error and misunderstanding both of his own proper nature and of the nature of the external world in which he is forced to dwell; this presently involves him in unforeseen disasters whose consequences, being ignorant of the laws of nature, he can neither prevent nor render innocuous. These in their own turn make his surroundings even more recalcitrant to deal with, until they begin to distract him at every turn, and so warp his hitherto noble and generous character. His powers of reasoning and action are permanently undermined. He thus becomes the defenceless victim of institutions of his own

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philosophers have taught, perceives the proper function of each thing in nature, knows the use and limit of its own faculties, and can therefore adjust itself into complete harmony with nature and with other rational beings like itself. But a creature that has been rendered irrational, by whatever cause, is thwarted at every turn by unexpected obstacles, whose sources and nature it cannot comprehend; helpless and frustrated in an unintelligible and therefore hostile universe, he invents mythical explanations, out of which religious and metaphysical systems are compounded, to account for his unhappy state, and, passionately anxious to justify his conduct, if only in order to save his own vanity, attempts to find a supernatural or hidden order to account for the chaos caused by his own ignorance and folly. To alter this situation and provide universal and lasting happiness, one single measure is both necessary and sufficient: the employment of reason and of reason alone in human affairs. (A78–82)<sup>8</sup>

This task is admittedly far from easy; men have lived too long in a world of intellectual darkness to be able to move unblinkered in the sudden light of day. A process of gradual education in scientific principles is therefore required: the growth of reason and the advance of truth, while in themselves sufficient to conquer the **embattled (A82)** forces of prejudice and ignorance, cannot occur until enlightened men are found ready to devote their whole lives to the **sole (A82)** task of educating the vast benighted mass of mankind.[43]

But here a new obstacle arises: whereas the original cause of human misery, neglect of reason and intellectual indolence, was not deliberately brought about, there exists in our own day and has existed for many centuries past, a class of men who, perceiving that their own power rests on ignorance which blinds men to its injustice, promote it by every invention and means in their power. By nature all men are rational, and all rational beings have equal

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**creation, which owing to his own stupidity and blindness have escaped his control. (A76–8)**

<sup>8</sup> To abolish it one measure is both necessary and sufficient: the employment of reason and of reason alone in the conduct of human affairs.

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rights before the natural law of reason. But the ruling classes, the princes, the nobility, the priests, the generals, realise only too well that the spread of reason would soon open the eyes of the peoples of the world to the colossal fraud by which in the name of such hollow figments as the sanctity of the church, the divine right of kings, the claims of national pride or possession, they are forced to give up their natural claims, and labour uncomplainingly for the maintenance of a small class which has no shadow of right to exact such privilege. It is therefore in the direct personal interest of the upper class in the social hierarchy to thwart the growth of natural knowledge, wherever it threatens to expose the arbitrary character of its authority, and in its place to substitute a dogmatic code, a row of unintelligible mysteries expressed in high-sounding phrases with which to confuse the feeble intelligences of their unhappy subjects, and keep them in a state of blind obedience. Even though some among the ruling class may be genuinely self-deceived and come themselves to believe in their own inventions, some there must be who know that only by systematic deception, propped up by the occasional use of violence, could so corrupt and unnatural an order be preserved. It is the first duty, therefore, of an enlightened ruler to break the power of the privileged classes, and to allow natural reason with which all men are endowed to re-assert itself; and since reason can never be opposed to reason, all private and public conflict is ultimately due to some[44] irrational element, some simple failure to perceive how an harmonious adjustment of apparently opposed interests may be made.

**In nature will is rational and therefore harmonious, and co-operation plays the part which in human society is played by competition; hence the free play of reason, by allowing the full development of human faculties, will of itself secure peace, just government and prosperity for mankind, which, resting on the secure foundation of man's own rational will, will never again disappear from the world.**

This is a brief account of the doctrine of those who believed in natural harmony – the children and grandchildren of men whose lives were spent in the religious wars and the passionate controversies of the seventeenth century, which formed the outlook of such thinkers as various as Locke and Voltaire, Rousseau and Condorcet, d'Alembert and Kant, Franklin and Adam Smith. 'La Raison a toujours raison':

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**(A86)** Reason is always right. To every question there is only one true answer which with sufficient assiduity can be infallibly discovered, and this applies no less to questions of ethics or politics, of personal and social life, than to the problems of physics or mathematics. Once found, the putting of a solution into practice is a matter of mere technical skill; but the traditional enemies of progress must first be removed, and men taught the importance of acting in all questions on the advice of disinterested scientific experts, whose knowledge is founded on reason and experience. Once this has been achieved, the path is clear to the millennium.

But the influence of environment is no less important than that of education. **Side by side with this, closely connected and yet fundamentally incompatible with it, was the doctrine of environmentalism, preached, paradoxically enough, by thinkers of the same school and outlook, but entailing a very different set of answers to the same questions. If man is the product of natural forces which operate upon him, his character and behaviour can be explained entirely in terms of the double influence of environment and education. (A87)**

If you would wish to foretell the course of a man's life, you must consider such factors as the character of the region in which he lives, its climate, the fertility of its soil, its distance from the sea, in addition to his physical characteristics and the nature of his daily occupation. **To this you must add the traditions of the community and the character and mode of life of those under whose influence he is brought up. Precise and exhaustive knowledge of these empirical facts would enable the scientist, provided his hypotheses concerning human development are valid, to predict the entire future of any individual presented for investigation. Thus, by careful study of a child's natural qualities and gifts, and by corresponding adjustment of its environment, rich potentialities of human nature might be realised, undreamt of in the cramped, chaotic conditions of life in contemporary society. Opposed to this, and denounced as a malignant fiction invented to bolster up the unjust State, with its oppressors and oppressed, was the doctrine, derived from Aristotle and the Christian thinkers, that not all causes are thus open to scientific analysis and treatment: that some human**

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tendencies are innate and not empirically explicable, and cannot be altered by a change of environment or education. Thus some men, according to Aristotle, are slaves, created so from birth, unalterably: according to the Christian doctrine of the Fall and original sin, man has a natural inclination towards evil, due to natural and supernatural causes; in so far as the soul is immaterial and immortal, being a direct emanation of divine substance, it is not subject to physical or any other natural law, and therefore no science of it, that is to say, no psychology, descriptive or therapeutic, is in principle possible. Against this, the materialists of the eighteenth century, remote disciples of the Epicureans and atomists of the ancient world, direct disciples of their descendants in the Renaissance, maintained that (A88–92) the human soul, like material substance, is swayed by no supernatural influences and possesses no occult properties; its entire behaviour can be adequately accounted for by means of ordinary verifiable physical hypotheses. The French materialist, La Mettrie, developed this empiricism to its fullest limits in a celebrated treatise, *L'Homme machine*, which caused an immense scandal at the time of its publication. His views were shared in various degrees by the editors of the Encyclopaedia, Diderot and d'Alembert, by Holbach, Helvétius and Condillac, who, whatever their other differences, were agreed that man's principal difference from the plants and lower animals lies in his possession of self-consciousness, that is, awareness of certain of his own processes, in his capacity to use reason and imagin[45]ation to conceive ideal purposes and to attach moral values to this or that activity or characteristic in accordance with its tendency to forward or retard the ends which he desired to realise.

A serious paradox which this view involved was the conflict between freewill on the one hand, and complete determination by character and environment on the other; which was the old conflict between freewill and divine foreknowledge in a new form, with Nature in the place of God. **So far as human freedom is concerned, man had neither more nor less of it than any other natural thing. (A93)** Spinoza had observed that if a stone falling through the air could think, it might well imagine that it had freely chosen its own path, being unaware of the external causes such as the aim and force of the thrower and the natural medium

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which determine its fall. Similarly, it is only his ignorance of the natural causes of his behaviour which makes man suppose himself in some fashion different from the falling stone: omniscience would quickly dispel this vain delusion, even though the feeling of freedom to which it gives rise may itself persist, having lost its power to deceive. So far as extreme empiricism is concerned, this deterministic doctrine is entirely consistent with optimistic rationalism:<sup>9</sup> but it carries the very opposite implications with regard to the possibility of reform in human affairs. For if men are made saints or criminals solely by the movement of matter in space, **calculable and predictable by the physicists (A94)**, the educators are as rigorously determined to act as they do, as those whom it is their duty to educate. Everything occurs as it does as a result of unalterable processes of nature; and no improvement can be affected by the free decisions of individuals, however wise, however benevolent and powerful, **since they, no more than any other entity in nature, can, because they will this or that, effect any alteration in the inexorable process of the material changes which compose the world. (A94-5)**<sup>10</sup> No one supposes that human action could interfere with any geological process, or have an effect such as that of the moon upon the tides, but there is no difference in principle between these great events and the minutest and the most trivial successions of causes and effects.

It is a profound truth that environment and natural forces alone make men good or bad, that they cannot therefore themselves be praised or blamed for being as they are. It follows that their characters cannot be transformed by the voluntary acts of their fellows, who are themselves what they are not from any choice of their own, and can at best function only as so many involuntary subsidiary causes in affecting the lives of others: to maintain the opposite is to assume the premisses held by the Church and its secular allies, who justify their acts by appeals to the moral or religious principles which men have to discover within themselves and realise in their lives, a position contrary to all scientific evidence, a shallow fallacy which the new materialism

<sup>9</sup> this doctrine is entirely consistent with the other, stressing no less strongly the omnipotence of education (A94)

<sup>10</sup> since they, no more than any other entity, can alter natural necessity

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claimed to have exploded finally, once and for all. Either man is a creature of his environment, a function of physical tendencies and forces beyond his control, in which event, having grasped this fact, he will cease to praise and to condemn, or to look to divine providence for salvation; but equally he will cease to look to himself or to any other man for it – rather he will acquiesce stoically in his inevitable lot. Or he is what he is as a result of his ignorance of the laws of the world in which he lives (often blinded by vicious education), in which even his children must be given an enlightened education; but in that event no strictly scientific knowledge of man is possible, since the determining factors of behaviour are in his own hands, and freedom to choose between alternatives precludes the possibility of natural factors completely predictable even by one who has in his possession the maximum quantity of evidence that is in principle discoverable. The logical incompatibility between the two theories, which emerges clearly when each is stated in its sharpest and least compromising form, seems to have caused little comment in the eighteenth century itself. (A94–9)

This celebrated crux, stripped of its old theological dress, emerged even more sharply in its secular form; it presented equal difficulties to both sides, but became obscured by the larger issues at stake. Atheists, [46] sceptics, materialists, rationalists, utilitarians, belonged to one camp; theists, metaphysicians, supporters and apologists of the existing order to the other; the rift between enlightenment and clericalism was so great, and the war between them so savage, that doctrinal difficulties within each camp passed relatively unperceived.

It is the first of the two theses that became the fundamental doctrine of the radical intellectuals of the next century. They emphasised the natural goodness of men unspoiled by a bad or ignorant government, and **insisted upon (A 99)**<sup>11</sup> the immense power of rational education to rescue the masses of mankind from their present miseries,<sup>12</sup> to institute a juster and more scientific distribution of the world's goods, and so to lead humanity to the

<sup>11</sup> emphasised

<sup>12</sup> **from their oppressors (A99)**

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limits of attainable happiness. The imagination of the eighteenth century was dominated by the phenomenal strides made by the mathematical and physical sciences during the previous century, and it was a natural step to apply the method which had proved so successful in the hands of Kepler and Galileo, Descartes and Newton, to the interpretation of social phenomena and to the conduct of life. **Holbach, Helvetius, d'Alembert in France, and, on the other side of the channel, Hume, Adam Smith, and a generation later Jeremy Bentham, conceived of their task as the application of the methods and principles of natural science to the less precise material of social phenomena, which they proposed to analyse and set in order. Locke spoke of a plain historical method which he proposed to use in his investigation of the scope of the faculties of the human mind. His successors, in the same spirit, proposed to strip their subject of the metaphysical and theological accretions beneath which it had become obscured, and then to study it with the methods which Newton had so fruitfully applied in the *Principia*. The figure of Newton exercised an almost magical fascination on the minds of the leading thinkers of the eighteenth century. Again and again his name occurs in their pages; his methods are the acknowledged ideal on which their whole activity was modelled. (A100–1)**

If any single individual may be said to have created the movement, it is unquestionably Voltaire. If he was not its originator, he was its greatest and most celebrated protagonist for more than half a century. His books, his pamphlets, his mere existence did incomparably more to destroy the hold of absolutism and Catholicism than any other single factor. **He excited more hatred and more enthusiasm, and certainly more universal admiration, than any other man of letters in his own lifetime. (A58)** Nor did his death arrest his influence. Freedom of thought was identified with his name: its battles were fought under his banner: no popular revolution from his day to ours has failed to draw some of its most effective weapons from that inexhaustible armoury which two centuries have not rendered obsolete. But if Voltaire created the religion of man, Rousseau was the greatest **and most passionate (A58)** of its [47] prophets. He was a preacher and a propagandist of genius, and deployed a new eloquence and ardour, a richer, vaguer and more emotionally

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charged language, which profoundly affected the writers and thinkers of the nineteenth century. Indeed, he may be said to have created new modes of thought and of feeling, a wholly new idiom which was adopted as their natural vehicle of self-expression by the artistic and social rebels of the nineteenth century, the first generation of romantics who sought inspiration in the revolutionary history and literature of France, and in her name raised the banner of revolt in their own backward lands.<sup>13</sup>

**It is this emotional inflation and new personal passion in prose and poetry that is, as much as any single factor, responsible for the appearance of unreality and romance which the eighteenth century carries for us: the Romantic tradition survives sufficiently into the present to act as a systematically distorting medium through which its predecessor still presents an absurdly stylised and artificial air – an illusion which may indeed delude serious historians, but which cannot, as a phenomenon of historical perception, be eliminated from our intellectual horizon, and so inevitably infects our entire attitude towards the past. The shift in perspective which caused this collective hallucination took place in France, and to a smaller extent in England, in relatively isolated and self-contained and intellectual circles; in Germany it occurred on a truly gigantic scale, pouring itself into the all-pervasive movement called Hegelianism. Its total consequences were very far-reaching: in the field of thought they took the form of the new social and historical**

<sup>13</sup> He was a writer and a preacher of genius, and he deployed a new eloquence and ardour which by degrees infected the languages of all reformers and radicals in the years which succeeded his death. Rousseau, who was acutely sensitive to the contours of the coming order, revolted frantically against that of his contemporaries; living in the eighteenth century, he belonged in spirit to the nineteenth, and invented a richer, vaguer and more emotionally charged mode of self-expression, which overwhelmed his contemporaries, and created a new style of thought and feeling which became the natural idiom of all artistic and social rebels of the succeeding age, the first generation of romantics who sought inspiration in the revolutionary history and literature of France, and in her name raised the banner of revolt in their own backward lands. (A59)

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**science, in the field of action they are most manifest in the recent history of Central and Southern Europe. (A60–4)**

One of the most fervent and certainly the most effective among the advocates of this doctrine in England was the idealistic Welsh manufacturer, Robert Owen. His creed was summarised in the sentence inscribed at the head of his journal, *The New Moral World*: ‘Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even the world at large, by the application of proper means, which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men.’ He had triumphantly demonstrated the truth of his theory by establishing model conditions in his own cotton mills in New Lanark, limiting working hours, and creating provision for health and a savings fund. By this means he increased the productivity of his factory and raised immensely the standard of living of his workers, and what was even more impressive to the outside world, trebled his own fortune. New Lanark became a centre of pilgrimage for kings and statesmen, and, as the first successful experiment in peaceful co-operation between labour and capital, had a considerable influence on the history both of socialism and of the working class. His later attempts at practical reform were less successful. Owen, who died in deep old age [48] in the middle of the nineteenth century, was the last survivor of the classical period of rationalism, and, his faith unshaken by repeated failures, until the end of his life believed in the omnipotence of education and the perfectibility of man.

The effect which the victorious advance of the new ideas had upon European culture is hardly inferior to that of the Italian Renaissance. The spirit of free inquiry into personal and social issues, of calling all things in question before the bar of reason, acquired a formal discipline, **a recognised method of procedure (A102)**, and an increasingly enthusiastic acceptance in wide sections of society. Intellectual courage, and even more, intellectual disinterestedness, became fashionable virtues. Voltaire and Rousseau were universally fêted and admired, Hume was magnificently received in Paris. This was the climate of opinion which formed the character of the revolutionaries of 1789, a severe and heroic generation which yields to none in the clearness and purity of its convictions, in the robust and unsentimental

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intelligence of its humanism – above all, in its absolute moral and intellectual integrity, securely founded upon the belief that the truth must ultimately prevail because it is the truth, a belief which years of exile and persecution did not weaken.<sup>14</sup> Their moral and political ideas, and their words of praise and blame have long since become the common inheritance of democrats of all shades and hues; socialists and liberals, utilitarians and believers in natural rights, speak their language and profess their faith, and so naïvely, nor with such utter confidence, but also less eloquently, less simply and less convincingly.

#### II

The counterattack came with the turn of the century. It grew on German soil but soon spread over the whole civilised world, checking the advance of empiricism from the West, and putting in its place a profoundly [49] metaphysical view of nature and of the individual, the effects of which are with us still, and growing in strength and influence.<sup>15</sup>

Germany, spiritually and materially crippled by the Thirty Years War, was, at the end of a long and sterile period, beginning to produce once more, towards the end of the eighteenth century,

<sup>14</sup> **The generation of Frenchmen which made the revolution of 1789, bred of such propaganda as this, yields to no one in the clearness and purity of its convictions. The robust and unsentimental intelligence of its humanism, above all, is the absolute moral and intellectual integrity to be found among the rank and file of the revolutionaries, many of whom rejected any form of compromise with the restored reaction and, scattered in exile in the early years of the nineteenth century, concealed in many distant corners of Europe, could be recognised for their unrelenting and often forbidding temper, a grim, devoted generation, indifferent to the attitude of their contemporaries, absorbed in the perilous task of keeping alive the revolutionary tradition during the dark years of reaction. (A102–3)**

<sup>15</sup> **The counterattack came with the turn of the century from Germany, which checked the hitherto unresisted advance of empiricism from the West, and advanced against it, into the intellectual field, forces as massive as any that had ever been seen in it: its effects are with us still and daily grow in strength and influence. (A105)**

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and indigenous culture of its own, influenced by, but fundamentally independent of, the French models which all Europe vied in imitating. Both in philosophy and in criticism the Germans began to produce works which were in form clumsier, but more ardently felt, **more original (A105)**, more vehemently expressed, and more disquieting than anything written in France outside the pages of Rousseau; the French saw in this rich disarray only a grotesque travesty of their own limpid style and exquisite symmetry. The Napoleonic Wars which added to the Germans' wounded intellectual pride the humiliation of military defeat, made the rift still wider, and the strong patriotic reaction which began during these years and rose to a wild flood of national feeling after Napoleon's defeat, became identified with the new, so-called romantic philosophy of Kant's successors, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, which thus obtained national significance and became broadened and popularised into an almost official German faith. Against the scientific empiricism of the French and English, the Germans put forward the metaphysical historicism of Herder and of Hegel. Founded on the criticism of its rivals, it offered a bold alternative, the influence of which altered the history of civilisation in Europe and left an ineffaceable impression on its imagination and modes of feeling.

The classical philosophers of the eighteenth century had asked: Given that man is neither more nor less than an object in nature, what are the laws which govern his behaviour? If it is possible to discover by empirical means under what conditions bodies fall, planets rotate, trees grow, ice turns into water and water into steam, [50] it must be no less possible to find out under what conditions men are caused to eat, drink, sleep, love, hate, fight one another, constitute themselves into families, tribes, nations, and again into monarchies, oligarchies, democracies. Until this is discovered by a Newton or a Galileo, no true science of society can come into being.

**Various solutions were suggested in the prevalent scientific form of invariant laws: given such and such climatic, geographical, nutritive conditions, men, like the semi-automata they are, are compelled to behave in this or that fashion: once they are discovered and systematised, men cease to be an incalculable super-material factor in the universe. The so-called immaterial soul, which seventeenth-**

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century spiritualism had made responsible for so much, is revealed in its true nature as a mere name for all the unknown causes of hitherto unexplained phenomena of material behaviour, and, once exposed, ceases to be the occult entity and source of irrational precepts and intuitions behind which metaphysical and theological dogmatism had long been allowed to shelter. This uncompromising naturalism threatened, indeed, to jeopardise the notion of human freedom and progress. The notion of freedom was an illusion due to ignorance of the causes of behaviour; as for progress, it was plainly absurd to speak of progress as occurring in the lives of stars and planets or in the ebb and flow of seas and oceans, or in the worlds of sun, heat or light: it must therefore be equally senseless to apply it to human beings. They undergo certain processes involving inevitable successions of events; but progress implies a goal and goals, and final causes in nature are figments of human imagination by which men represent to themselves as their own freely chosen ends, or as a purpose of the universe, what they and everything else are in case compelled to do by the physical laws of their own material nature. To import the concept of purpose into the sphere of natural science or human history is, as Spinoza had first made clear, anthropomorphism of the crudest order. (A107–10)

This radical empiricism appeared to Hegel to embody a scientific dogmatism even more disastrous than the theology which it wished to displace, involving the fallacy that only methods successful in the natural sciences can be valid in every other department of experience. He was sceptical of the new method even in the case of the material world, and quite groundlessly suspected natural scientists of arbitrarily selecting the phenomena which they discussed and no less arbitrarily limiting themselves to certain kinds of evidence alone. But if his attitude towards empiricism in the sciences are unsympathetic, he spoke with even greater violence of its ruinous consequences when applied to the subject of human history. If history were written in accordance with scientific rules, as the word was understood by Voltaire or by Hume, a monstrous distortion of the facts would result, which the best historians of the past – Hume and Voltaire themselves, indeed, when they were not theorising but writing history, **and**

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had given no thought to the theoretical foundation of their science (A111) – had unconsciously avoided by a sure historical intuition. He conceived of history as it were in two dimensions: the horizontal, in which the phenomena of different spheres of activity, occurring among different peoples belonging to the same stage of development, are seen to be broadly interconnected in some unitary pattern, which gives each period its own individual, immediately recognisable character; and the vertical dimension, in which the same cross-section of events is viewed as part of a temporal succession, as a necessary stage in a developing process, in some sense contained by its predecessor in time, which is itself seen already to embody, although in a less developed state, those very tendencies and forces whose full emergence makes the later age that which it ultimately comes to be. Hence every age, if it is to be genuinely understood, must be considered in relation not to the past alone; for it contains within its womb seeds of the future, foreshadowing the contour of what is yet to come; and this relation, no historian, however scrupulous, however anxious to avoid straying beyond the bare evidence of the facts, can allow himself to ignore, **if he is to represent the correct perspective (A113)**. Only so can he represent the period with which he is dealing, distinguishing the significant from the trivial, the central, determining characteristics of an age from those accidental, adventitious elements in it, which might have happened anywhere and at any time, and consequently have no deep roots in its particular past, and no appreciable effects on its particular future.

The conception of growth by which the acorn is said potentially to contain the oak, and can be adequately described only in terms of such development, is a doctrine as old as Aristotle and indeed older. In the Renaissance it came to light once more and was developed to its fullest extent by Leibnitz, who taught that the universe was compounded of a plurality of independent individual substances, each of which is to be conceived as composed of its own whole past and its own whole future. Nothing was accidental; no object could be described as the empiricists wished to describe it, namely as a succession of continuous or discontinuous phenomena or states, connected at best only by the external relation of mechanical causation. The only true definition of an object was in terms which explained why it necessarily developed as it did in terms of its individual history, as a growing entity, each

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stage of which was, in the words of Leibniz, 'chargé du passé et gros de l'avenir'. Leibnitz made no detailed attempt to apply this metaphysical doctrine to historical events, and yet [52] that seemed to Hegel to be the sphere to which it best applied. For unless some relation other than that of scientific causation be postulated, it seems impossible to account for, even to express, the entirely individual character of a particular personality or period of history, the individual essence of a particular work of art or of science, each of whose characteristics may indeed closely resemble something which has occurred before or after it, but whose totality is in some sense unique, and exists only once; and cannot therefore be accounted for by a scientific method whose successful application depends upon the occurrence of the precise opposite, namely, that the same phenomenon, the same combination of characteristics should repeat itself, regularly recur, again and again.

The new method was first triumphantly applied by Herder, who, under the influence perhaps of the growth of national and racial self-consciousness in Europe, and moved by hatred of the levelling cosmopolitanism and universalism of the prevailing French philosophy, applied the concept of organic development (as it later came to be called) to the history of entire cultures and nations as well as individuals. Indeed, he represented it as more fundamental in the case of the former, since individuals can only properly be viewed as occurring at a particular stage of the development of a society, which, in the thought and action of its greatest sons, reaches its most typical expression. **Patriotically, (A116)**, therefore, he immersed himself in the study of national German culture, its barbarian beginnings, its philology and archaeology, its medieval history and institutions, its traditional folklore and antiquities. From this he attempted to draw a portrait of the living German spirit, as a formative force responsible for the unity of its own peculiar national development, which cannot be accounted for by the crudely empirical relation of mere loose before-and-afterness in time, by which [53] the uniform, monotonous history of mechanically caused events, the rotation of the crops or the yearly revolutions of the earth, may perhaps be satisfactorily explained.

Hegel developed this still more widely, ambitiously **and impartially (A117)**. He taught that the explanation offered by French materialism afforded at best a hypothesis for explaining

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some static but no dynamic phenomena, differences but not change. Given such and such material conditions, it may be possible to predict that the men born in them will develop certain characteristics, directly attributable to physical causes and to the education given to them by previous generations, themselves affected by the same conditions. But even if this is so, how much does it really tell us? The physical conditions of Italy, for example, were much the same in the first as they were in the eighth and fifteenth centuries, and yet the ancient Romans differ widely from their Italian descendants, and the men of the Renaissance showed certain marked characteristics, which Italy in decline was losing or had totally lost. It cannot therefore be these relatively invariant conditions, with which alone the natural scientists are competent to deal, that are responsible for the phenomena of historical change, for progress and reaction, glory and decline. Some dynamic factor must be postulated to account both for change as such and for the single, clearly perceptible, direction which it has. Such change is plainly not repetitive: each age inherits something new from its predecessors, in virtue of which it differs from every preceding period; the principle of development excludes the principle of uniform repetition which is the foundation on which Galileo and Newton built. If history possesses laws, these laws must evidently be different in kind from what has passed for the only possible pattern of scientific law so far: and since everything that is, persists, and has some history, the laws of history must [54] for that very reason be identical with the laws of being, of everything that exists.

Where is this principle of historical motion to be found? It is a confession of human failure, of the defeat of reason, to declare that this dynamic principle is that notorious object of the empiricist's gibes, a mysterious and occult power which men cannot expect even to detect.<sup>16</sup> It would be strange if that which governs our normal lives were not more present to us, a more familiar experience than any other that we have. For we need only take our own lives as the microcosm and pattern of the universe. We speak familiarly enough of the character, or of the temper, of a man as accounting for his acts and thoughts, not as some

<sup>16</sup> **But it would indeed be odd if this dynamic principle turned out to be the object of the empiricists gibes, something mysterious and occult, which men cannot expect ever to detect. (A119)**

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independent thing totally distinct from them, but as the common pattern which they express: and the better we say we know a man, the better we may be said to know his moral and mental constitution in its relation to the external world. Hegel transferred the concept of the personal character of the individual, **which gradually unfolds itself as a man lives on and in terms of which we explain to ourselves the reason and quality of his acts (A120),**<sup>17</sup> to the case of entire cultures and nations: he referred to it variously as the Idea or Spirit, distinguished stages in its evolution, and pronounced it to be the motive, dynamic factor in the development of specific peoples and civilisations and so of the sentient universe as a whole. Further, he taught that the error of all previous thinkers was to assume the relative independence of different spheres of activity at a given period, of the wars of an age from its art, of its philosophy from its daily life. We should not naturally make this separation in the case of individuals; in the case of those with whom we are best acquainted, we half-unconsciously<sup>18</sup> correlate all their acts as different manifestations of a single nature; **nor do we necessarily pay exclusive attention to their own statements of their views or motives, save as some additional objective, psychological, evidence of their actual character: but we assess this character itself by their actual behaviour, taking into account the influences to which they are subject, whether or not they are aware of them (A121–2);** we are affected by innumerable data drawn from this or that phase of their activity, which collectively influ[55]ence our mental portrait of them. This, according to Hegel, applies no less to our concept of a culture of a particular historical period. The historians of the past have tended to write monographs on the history of this or that city or campaign, of the acts of this or that king or commander, as if they could be represented in isolation from the other phenomena of their time. But just as the acts of an individual are the acts of the whole individual, so the cultural phenomena of an age, the particular pattern of events which constitute it, are expressions of the whole age and of its whole personality, a fact which we do indeed tacitly recognise in speaking

<sup>17</sup> which gradually unfolds itself throughout a man's life

<sup>18</sup> automatically

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of a phenomenon as typical of the ancient rather than the modern world, or of an age of chaos rather than of one of settled peace.

This should be recognised explicitly. In writing, for instance, the history of seventeenth-century music, and in considering the rise of a particular form of polyphony, it is relevant to ask whether a development of a similar pattern may not be observed in the history of science at this time; whether, for example, the discovery of the differential calculus simultaneously by Newton and Leibnitz was purely accidental, or due to certain general characteristics of that particular stage of European culture, which produced a not dissimilar genius in Bach and Leibnitz, in Milton and Poussin. Obsession with rigorous scientific method might lead historians, as it does natural scientists, to build walls between their fields of inquiry and treat each branch of human activity as functioning in relative isolation, like so many parallel streams which cross rarely and without effect; whereas, if the historian is fully to realise his task, to rise above the chronicler and the antiquary, he must endeavour to paint a portrait of an age in movement, **expose the diverse facets of its personality (A124)**, collect that which is characteristic, distinguish between its component elements, between the old and the new, the [56] fruitful and the sterile, the dying survivals of a previous age and the heralds of the future, born before their time.

This command to look in the particular for the most vivid expression of the universal, for the concrete, the differentiated, the individual, to emulate the art and the realism of the biographer and the painter rather than the photographer and the statistician, is the peculiar legacy of Hegel. If history is a science, it must not be beguiled by the false analogy of physics or mathematics, which, looking for the widest obtainable, least varying, common characteristics, deliberately ignores what specifically belongs to only one time and one place, seeking to be as general, as abstract, as formal, as possible. The historian, on the contrary, must see and describe phenomena in their fullest context, against the background of the past and the foreground of the future, as being organic to all other phenomena which springs from the same cultural impulse.

The effect of this doctrine, at once a symptom and a cause of a change of outlook on the part of an entire generation, and now grown so familiar, is inestimably great. **The habit of attaching**

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particular characteristics to particular periods and places, and of seeing individuals or their acts as typical of nations or times; the new faculty of historical imagination which fascinated all Europe in the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and was foreign to the eighteenth century, which saw nothing incongruous in stage Romans or stage Athenians who played their parts in wigs and powder; these spring from this new outlook, which came to be called Romanticism. To it belongs our habit of bestowing almost a personality of their own with active causal properties upon certain periods or places, or passing moods experienced by whole sections of society, as when something is spoken of as an expression of the spirit of the Renaissance, or of the Revolution, or of the Victorian age, or of post-war disillusionment. Our habit of classifying human action as inspired by the growth of nationalism, or of Romanticism, or more specifically by a Russian or Italian or Spanish view of life – factors to which so much is compendiously and often unscientifically attributed, but without whose help as categories or classifications the history of human civilisation would scarcely be written – derives from the invention of the historical imagination, which itself owes more to Hegel's view of history than to any other single influence. (A126–7)<sup>19</sup> Hegel's specifically logical doctrines and his view of the method of the natural sciences were barren, and their effects were wholly disastrous. His true importance lies in his influence in the field of social and historical studies – **not indeed as a historian, for his own wonderfully bold attempts to reconstruct the past by a priori methods are for the most part fantastic; the splendid imaginative generalisations are as often founded on ignorance as on knowledge, and belong to art rather than science. By taking seriously, and acting in accordance with, propositions first uttered half a century**

<sup>19</sup> Our habit of attaching particular characteristics to particular periods and places and of seeing individuals or their acts as typical of nations or of times: of bestowing almost a personality of their own, active causal properties, upon certain periods or peoples, or even on widely felt social attitudes, in virtue of which acts are described as expressions of the spirit of the Renaissance or of the French Revolution, of German romanticism or of the Victorian Age, springs from this new historicism of outlook.

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before by Vico, to the effect that human history was not a specific form of natural history that regarded individuals as objects in nature, but the autobiography of humanity, made by mankind out of its own collective experience, he created (A128–9) a new science, which consists in the history and criticism of human [57] institutions, viewed as great collective quasi-personalities, **the *soi commun* of which Rousseau had spoken so eloquently**, which possess a life and character of their own, and cannot be described purely in terms of the individuals who compose them. **The combination of a new breadth of outlook with a scrupulous and fervent attitude towards research, which inspired Ranke – who laid the foundations of modern historical science – was the first and noblest fruit of the Hegelian philosophy, of the pursuit of a new ideal which no one before him had clearly revealed. (A129)** It was largely due to his influence that there came into existence a new school of German historians whose work made all writers who explained events as the outcome of the character or intentions, the personal defeat or triumph of this or that king or statesman, seem naïve and unscientific. **The political consequences of his doctrines have not appeared in their full force until our own day. He may well claim to be the most influential and effective figure of modern times, a title of lasting fame, if not lasting honour, in human history. (A131)**

If history is the development of the impersonal Spirit, which Hegel did not identify solely with the human spirit, since he denied any essential divorce between mind and matter, it is necessary to rewrite it as the history of the achievement of the Spirit. The horizon suddenly seemed immensely widened. Legal history ceased to be a remote and special preserve of archaeologists and antiquaries and was transformed into Historical Jurisprudence, wherein contemporary legal institutions were interpreted as an orderly evolution from Roman or earlier law, embodying the Spirit of the Law in itself, of society in its legal aspect, interwoven with political, religious, social aspects of its life.

**In accordance with the new principles, (A132)<sup>20</sup>** the history of art and the history of philosophy began to be treated as complementary and indispensable elements in the general history

<sup>20</sup> Henceforth

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of culture: facts previously thought trivial or sordid were accorded sudden importance as being hitherto unexplored domains of the activity of the Spirit – the history of trade, of dress, of the useful arts were seen to be essential elements in the complete, ‘organic’, institutional history of mankind.<sup>21</sup> **If many aspects of social development still continued to be ignored, that was the fault of its historians or of the level of the information, not of their method.**

**The new methods of research and interpretation which had suddenly been revealed produced a startling and even intoxicating effect on enlightened European society, greater than the impact of the earlier, more original and perhaps more liberating doctrines of the French *philosophes* (A133–4).** There was one respect, however, in which Hegel sharply diverged from the Leibnizian conception of development as a smooth progression of an essence gradually unfolding itself from potentiality into actuality. He insisted on the reality and necessity of conflicts and wars and revolutions, of the tragic waste [58] and destruction in the world. **Indeed their inevitability was demanded by, and maybe the need to explain them accounts for, the invention of the theory for which he is perhaps most famous. (A140)**

He declared that every process is one of perpetual tension between two incompatible forces each straining against the other, and by this mutual conflict advancing their own development; this duel – which is sometimes concealed and sometimes open, and can be traced in all provinces of conscious activity as the struggle between so many rival physical, moral and intellectual forces and influences – grows in strength and sharpness until it turns into an open conflict, which culminates in a final collision, the violence of which destroys both the adversaries. This is the point at which the hitherto continuous development is broken, a sudden leap takes place to a new level, whereupon the tension between a new dyad of forces begins once more. Certain among those leaps, those, namely, which occur on a sufficiently large and noticeable scale, are termed political revolutions. But, on a more trivial scale, they

<sup>21</sup> **facts previously thought of as trivial or sordid were accorded sudden importance as being hitherto insufficiently explored domains of the activity of the spirit – essential elements in the comprehensive history of mankind. (A133)**

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occur in every sphere of activity, in the arts and sciences, in the growth of physical organisms studied by biologists and in the atomic processes studied by chemists, and finally in ordinary argument between two opponents, when, after a conflict between two partial falsehoods, new truth is discovered, itself only relative, itself assaulted by a counter-truth (antithesis to its thesis), the destruction of each by the other leading once more to a synthesis – a process which continues without end. He called the process dialectical. The notion of struggle and of tension provides precisely that dynamic principle which is required to account for movement in history. Thought is but reality conscious of itself, and its processes the processes of nature in their clearest form. The principle of perpetual absorption and resolution (*Aufhebung*) in an ever higher unity occurs in nature no less than in discursive thought, and demonstrates that its processes are not purposeless, like the mechanical movements postulated by materialism, but lead in the direction of greater and greater perfection.<sup>22</sup> Each [59] major transition is marked by a large-scale revolutionary leap, such as, for example, the destruction of Rome by the barbarians, or the great English or French Revolutions. In each case the Spirit or universal idea advances a step nearer to complete realisation, humanity is carried a stage forward, but never strictly in the direction anticipated by either of the two sides engaged in the preliminary conflict, that side being more deeply and more irrationally disappointed, which believed most firmly in its own peculiar ability to force the direction of history.

The new methods of research and interpretation which had suddenly been revealed produced a startling, and even intoxicating, effect on enlightened German society, and to a lesser extent on its cultural dependencies, the Universities of St Petersburg and Moscow. Hegelianism became the official creed of every man with intellectual pretensions: the new ideas were applied in every sphere of thought and action with an uncontrolled enthusiasm which an age more sceptical of ideas may find it difficult to conceive.

<sup>22</sup> The principle of absorption (*Aufhebung*) in a higher unity shows clearly that the process is not a casual one, but leads in the direction of greater and greater truth and perfection, so that time is (for various metaphysical reasons) regarded as unreal; each period in the history of mankind is nearer the ideal than its predecessors, and paves the way to one more perfect than itself. (A142)

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Academic studies were entirely transformed: Hegelian logic, Hegelian jurisprudence, Hegelian ethics and aesthetics, Hegelian theology, Hegelian philology, Hegelian historiography, surrounded the student of the humanities wherever he turned. Berlin, in which Hegel's last years were spent, was the headquarters of the movement. Patriotism and political and social reaction lifted their heads again. The advance of the doctrine that all men were brothers, that national, racial and social differences were the artificial products of defective education, was arrested by the Hegelian counter-thesis according to which such differences, for all their apparent irrationality, expressing as they do the peculiar genius of a given race or nation, are grounded in some historical necessity. They are needed for the development of the Idea, of which the nation is the incarnation, and cannot [60] be made to vanish overnight by the mere application of reason by individual reformers. Reform must spring from traditional soil; otherwise it is doomed to failure, condemned in advance by the forces of history which move in their own time and at their own pace. To demand freedom from these forces and seek to rise above them, is to wish to escape from one's inevitable historical position, from the society of which one is an integral part, from the complex of relations, public and private, by which every man is made to be what he is, which are the man, are what he is; to wish an escape from this is to wish to lose one's proper nature, a self-contradictory demand, which could be made only by one who does not understand what he is demanding, one whose idea of personal liberty is childishly subjective.

True freedom consists in the discovery of the laws to which, in the particular time and place in which one lives, one is necessarily subject, and in the attempt to make actual those potentialities of one's rational, that is one's law-abiding nature, the realisation of which advances the individual and thereby the society to which he 'organically' belongs, and which expresses itself in him and in others like him. When a man in the name of some subjective ideal attempts to **oppose the laws of history (A136)**, to destroy a tradition instead of modifying it, he opposes the laws of history, attempts the impossible, and thereby reveals his own irrationality **and commits unnecessary suicide under the wheels of advancing history (A136)**. Such behaviour is condemned, not only because it is necessarily doomed to failure and therefore

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futile: for situations might occur in which it might be thought to be nobler to perish quixotically than to survive. It is condemned because it is irrational, since the laws of history which it opposes are the laws of the Spirit, which is the ultimate substance of which everything is composed, and are therefore necessarily rational; indeed if they were not, they would not be amenable to human explanation.

**Whatever can be explained is, for Hegel, explained by reference to the need which it fulfils, which, when the fulfilling is conscious, is what is meant by calling it the activity of the Spirit. But to explain it in this way is to justify it: for what is it to justify anything but to show it to be conducive to some end, moral or aesthetic, individual or social? The laws of history are the self-fulfilment of the rational Spirit, and to say of anything that is rational is therefore to say only that it accords with the Spirit's activity (A137).** The [61] Spirit approaches its perfection by gradually attaining to greater self-consciousness with every generation: and the highest point of its development is reached in those who at any time see themselves most clearly in their relation to their universe, that is, in the profoundest philosophers of every epoch. By philosophers are meant the artists and the thinkers, the scientists and the poets, all those sensitive and inquiring spirits who are more acutely and more profoundly conscious than the rest of their society of the stage of development which humanity has reached, of what has been gained in their time and partly by their effort.

The history of philosophy is the history of the growth of this self-awareness, in which the spirit becomes conscious of its own activity; and the history of humanity, on this view, is itself nothing other than the story of the progress of the spirit in the process of its growing self-awareness. All history is thus the history of thought, that is, the history of philosophy: which is identical with the philosophy of history, since that is but a name for the awareness of this awareness. The celebrated Hegelian epigram, 'the philosophy of history is the history of philosophy,' is, for anyone who accepts the Hegelian metaphysic, not an obscure paradox, but a platitude, quaintly expressed – with the important and peculiar corollary that all true progress is progress of the Spirit,<sup>23</sup> since that

<sup>23</sup> **All true progress is progress of thought (A139)**

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is the substance of which all else is compounded. Hence the sole method by which those who have the good of society at heart can improve it, is by developing in themselves and their environment, an activity later called criticism, the growth of which is identical with human progress. From this it follows that changes involving physical violence and bloodshed are due solely to the recalcitrance of brute matter, which, as Leibnitz had taught, is itself but thought, at a lower, unconscious level. The revolution instituted by Newton was there[62]fore far more truly a revolution than events which are commonly so called, although it occurred with no bloodshed; all genuine conquest, all true victory is literally, and not in metaphor, gained always in the realm of the Spirit. Thus the French Revolution was in effect over, when the philosophers had completed their systems, long before the guillotine began its work.

This doctrine appeared to solve at last the great problem which vexed men's minds throughout the early nineteenth century; the question to which all its leading political theories are so many different answers. The French Revolution had been made in order to secure liberty, equality and fraternity among men; it was the greatest attempt in modern history to embody a wholly new revolutionary ideology in concrete institutions by the violent and successful seizure of power on the part of the ideologues themselves: and it failed utterly to secure its end. It changed the face of Europe, but its purpose, the establishment of human freedom and equality, was as remote from realisation as ever. What answer was there to those who, bitterly disillusioned, fell into cynical apathy, proclaiming the impotence of good over evil, of truth over falsehood, affirming the total inability of mankind to improve its lot by its own efforts. To this problem, with which the social thought of the period of political reaction in Europe is wholly preoccupied, Hegel provided an impressive solution by his doctrine of the inevitable character of the historical process, which involves the predestined failure of any attempt to deflect it by violence, even when the attempt is itself historically necessitated, a view directly opposed to the rival hypothesis then being advanced in France by Saint-Simon and Fourier.

Marx, whose natural bent was empirical, and whose early education was rationalistic at first, found this intellectual climate uncongenial, but its influence was evidently irresistible: within three months he fell under its spell, and for the rest of his life

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remained the most faithful, if the most rebellious of the disciples of the great metaphysician. Law and the philosophy of history were the subjects to which he applied the Hegelian method of interpreting evidence, and of synthesising its results. It seemed to him the only method which was at once comprehensive and scientific: everything that he subsequently learned and accepted as true he subjected to this discipline and expressed it in terms of it: consequently, it is Hegelianism, far more than any other single characteristic, which distinguishes Marxism from other forms of contemporary socialism, a form which cannot be divorced from the substance without altering it. Marx became an orthodox Hegelian at the age of nineteen, a critical member of the movement six months later and finally after a year in Paris, developed independent views which led to a complete break with the official school early in 1843.

**By the time he was thirty, the process of intellectual ferment was over. He had created and elaborated his own original doctrine, and provided himself with colossal intellectual resources for its defence. He possessed a prodigious industry and an unparalleled capacity for continuous reading, as one of his bitterest enemies was later to remark, not only copiously but intelligently; he had an astonishing gift for rapid assimilation of new material, for the immediate perception of the direct relevance of new information to his own mature or half-formed beliefs; no one has ever rivalled him in the faculty of rapidly co-ordinating and systematising unwieldy masses of recalcitrant matter and transforming them into an immediate instrument of war. By the time *The Communist Manifesto* was published, early in 1848, his views had become completely set, rigorously organised in a Hegelian framework, and inconceivable without it. Rejection of the Hegelian method involves the rejection of the particular form of political and social faith professed by Marx. (A65–74)**

The problem of social freedom, and of the causes of the failure to attain it, is therefore quite naturally the central subject of all Marx's early writings. His approach to the problem and his solution are in [63] spirit purely Hegelian. His early training and his natural instincts inclined him towards an extreme empiricism: and the modes of thought which belong to this outlook are sometimes

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visible below the metaphysical accretions beneath which they are for the most part concealed. This emerges most clearly in his passion for exposing irrationalism in every shape and guise; often in his argument he uses the methods of eighteenth-century materialism: but the form in which it is expressed, and the theses it is designed to prove are wholly Hegelian. He was converted to the new outlook in his youth and for many years, despite his vehement attack on the idealist metaphysic, remained a convinced, consistent and admiring follower of the great philosopher. [64]

## CHAPTER IV

### THE YOUNG HEGELIANS

They [the Germans] will never rise. They would sooner die than rebel ... perhaps even a German, when he has been driven to absolute despair, will cease to argue, but it needs a colossal amount of unspeakable oppression, insult, injustice and suffering to reduce him to that state.

Mikhail Bakunin

The years which Marx spent as a student in the University of Berlin were a period of profound depression among the radical intelligentsia of Germany. In 1840 a new king from whom much was expected had ascended the throne of Prussia. Before his accession he had spoken more than once of a natural alliance of patriotism, democratic principles<sup>24</sup> and the monarchy; he had spoken of granting a new, **more democratic (A146)** constitution; ecstatic references began to appear in the liberal press to Don Carlos and The Crowned Romantic. These promises came to less than nothing. The new monarch was no less reactionary, but astuter and less bound by routine than his father; the methods of suppression employed by his police were more imaginative and more efficient than those in used in the days of Frederick William III; otherwise his accession made little difference. *There was no sign of reform, either political or social; the July Revolution in France, which was greeted with immense enthusiasm by German radicals, had merely caused Metternich to set up a central commission to suppress dangerous thought in all German lands, a measure zealously welcomed by the Prussian landowning gentry, whose continued power paralysed every effort towards freedom.* The governing class did all that was in its power to obstruct – it could not entirely suppress – the growing class of industrialists and bankers, which, even in backward and docile Prussia, began to show unmistakable signs of restiveness. Open repression in the press or at public meetings was unthinkable: the official censorship was far too efficient and too ubiquitous; *the Diet was packed with the King's supporters*; the gathering feeling of resentment against the

<sup>24</sup> **liberalism (A146)**

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landlords and officials, increased by the growing sense of its own strength on the part of the middle class, **seeking to find some outlet, with leaders too weak and too irresolute to take social or political action, (A147)** finally poured itself out in the traditional form of German self-expression, in a flood of words, **a vast abstract system (A148)**, a philosophy of opposition.

If orthodox Hegelianism was a reactionary movement, the answer of wounded German nationalism to the French attempt to impose its new principle of universal reason upon the world – **taking the form of awakened nationalism and traditionalism, a reactionary force drawing inspiration from the past, perceiving in all reforms an artificial attempt to pervert the course of natural development in the name of arbitrary and abstract principles – (A148)** the secession of its younger members represents an effort to find some progressive interpretation for the formulae of natural development, to detach the Hegelian philosophy from its preoccupation with past history and to identify it with the future, to adapt it to the new social and economic factors which were everywhere coming into being. Both camps, the right and the left, the old and, as they came to be called, the Young Hegelians, based themselves on their founder's famous dictum, according to which the real is the rational and the rational is the real. Both agreed that this was to be interpreted as meaning that the true explanation of any phenomenon was equivalent to the demonstration of its necessity, which was tantamount to its rational justification; **that to account for a historical event was to analyse it as the self-expression in time of the Absolute Idea; that rational approval and rational condemnation were not an expression of subjective feeling, nor could they be analysed in terms of conduciveness to individual or social happiness, in the empirical, psychological, sense of that notion used by the English and French Utilitarians. Discovery of an objective fact that was approved was a case of historical necessity, while what was condemned was obsolete and doomed by history to extinction. (A149)** Nothing could be both evil and necessary. **If it was necessary, it was made so by the growth in self-consciousness of the Idea: this was its reason as well as its cause. All natural causes, upon profound inspection, reveal themselves as reasons, the reasons not of individuals, indeed,**

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but of the impersonal Idea which governs our destinies. To condemn anything so caused as evil is at once childish subjectivism – an attempt to judge history by arbitrary standards – and ultimately a contradiction in terms: such phrases as ‘the logic of history’ or ‘the logic of the facts’ were not metaphors or empty clichés, but expressions with literal significance, for indeed there can ultimately be no other logic than this. The logic of a specific individual’s thought or language is a derived phenomenon, a case of the cosmic structure attaining self-consciousness in the individual’s mind. (A151–2) Whatever is real is justified because it is real: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht* (‘world history is world justice’). So much was accepted by both sides. The schism arose over the relative emphasis to be placed on the crucial terms, ‘rational’ and ‘real’.

The conservatives, proclaiming that only the real was [66] rational, declared that the measure of rationality was actuality, that the stage reached by social or personal institutions, as they existed at any given moment, was the sufficient measure of their excellence; so, for example, German culture as Hegel had in fact declared, was a higher and probably ultimate, synthesis of its predecessors, Oriental and Graeco-Roman cultures, and its own highest culmination, the most perfect political framework yet attained by men<sup>25</sup>, consisted, as Hegel had gone on to say, in the Prussian State. To wish to alter it or subvert it was morally bad, because directed against the rational will embodied in it, and in any case futile, because it set itself against a decision already made by history. *This is a form of argument with which Marxism later familiarised the world.*

The radicals, stressing the converse, protested that only the rational was real. The actual, they insisted, is often full of inconsistencies, anachronisms and blind unreason: it cannot therefore be regarded in any genuine, that is metaphysical, sense, as being real. Basing themselves on numerous texts from Hegel, they pointed out that the master recognised that mere occurrence in space or time was by no means equivalent to being real: the existent might well be a tissue of chaotic institutions, each frustrating the purposes of the other, and so from the

<sup>25</sup> Attained by human society (A153)

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metaphysical point of view utterly illusory: their degree of reality was measured by their tendency to form a rational whole, which may necessitate a radical transformation on their part in accordance with the dictates of reason.<sup>26</sup> These are best known to those who have been emancipated themselves from the tyranny of the merely actual, and have revealed its inadequacy to its historic role as deduced from a correct interpretation of the character and direction of the past and present. This critical activity against *the social institutions of his time, directed by the individual who lifts himself above them*, is the noblest function of man, [67] and the more enlightened the critic, the more searching his criticism, the more rapidly will the actual progress towards the real. For, as Hegel had indubitably said, reality is spiritual in character and grows more perfect in the very growth of critical self-consciousness among men. Nor was there any reason to suppose that such progress must be gradual and painless. Citing again the texts undeniably to be found in Hegel, they reminded their opponents that progress was the result of tension between opposites, which grew to a crisis and then burst into open revolution: then and only then did the leap into the next stage occur. These were the laws of development found equally in the obscurest processes of brute nature and the affairs of men and societies.

The plain duty of the philosopher who carries the burdens of civilisation on his shoulders is, therefore, to promote such revolution by the special technical skill which he alone commands, that is by intellectual warfare. It is his task to stir men from their indolence and torpor, to sweep away obstructive and useless institutions, **and their ossified guardians (A155)**, with the aid of his critical weapons much as the French philosophers had undermined the *ancien regime* by the power of ideas alone. No resort must be had either to physical violence or *to the brute force of the masses: to appeal to the mob, which represents the lowest level of self-consciousness reached by the Spirit among men*, is to make use of irrational means, which could only produce irrational consequences: a revolution of ideas will of itself bring about a revolution in practice: *Hinter die Abstraktion stellt sich die Praxis von selbst* (Behind the abstract theory practice appears of its own accord). But since

<sup>26</sup> **the reality which lay beneath them was their tendency to form a rational hold which can express itself only in the form of a radical change in the form of the dictates of reason. (A154)**

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open political pamphleteering was forbidden, **by the Commission for the Suppression of Dangerous Thought, set up under the influence of Metternich, to stem the new tides of radicalism of the thirties (A156)**, the opposition was driven into less direct methods of attack: the first battles against orthodoxy were fought in the field of Christian theology, whose professors had hitherto tolerated, if not encouraged, a philosophy which had shown every dis[68]position to support the existing order. In 1835 David Strauss published a critical life of Jesus written in accordance with the new Hegelian method, **which was for the first time applied, not to justify but to openly destroy (A157)** in which he rejected some portions of the Gospels as pure invention, regarding others as representing not facts but semi-mythological beliefs entertained in the early Christian communities, and treating the whole subject as an exercise in the critical treatment of *a historically important but unreliable text*. His book caused an immediate storm not in orthodox circles only, but also among the Young Hegelians, whose most prominent representative, Bruno Bauer, then a lecturer in theology in the University of Berlin, published several attacks upon it from the point of view of an even extremer Hegelianism, wholly denying the historical existence of Jesus, and attempting to explain the Gospels as works of pure imagination, as the literary expression of the 'ideology' prevalent in its time, the highest point reached at this period by the development of the Absolute Idea.<sup>27</sup> The Prussian authorities were not in general interested in sectarian controversies among philosophers, but in this quarrel both sides appeared to hold views subversive of religious, and so, in all likelihood, of political orthodoxy. Hegelianism, which had previously been left in peace as a harmless, and even patriotic, philosophical movement, was suddenly accused of demagogical tendencies. *Hegel's greatest opponent, Schelling, then a bitterly reactionary old man, was brought to Berlin in order to refute these doctrines publicly, but his lectures totally failed to produce the desired result.* The censorship was tightened, and the Young Hegelians found themselves driven into a position in which they were given the choice of capitulating completely or of moving farther to the political left than the

<sup>27</sup> the particular level reached at this period by the self-development of the Absolute Idea.

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majority wished to go<sup>28</sup>. The only arena where the issue could be still raised were the universities, where a curtailed, but nevertheless genuine, academic freedom continued to [69] survive. The University of Berlin was the chief seat of Hegelianism and it was not long before Marx became immersed in its philosophical politics.

He began his academic career as a student of the faculty of law by attending Savigny's lectures on jurisprudence and those of Gans on criminal law. **In other countries, it is conceivable that lectures on law would operate at a sufficient distance from the burning issues of the moment to insulate the assiduous student at any rate for a time, from contemporary politics. This was far from being the case in Berlin. (A159-60)** Savigny, the founder and the greatest theorist of the Historical School of Jurisprudence, and a convinced and rabid anti-liberal, was by far the most distinguished defender of Prussian absolutism in the nineteenth century. He was not a Hegelian in the strict sense, but **he was a romantic in the strict sense (A160), and** agreed with the School in rejecting equally the theory of natural rights and of utilitarianism, and interpreted law historically, as a continuous, orderly, traditional development springing from, and justified by, the ideals and character of a given nation in its historical surroundings.

**By a strange transference of terminology, classicism is the name given in our day to the doctrine which involves the rejection of all abstract, timeless, criteria and the valuation of everything by its conformity to a traditional 'line' which continues unbroken from age to age though sometimes it is driven underground and it needs elaborate historical sense and sensibility to denote its direction. It was Savigny who created the theoretical foundations of the Christian German State, which until recently, played so prominent a part in German history and he who induced the new king soon after his accession, to invite Schelling, then a bitter old man, to lecture in Berlin, and publicly refute the evidently dangerous doctrines of Hegel, lectures which failed in their purpose and cause no stir, and served only to fill Bauer and his friends**

<sup>28</sup> Moving farther to the political left than they temperamentally were inclined to go. (A159)

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**with a more buoyant confidence in the future by allying morose old age with a reactionary cause. (A163–5)**

Marx attended Savigny's lectures for two terms with great regularity, and the immense erudition and power of close historical argument for which the latter was notable was probably Marx's first contact with the new method of historical research, which demanded minute knowledge of facts as a basis for broad general theses. Savigny's chief professional opponent was the professor of criminal law, Eduard Gans, whose effect on Marx was more considerable. Gans was one of Hegel's favourite disciples: he was by birth a Jew, a friend of Heine, and like him a humanitarian radical<sup>29</sup> who did not share his teacher's low opinion of the French enlightenment. His lectures, models, it seems, both of **eloquence (A165)**, erudition and of courage, were widely attended; his free criticism of legal institutions and methods of legislation in the light of reason, with no trace of mysticism about the past, affected Marx profoundly, and inspired him with a conception of the proper purpose and method of theoretical criticism which he never completely lost.

Under the influence of Gans he saw in jurisprudence the natural field for the application and verification of [70]every type of philosophy of history. **He still at this time instinctively recoiled from the peculiar mysticism and obscure rhetoric of neo-Hegelianism: he was determined to elude this influence and attempted to invent an answer of his own: After some months of feverish composition he found the temptation too strong for him. He seems to have all the works of Hegel at a single gulp. (A164)** Hegelianism at first repelled his naturally positivist intelligence. In a long and intimate letter to his father, **giving a coloured description of his titanic intellectual struggle, he announced his official capitulation (A165)** *He described his efforts to construct a rival system; after sleepless nights and disordered days spent in wrestling with the adversary, he fell ill and left Berlin to recuperate. He returned with a sense of failure and frustration, equally unable to work or to rest. His father wrote him a long paternal letter, begging him not to waste his time on barren metaphysical speculation when he had his career to think of. His words fell on deaf ears. Marx resolutely plunged into an exhaustive study of Hegel's work, read night and day, and after three weeks*

<sup>29</sup> a humanitarian liberal (A165)

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*announced his complete conversion.* He sealed it by becoming a member of the *Doktorclub* (graduates' club), an association of free-thinking university intellectuals, who met in beer cellars, wrote mildly seditious verse, professed violent hatred of the King, the church, the bourgeoisie, and above all argued endlessly on points of Hegelian theology. **This circle was his first introduction to systematic social agitation (A165).** Here he met, and was soon on terms of intimacy with the leading members of this bohemian group, the brothers Bruno, Edgar and Egbert Bauer, **Rutenberg, a radical journalist (A165)**, Köppen, a curious figure, one of the earliest students of Tibetan lamaism and the author of a history of the French Terror<sup>30</sup>, Max Stirner who preached an ultra-individualism of his own, and one or two more free spirits, as they called themselves.

**The merits of the newcomer were soon recognised: he cease attending lectures, lived more socially and more gaily (A168).** He abandoned his legal studies, and became entirely absorbed in philosophy. No other subject seemed to him to possess sufficient contemporary significance: he planned to become a lecturer in philosophy in one of the universities, and together with Bauer to launch a violent atheistic campaign which should put an end to the timorous, half-hearted toying with dangerous doctrines to which the milder radicals confined themselves. It was to take the form of an elaborate hoax<sup>31</sup>, appearing as an anonymous diatribe against Hegel by a pious [71] Lutheran charging him with atheism and subversion of public order and morality, and armed with copious quotations from the original text. This joint work actually appeared and caused some stir; a few reviewers were genuinely taken in, but the authors were discovered, and the episode ended by Bauer's removal from his academic post. *As for Marx, he frequented social and literary salons, met the celebrated Bettina von Arnim, the friend of Beethoven and Goethe, who was attracted by his audacity and wit;* wrote a conventional philosophical dialogue, and composed a fragment of a Byronic tragedy, **called 'Oulanem' (A169)** and several volumes of bad verse, which he dedicated to Jenny von Westphalen, to whom he

<sup>30</sup> **Author of a work on the French revolution in which the Terror is passionately defended, and a devoted admirer of the free-thinking independent Frederick the Great. (A166)**

<sup>31</sup> **It was to take the form of a diatribe. (A168)**

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had in the meantime become secretly engaged. His father, frightened by this intellectual dissipation, wrote letter after letter full of anxious and affectionate advice, begging him to think of the future and prepare himself to be a lawyer or a civil servant. His son sent soothing answers, and continued in his previous mode of life. **Marx preserved his devotion to his father all his life: for his mother he seems neither to have affection or respect then or later his brothers or sister meant little to him: the memory of his father was bound up for him with romantic recollection of his youth and an affectionate and tolerant domestic existence and a wide, human and generous culture which even in later years, he never brought himself wholly to despise (A170).**

He was now twenty-four years of age, an amateur philosopher of no fixed occupation, respected in advanced circles for his erudition and for his powers as an ironical and bitter controversialist; **who relied on an accumulation of quotations and facets and the power of irony and of logical arguments (A170).** He soon began to be increasingly irritated by the prevailing literary and philosophical style of his friends and allies, an extraordinary compound of pedantry and arrogance, full of obscure paradoxes and laboured epigrams, embedded in elaborate, alliterative, punning prose which can never have been intended to be understood. Marx was to some extent infected by it himself, particularly in his early polemical pieces; yet his prose is compact and luminous in comparison with the mass of neo-Hegelian patter which at this time was let loose upon the German public.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> **He was beginning to react adversely to the prevailing style of his friends and philosophical allies- an odd mixture of vague, clumsy, inflated phraseology, full of infinitely elaborated allusions and alliterations and ponderous fun at the expense of of obscurely indicated books and persons, ending with a prescribed type of peroration, the whole written with soaring rhetoric and sudden appeals to the emotions. Neither at that nor at any later time was Marx entirely free from this jargon: particularly in the philosophical and polemical portions of his early work: nor have later generations omitted to stress this fact. Yet his prose is compact and luminous in comparison with the fantastic productions of the majority of the Epigoni of Hegel-of the brothers Bruno and Edgar Bauer, of Meyer and max Stirner, even of the comparatively intelligible Ruge- a style which died with the collapse of German radicalism in the revolution of 1848-1849, and**

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Marx's polemical work directed against his former friends, 'The Holy Family' aimed at the Baueurs and 'St Max', an onslaught on Stirner which he published as well as the rest of the immense work on the 'German ideology' of which they formed a part, are written in the same esoteric idiom. Later he developed a bitter hatred for it: *The Communist Manifesto*, the pamphlet on Napoleon III, composed not long afterwards, are written in a very different style, in swift epigrammatic periods, full of passion and of wit, whose brilliance has not been dimmed by the passage of time; works of great artistic skill, they are still as works of propaganda unequalled by anything to be found in the later literature of socialism. (A174)

*Some years later he described the condition of German philosophy at this time:*

*According to the reports of our ideologists [he wrote], Germany has, during the last decade, undergone a revolution [72] of unexampled proportions ... a revolution in comparison with which the French Revolution was mere child's play. With unbelievable rapidity one empire was supplanted by another, one mighty hero was struck down by another still bolder and more powerful in the universal chaos. During three years, from 1842 to 1845, Germany went through a cataclysm more violent in character than anything which had happened in any previous century. All this, it is true, took place only in the region of pure thought. For we are dealing with a remarkable phenomenon – the decomposition of the Absolute Spirit.*

*When the last spark of life disappeared from its body, its various constituents disintegrated and entered into new combinations and formed new substances. Dealers in philosophy, who had previously made a living by exploiting the Absolute Spirit, now threw themselves avidly on the new combinations. Each busily began to dispose of his share of it. Plainly this could not be done without competition. At first it possessed a solidly commercial, respectable character; but later when the German market became glutted, and the world market, in spite of all efforts, proved incapable of assimilating further goods, the whole business – as usual in Germany – was spoilt by mass production, lowering of quality, adulteration of raw material, forged labels, fictitious deals, financial chicanery, and a structure of credit which lacked all real basis. Competition turned into an embittered struggle, which is now represented to us in glowing colours as a revolution of cosmic significance, rich in epoch-making achievements and results.*

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which makes the literature of that period virtually unreadable in the present. (A170-A174)

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This was written in 1846: in 1841 Marx might perhaps have continued to live in this fantastic world, himself taking part in the inflation and mass production of words and concepts, if his circumstances had not suffered a sudden catastrophic change: his father, on whom he [73] financially depended, died, leaving a barely sufficient competence to his widow and youngest children. At the same time, the Prussian Minister of Education finally decided to condemn the Hegelian Left officially, and expelled Bauer from his post, **transferring him from Berlin to the comparative backwater of the University of Bonn, and soon afterwards, expelled him outright for blasphemy (A177)**. This effectually closed the possibility of an academic career to Marx who was heavily compromised in the Bauer affair, and forced him to look for another occupation. He did not have long to wait. Among his warmest admirers was a certain Moses Hess, a Jewish publicist from Cologne, a sincere and enthusiastic radical, who was even then far in advance of even the Hegelian Left.<sup>33</sup> He had visited Paris and had there met the leading French socialist and communist writers of the day, to whose views he became a passionate convert.

**The tradition of Communism in France which proceeded in an uninterrupted line from the materialists of the previous century and early socialism through the twin channels of the evolutionist doctrines of St. Simon and Fourier and the revolutionary pragmatism of Babeuf and his fellow conspirators, had produced a particularly fertile crop of socialist tracts and utopian schemes for the re-generation of making in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century: a book had been published in Germany giving a full account of these doctrines by Lorenz Stein, which however, had little immediate effect, but (A178–9) Hess, who was a curious blend of ardent traditional Judaism with idealist humanitarianism and Hegelian ideas, returned from France, a zealous Communist of the French type, and (A179) preached the primacy of economic over political factors and the impossibility of emancipating mankind without previously liberating the wage-earning proletariat. Its continued slavery, he declared, made all the efforts of**

<sup>33</sup> a man of exceptionally pure personal character, and passionate political enthusiasm. (A178)

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intellectuals to establish a new moral world unavailing, since justice cannot exist in a society which tolerates economic inequality. *The institution of private property was the source of all evil; men could be freed only by the abolition of both private and national property, which must involve the removal of national frontiers, and the reconstitution of a new international society on a rational, collectivist economic basis.* His meeting with Marx overwhelmed him: in a letter to a fellow radical he declared: *'He is the greatest, perhaps the one genuine philosopher now alive and will soon ... draw the eyes of all Germany ... Dr Marx – that is my idol's name – is still very young (about twenty-four at most) and will give medieval religion and politics their coup de grâce. He combines the deepest philosophical seriousness with the most biting wit. Imagine Rousseau, [74] Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine and Hegel fused into one person – I say fused, not thrown together in a heap – and you have Dr Marx.'*

Marx thought Hess's enthusiasm endearing but ridiculous, and adopted a patronising tone which Hess was at first too amiable to resent. Hess was a middleman of ideas, a fervent missionary rather than an original thinker, and converted more than one of his contemporaries to communism, among them a young radical named Friedrich Engels who had not at this time met Marx. Both learnt from association with him far more than either was ready to admit in later years, when they tended to treat Hess, who was not a man of action, as a harmless but tedious fool. At this time however, Marx found him a useful ally, since Hess, who was a tireless agitator **and a restless journalist (A182)**, had managed to persuade a group of liberal industrialists in the Rhineland to finance the publication of a radical journal which should contain articles on political and economic subjects directed against the reactionary policy of the Berlin government, and in general sympathy with the needs of the rising bourgeois class. It was issued at Cologne and was called the *Rheinische Zeitung*.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> **had managed to persuade a group of liberal industrialists in the Rhineland, to found an advanced organ which was called the *Rheinische Zeitung*. It was to be edited in Cologne, by a qualified publicist in broad sympathy with the needs of the bourgeoisie and was to contain articles on political and economic subjects, intended to do what could be done, within the limits of Prussian law, to dispel the prevailing Germany darkness on these subjects. (A182)**

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**The first editor was a moderate liberal, who soon found that his staff was too radical for him, He was replaced by Marx's friend Rutenberg; and (A182–3)** Marx was invited, and eagerly consented, to contribute regular articles to this journal; ten months later he became its chief editor. It was his first experience of practical politics: he conducted his paper with immense vigour and intolerance<sup>35</sup>: his dictatorial nature asserted itself early in the venture, and his subordinates were only too glad to let him do entirely as he pleased, and write as much of the paper as he wished. From a mildly liberal paper *it rapidly became a vehemently radical one*: more violently hostile to the Government, **which it attacked in no measured terms (A183)**, than any other German newspaper. It published long *and scurrilous* attacks on the Prussian censorship, on the Federal Diet, on the landowning class in general: its circulation rose, its fame grew through[75]out Germany, and the Government was at last forced to take notice of the surprising behaviour of the Rhineland bourgeoisie. The shareholders were, indeed, scarcely less surprised than the authorities, but as the number of subscribers was steadily increasing, and the economic policy pursued by the paper was scrupulously liberal, advocating free trade and the economic unification of Germany, they did not protest. The Prussian authorities, anxious not to irritate the newly annexed western provinces, also refrained from interference. Emboldened by this toleration, Marx intensified the attack and added to the discussion of general political and economic subjects two particular issues over which there was much bitter feeling<sup>36</sup> in the province: the first was the distressed condition of the Moselle vine-growing peasantry; the second, the harsh law punishing thefts by the poor of decayed timber in the neighbouring forests. Marx used both these as texts for a particularly violent indictment of the government of landlords. The Government, after cautiously exploring feeling in the district, decided to apply its power of censorship, and did so with increasing severity. Marx used all his ingenuity to circumvent the censors who were mostly men of limited intelligence, and managed to publish a quantity of thinly veiled democratic and republican propaganda, which more than

<sup>35</sup> **with immense rigour and ruthless method (A183)**

<sup>36</sup> **much indignation in the province (A184)**

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once led to the reprimand of the censor and his replacement by another and stricter official. The year 1842 was spent in this elaborate game, which might have continued indefinitely if Marx had not inadvertently overstepped the limit. **It was his customary editorial policy to publish attacks on (A185)** the Russian Government, which throughout the nineteenth century, served as the greatest embodiment<sup>37</sup> of obscurantism, barbarism and oppression in Europe, the inexhaustible reservoir whence the reactionaries of other nations were able to draw strength, and consequently became the bugbear of western liberals **and progressives (A186)** of all shades of opinion. It was at this time [76] the dominant partner in the Russo-Prussian alliance, and as *such was fiercely attacked by Marx in successive editorial articles: a war against the Russians seemed to him both then and later the best blow that could be struck on behalf of European liberty.* The Emperor Nicholas I himself happened to come upon a copy of one of these philippics, and expressed angry surprise to the Prussian Ambassador. A severe note was sent by the Russian Chancellor upbraiding the King of Prussia for the inefficiency of his censors. The Prussian Government, anxious not to irritate its powerful neighbour, took immediate steps; the *Rheinische Zeitung* was suppressed without warning in April 1843, and Marx was free once more. One year had sufficed to turn him into a brilliant political journalist of notorious views, with a fully developed taste for baiting reactionary governments, a taste which his later career was to give him full opportunity of satisfying.

Meanwhile he had been working with restless energy: he had taught himself French by reading the works of the Paris socialists, Fourier, Proudhon, Dézami, Cabet and Leroux. He read recent French and German history and Machiavelli's *Prince*. For a month he was absorbed in the histories of ancient and modern art in order to gather evidence to demonstrate the revolutionary and disruptive character of Hegel's fundamental principles; like the young Russian radicals of this period he looked upon them as being in Herzen's phrase, 'the algebra of revolution'. 'Too frightened to apply them openly,' wrote Herzen, 'in the storm-tossed ocean of politics, the old philosopher set them afloat in the tranquil inland lake of aesthetic theory.' Marx's view of their

<sup>37</sup> symbol (A186)

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proper interpretation had lately been affected, however, by a book which had appeared during that year – the *Theses on the Hegelian Philosophy*, by Ludwig Feuerbach, which Ruge had sent him to be reviewed.

Feuerbach is one of those authors, not infrequently [77] met with in the history of thought, who, mediocrities themselves, nevertheless happen to provide men of genius with the sudden spark which sets on fire the long-accumulated fuel<sup>38</sup>. His own contribution to philosophy is jejune and uninspired, but he was a materialist, at a time when Marx was reacting violently against the subtleties of the decadent idealism in which he had been immersed during the past five years, **and fast developing his own scholasticism (A192)**. Feuerbach's simpler style, for all its woodenness and perhaps because of it, seemed suddenly to open a window into the real world. The neo-Hegelian scholasticism of the Bauers and their disciples suddenly seemed to him like a heavy nightmare which had but lately lifted, and the last memories of which he was determined to shake off.

**In his most celebrated work, 'The essence of Christianity', Feuerbach seemed to him to give an answer to the question that everyone was asking: what is the cause of change, the dynamic factor in history, an answer in the light of which the orthodox Hegelian doctrine began to seem not merely false but meaningless. Like the majority of his contemporaries, he wrote and thought of past and present events as caused principally by the motives, intentions and volitions of individuals or groups of individuals: doubtless there were occasions on which external catastrophes, great floods or earthquakes, fundamentally altered the history of a community independently of human wished. This occurred sufficiently seldom to be discounted: the environment was relatively static, and the factor of change came from man himself. (A193–4)**

Hegel had asserted that the thoughts and acts of men who belong to the same period of a given culture, are determined by the working in them of an identical spirit which manifests itself in

<sup>38</sup> which sets on fire the long-accumulated timber (A192).

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all the phenomena of the period <sup>39</sup>; **and a fixed recurrent pattern can be discovered in the history of human culture; so that armed with sufficient information about its character at a given period and with the general scheme as an**

**instrument of research, the past at any rate, if not the future, can be approximate deduced, as the whole pattern of carpet from a section of it, or as Leuvier had reconstructed, a skeleton from the bone of a single toe: empirical evidence would necessarily corroborate what had thus been discovered a priori (A194–5).** Feuerbach vehemently rejected this. ‘What,’ he inquired in effect, ‘is the spirit of an age or a culture other than a compendious name for the totality of the phenomena which compose it?, **or at the very least, the qualities common to them, or some common pattern into which they fit**’ To say, therefore, that the phenomena were determined to be what they were by it, was to assert that they were determined by the totality of themselves, – the emptiest and silliest of tautologies. Nor was the case improved, he went on to point out, by substituting for this totality the concept of a pattern, for patterns cannot cause events: a pattern was a form, an attribute of events, which could themselves be caused only by other events. The Greek genius, the Roman character, the spirit of the Renaissance, the spirit of the French Revolution, what were these but abstractions, labels to describe compendiously a given complex of qualities and historical events, general terms invented by men for their own convenience, but in no sense real objective inhabitants of the [78] world, capable of effecting this or that alteration in human affairs. The older view according to which it is the decision and action of individuals that is responsible for change was fundamentally less absurd: for individuals at least exist and act in a sense in which general notions and common names do not. Hegel had rightly stressed the inadequacy of this view because it failed to give an explanation of how the total result emerged from the interplay of a colossal number of individual lives and acts, and showed genius in looking for some single common force responsible for giving a definite direction to these wills, some general law in virtue of which history can be made a systematic account of the progress of whole

<sup>39</sup> **are so closely interconnected, as to be properly regarded as the expression in many spheres of an identical spirit, which manifests itself in all the phenomena of the period. (A192)**

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societies; **instead of a haphazard collection of records of individual lives. Hegel saw what kind of method and what kind of presuppositions in general historians must use if their subject is to be a science, but when it came to finding a specific answer (A197)**, in the end he failed to be rational, and ended in an obscure mysticism; for the Hegelian Idea, if it was not a tautological re-formulation of what it is intended to explain, was but a disguised name for the personal God of Christianity, and so lifted the subject beyond the confines of rational discussion.<sup>40</sup>

Feuerbach's next step was to declare that the motive force of history was not spiritual, but the sum of material conditions at any given time which determine the men who lived in them to think and act as they did. Their material distress caused them, however, to seek solace in an immaterial ideal world, where as a reward for the unhappiness of their lives on earth, they would enjoy eternal bliss hereafter. If this illusion was to be exposed, it must be analysed in terms of the material maladjustments which give rise to it. **In this respect, he returned to the materialism of the eighteenth century: indeed he took up a position which differs little from that of La Mettrie, save that he took humanity and not the individual as his unit, an entity in itself in no way as impalpable as Hegel's society, which is more real than its members, concerning which however, he held rigorously materialistic and deterministic views (A198)**. Like Holbach and the author of *L'Homme Machine*, Feuerbach's hatred of transcendentalism often led him to seek for the crudest and simplest explanation in purely physical terms. *Der Mensch ist was er isst* (Man is what he eats) is his own Hegelian caricature of his doctrine: human history is the history of the decisive influence of physical environment on men in society; therefore knowledge of physical laws alone can make Man master of these [79] forces by enabling him to adapt his life consciously to them.

His **Hegelian (A199)** materialism, and in particular his theory that all 'ideologies' whether religious or secular are often an attempt to provide ideal compensation for real miseries, produced an immense effect both on Marx and on Engels, as it later did on Lenin, who read it during his Siberian exile. Feuerbach's treatise is

<sup>40</sup> **for the Hegelian idea, if it is not a tautological repetition of what it is intended to explain is an entity wholly opaque alike to reason and to empirical observation. (A197)**

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a badly written, unhistorical, naïve book, yet after the absurdities of the unbridled Hegelianism of the thirties, its very *terre à terre* quality must have seemed refreshingly sane. Marx, who was still a liberal and an idealist at this period, was roused by it from his dogmatism. **It strengthened his belief that history moved in discontinuous leaps, that events accumulated to a crisis: he still believed that the decision of governments and rulers were decisive to the careers of their subjects: but he was no longer certain as to what he brought about these decisions themselves (A199–200).** The Hegelian Idea had turned out to be a meaningless expression, **and the old antipathy to transcendental solutions of empirical problems, which he had felt in his first years as a student in Berlin, now appeared in a more articulate form. He Believed the decisive factor to be material: but he was certainly at this stage, as the style of his attack on Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' shows, far from clear was to what was meant by this. (A200)** Hegel now seemed to him to have built a specious edifice of words about words and one which it was the duty of his generation, armed with the valuable Hegelian method, to replace by symbols denoting real objects in time and space, in their observable empirical relations to each other. He still believed in the efficacy of the appeal to reason and was opposed to violent revolution. He was a dissident idealist, but an idealist still: a year previously he had obtained a doctor's degree in the University of Jena with a highly conventional **and almost worthless (A201)** thesis on the contrast between Democritus and Epicurus, both being viewed as precursors of Hegel. In it he defends a materialism far more obscure and nebulous than much of what he later himself condemned as typical idealist nonsense.

In April 1843 he married Jenny von Westphalen, against the strongly expressed wishes of the greater part of her family. this hostility only served to increase the passionate loyalty of the serious and profoundly romantic young woman: her existence had been transformed by the revelation to her of a new world by her husband, and she dedicated her whole being to his life and his work. It was an entirely happy marriage. [80] She loved, admired and trusted him, and was, emotionally and intellectually, entirely dominated by him. He leaned on her unhesitatingly in all times of crisis and disaster, remained all his life proud of her beauty, her

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birth and her intelligence. The poet Heine, who knew them well in Paris, paid eloquent tribute to her charm and wit. In later years when they were reduced to penury, she displayed great moral heroism in preserving intact the framework of a family and a household, which alone enabled her husband to continue his work **comparatively. The history of his subsequent life is not conceivable without her (A189).**

Together they decided to emigrate to France. He knew that he had an original contribution to make to the agitating questions of the day, and that in Germany it was impossible to speak openly on any serious topic **and without the risk of being deliberately misunderstood..** Nothing held him back: his father was dead, for his family he cared nothing. He had no fixed source of income in Germany. **It irked his stubborn and violent nature to have to submit to the humiliation of Government interference on the one hand and the pressure of frightened shareholders on the other. (A189)** For his old associates of Berlin, **he now felt something like open contempt (A189),** they now seemed to him to be a collection of intellectual mountebanks who wished to cover the poverty and confusion of their thoughts by violent language and scandalous private lives. All his life he detested two phenomena with peculiar passion: disorderliness of life, and every form of histrionic display. It seemed to him that Bohemianism and deliberate flouting of conventions was but inverted Philistinism, emphasising and paying homage to the same false values by exaggerated protest against them, and exhibited therefore the same fundamental vulgarity. Köppen he still respected, but lost all personal touch with him, and formed a new and tepid friendship with Arnold Ruge, a gifted Saxon journalist who edited a radical periodical to which Marx had contributed. Ruge was a pompous and irritable man, a discontented romantic, who after 1848 gradually became transformed into a reactionary nationalist. As a writer he had a wider outlook and surer taste than many of his fellow radicals in Germany, and appreciated the gifts of [81] greater men, such as Marx and Bakunin, with whom he came into contact. He saw no possibility of continuing his journal on German soil in the teeth of the censor and the Saxon police, and decided to establish it in Paris. He invited Marx to assist him in editing a new journal to be called *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*; Marx accepted the offer with alacrity. "The atmosphere here is

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really too intolerable and asphyxiating,' he wrote to Ruge in the summer of 1843. 'It is not easy to cringe even for the sake of liberty, armed with pins instead of a sword: I am tired of this hypocrisy and stupidity, of the boorishness of officials, I am tired of having to bow and scrape and invent safe and harmless phrases; **and so you see the Government has once more granted me my freedom (A202)**. In Germany there is nothing I can do ... in Germany one can only be false to oneself.' Marx left Prussian territory in November 1843, and two days later arrived in Paris. **During the time which he spent in that city, his outlook altered radically and for life. (A203)** His reputation had to some extent preceded him: at that date he was principally thought of as a liberal journalist with a mordant pen, who was forced to leave Germany because he had too violently advocated democratic reform<sup>41</sup>. Two years later he was known to the police of many lands as an uncompromising revolutionary communist, a sworn enemy of reformist liberalism, the notorious leader of a subversive movement with international ramifications. The years 1843-5 are the most decisive in his life: in Paris he underwent his final intellectual transformation. At the end of it he had arrived at a clear position personally and politically: the remainder of his life was devoted to its development and practical realisation.

<sup>41</sup> He arrived not without a certain reputation as a liberal German journalist with a mordant pen who had attacked the Prussian government in the columns of a provincial newspapers, and had too violently advocated moderate democratic reforms, and so like all democrats was forced sooner or later to leave his native land (A203).

## [82] CHAPTER V

### PARIS

‘The time will come when the sun will shine only upon a world of free men who recognise no master except their reason, when tyrants and slaves, priests, and their stupid or hypocritical tools, will no longer exist except in history or on the stage.’

CONDORCET

#### I

The social, political and artistic ferment of Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century is a phenomenon without parallel in European history. A remarkable concourse of poets, painters, musicians, writers, reformers and theorists had gathered in the French capital, which, under the comparatively tolerant monarchy of Louis Philippe, provided asylum to exiles and revolutionaries of many lands. Paris had long been notable for wide intellectual hospitality<sup>42</sup>; *the thirties and forties were years of profound political reaction in the rest of Europe*, and artists and thinkers in growing numbers flocked to the circle of light from the surrounding darkness, finding that in Paris they were neither, as in Berlin, bullied into conformity by the native civilisation, nor yet, as in London, left coldly to themselves, clustering in small isolated groups, but were welcomed freely and even enthusiastically, and given free entry into the artistic and social *salons* which had survived the years of monarchist restoration. The intellectual atmosphere in which these men talked and wrote was excited and idealistic. A common mood of passionate protest against the old order, against kings and tyrants, against the church and the army, above all against the uncomprehending Philistine masses, slaves and oppressors, enemies to life and the rights of the free human per[83]sonality, produced an exhilarating sense of emotional solidarity, which bound together this tumultuous and widely heterogeneous society. The emotions were intensely cultivated, individual feelings and beliefs were expressed in ardent phrases, revolutionary and humanitarian slogans were repeated with fervour by men who were prepared to stake their lives upon them; it was a decade

<sup>42</sup> It was at this date that Paris first acquired its reputation for wide intellectual hospitality (A204)

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during which a richer international traffic in ideas, theories, personal sentiments, was carried on than during any previous period; there were alive at this time, congregated in the same place, attracting, repelling and transforming each other, men of gifts more varied, more striking and more articulate than at any time since the Renaissance. Every year brought new exiles from the territories of the Emperor and the Tsar. Italian, Polish, Hungarian, Russian, German colonies thrived in the atmosphere of universal sympathy and admiration. Their members formed international committees, wrote<sup>43</sup> pamphlets, addressed assemblies, entered conspiracies, but above all talked and argued ceaselessly in private houses, in the streets, in cafés, at public banquets; the mood was exalted and optimistic.

The revolutionary writers and radical politicians were at the height of their hopes and power, their ideals not yet killed, nor the revolutionary phrases tarnished by the debacle of 1848. Such international solidarity for the cause of freedom had never before been achieved in any place: the poets and musicians, the historians and social theorists felt that they wrote not for themselves but for humanity. In 1830 a victory had been achieved over the forces of reaction. They continued to live on its fruits; the suppressed Blanquist conspiracy of 1839 had been ignored by the majority of romantic liberals as an obscure *émeute*, yet it was no isolated outbreak: for this seething and nervous artistic activity took place against a background of hectic financial and industrial progress accompanied by ruthless corruption, in which vast sudden fortunes were made and lost again in colossal bankruptcies<sup>44</sup>. A government of disillusioned realists was controlled by the new ruling class of great financiers and railway magnates, large industrialists who moved in a maze of intrigue and bribery, in which shady speculators and sordid adventurers controlled the economic destiny of France; the frequent riots of the industrial workers in the south indicate a state of turbulent unrest due as much to the unscrupulous behaviour of particular employers of labour, as to the industrial revolution which was transforming the country more rapidly and more brutally, although on a far smaller

<sup>43</sup> read pamphlets (A206)

<sup>44</sup> against a hectic background of ruthless social and economic progress and corruption in which vast sudden fortunes were made and lost again in monstrous bankruptcies. (A207)

## CHAPTER VI

scale, than in England. Acute social discontent, together with the universal recognition of the weakness and dishonesty of the Government, added to the general sense of crisis and transition, which made anything seem attainable to one who was sufficiently gifted, unscrupulous and energetic; it fed the imagination, and produced full-blooded, ambitious figures like those which occur in the pages of Balzac, and in Stendhal's unfinished novel, *Lucien Leuwen*, while the laxity of the censorship, and the tolerance exercised by the July monarchy, permitted that sharp and violent form of political journalism, sometimes rising to noble eloquence, which, at a time when printed words had a greater power to move, stirred the intellect and the passions, and served still further to intensify the already electric atmosphere. The memoirs and letters left by poets, painters, novelists, musicians – Musset, Heine, Delacroix, Wagner, Berlioz, Gautier, Herzen, Turgenev, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Liszt – convey something of the enchantment which surrounds those years marked by the acute and conscious sensibility and heightened vitality of a society full of genius, by a preoccupation with self-analysis, morbid indeed, but proud of its novelty and strength, by a sudden freedom from ancient fetters, a new sense of spaciousness, room in which to move and to create. By 1851 this mood was dead; but a great legend was created, which has survived to our own day, and has made Paris a symbol of revolutionary progress in its own and others' eyes.

Marx had not, however, come to Paris in quest of novel experience. He was a man of unemotional, even frigid nature, upon whom environment produced little effect, and who rather imposed his own unvarying form on any situation in which he found himself: he distrusted all enthusiasm, and in particular one which fed on gallant phrases. Unlike his compatriot, the poet Heine, or the Russian revolutionaries Herzen and Bakunin, he did not experience that sense of emancipation, which in ecstatic letters they proclaimed that they had found in this centre of all that was most admirable in European civilisation. He chose Paris rather than Brussels or some town in Switzerland for the more practical and specific reason that it seemed to him the most convenient place from which to issue the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, which was intended as much for the non-German as for the German public. Moreover, he still wished to find an answer to the question to which he had found no satisfactory solution either in the

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Encyclopaedists, or in Hegel, or in Feuerbach, or in the mass of political and historical literature which he consumed so rapidly and impatiently in 1843.<sup>45</sup> ultimately was responsible for the failure of the French Revolution? What fault of theory or of practice made the Directoire, the Empire, and finally the return of the Bourbons possible? What errors must be avoided<sup>46</sup> by those who half a century later still sought to discover the means of founding a free and just society? **The more general question, of which the other is a specific application is (A212)** Are there no laws which govern social change, knowledge of which might have saved the great revolution, **might have made possible the achievement of its ends (A212)?** The Encyclopaedists had doubtless grossly oversimplified human nature by representing it as capable of being [86] made overnight wholly rational and wholly good by enlightened education; **a truth scarcely borne out by the career and character of the Russian Emperor Alexander I who, in spite of having had as a tutor the highly enlightened La Harpe, had not merely failed to reform his own barbarian country but had actively entered in league with the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia to maintain and strengthen the principles of absolutism and reaction, becoming towards the end of his life a religious mystic.**

Nor was the problem brought nearer solution by the Hegelian answer that the revolution had failed because the Absolute Idea had not then reached the appropriate stage, since no criterion of appropriateness to this or that event was given, save the occurrence of the event itself;<sup>47</sup> nor did the substitution for the

<sup>45</sup> he wished to find an answer to the question which agitated him and his entire generation. The problem to which he wished to find an answer and to which he could find no satisfactory solution in the mass of political and historical literature which he consumer so rapidly and impatiently in 1844 had now assumed a double form: a specific and a general one which arose out of the former. (A211)

<sup>46</sup> what lessons were to be learned from this? (A212)

<sup>47</sup> As for the answer given by Hegel, it was too vague and too general and answer to the specific question. Certainly, those who wished to discover why the revolution failed to free humanity, at any rate the French nation, might be forgiven if they did not regard the Hegelian proposition that this occurred because the absolute

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orthodox answer of such new formulae as human self-realisation, or embodied reason, or critical criticism, appear to make it any more concrete, or indeed to add anything at all.

Faced with the question, Marx acted with characteristic thoroughness: he studied<sup>48</sup> the facts, and read the historical records of the revolution itself; and at the same time he plunged bravely into the colossal mass of literature written in France upon this and kindred questions, and with characteristic thoroughness accomplished both tasks within a year. His leisure, since his schooldays, had been mainly spent in reading, but the extent of his appetite in Paris surpassed all limits: *as in the days of his conversion to Hegelianism, faced with the necessity of exploring unknown doctrines in a foreign tongue (A214)* he read for nights and days in a kind of frenzy, filling endless notebooks with extracts, and abstracts, and lengthy comments on which he largely drew in his later writings. By the end of 1844 he had made himself familiar with the political and the economic doctrines of the leading French and English thinkers, examined them in the light of his own still semi-orthodox Hegelianism, and finally established his own position by sharply defining his attitude towards these two irreconcilable tendencies. **He had while still in Germany, and under the influence of his father, read Holbach, Helvetius and Diderot. (A215)** He read principally the economists, beginning the Quesnay and Adam Smith, and ending with Sismondi, Ricardo, Proudhon and their followers. Their lucid, cool, unsentimental style contrasted favourably with the confused emotionalism and rhetoric of the Germans; the combination of practical shrewdness **with great power of generalisation (A215)** and emphasis on empirical investigation, with bold and ingenious general [87] hypotheses, attracted Marx, **with his hatred of vagueness and the sentimentality of the romantics,** and strengthened **his ambition to be rigorously scientific (A215),** his natural tendency to avoid all forms of romanticism and accept only such naturalistic explanations of phenomena as could be supported by the evidence of scientific observation. The influence

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idea had not yet advanced so far as a wholly satisfactory answer to the question. (A212–3)

<sup>48</sup> collected (A214)

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of French socialist writers and English economists had begun to dispel the all-enveloping mist of Hegelianism.<sup>49</sup>

He compared the general condition of France with that of his own native land and was impressed by its infinitely higher level of intelligence and capacity for political thought: 'in France every class is tinged with political idealism,' he wrote in 1843, 'and feels itself a representative of general social needs ... whereas in Germany where practical life is unintelligent, and intelligence unpractical, men are driven to protest only by the material necessity, the actual chains themselves ... but revolutionary energy and self-confidence are not sufficient by themselves to enable a class to be the liberator of society – it must identify another class with the principle of oppression ... as in France the nobility and priesthood were identified. This dramatic tension is absent in German society ... there is only one class whose wrongs are not specific but those of the whole of society – the proletariat.' He declares that the Germans are the most backward of western peoples. The past of England and of France is faithfully mirrored in the German present: the real emancipation of the Germans, who stand to more advanced peoples as the proletariat to other classes, will necessarily entail the emancipation of the whole of European society from political and economic oppression.

But if he was impressed by the political realism of those writers, he was no less shocked by their lack of historical sense. This alone, it seemed to him, made possible their easy and shallow eclecticism, the remarkable unconcern with which they introduced modifications and additions into their systems with no apparent [88] intellectual discomfort. Such tolerance seemed to him to show a lack either of seriousness or of integrity. His own view was at all times clear cut and violent, and was deduced from premises which permitted of no vagueness in the conclusions; such intellectual elasticity, it seemed to him, could be due only to insufficient grasp of the rigorous framework of the historical process. The assumption made by the classical economists that the contemporary categories of political economy held good of all times and all places struck him as particularly absurd. As Engels later put it, 'the economists of the day speak as if Richard Coeur de

<sup>49</sup> There can be little doubt that the French materialists and the English economists completed Marx's emancipation from his earlier Hegelianism. (A216)

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Lion, had he only known a little economics, might have saved six centuries of bungling, by setting up free trade, instead of wasting his time on the crusades,' as if all previous economic systems were so many blundering approximations to capitalism, by the standards of which they must be classified and assessed. This inability to grasp the fact that every period can be analysed only in terms of concepts and categories peculiar to itself, is responsible for all Utopian socialism, all the elaborate schemes which turn out to be so many idealised versions of bourgeois or feudal society with the 'bad' aspects left out; whereas the question to ask is not what one would wish to happen, but what history will permit to happen, which tendencies in the present are destined to develop and which to perish; one must build solely in accordance with the results of this strictly empirical method of investigation.

Nevertheless Marx found their moral taste sympathetic. They, too, distrusted innate intuitions and appeals to sentiments which transcend logic and empirical observation: they, too, saw in this the last defence of reaction and irrationalism; they, too, were passionately anti-clerical and anti-authoritarian. Many of them held oddly outmoded<sup>50</sup> views about the **perfectibility of man (A217)**, the natural harmony of all human interests, or believed in the capacity of the individual freed from the interference of states [89] and monarchs to secure his own and others' happiness. Such views his Hegelian education had made wholly unacceptable; but in the last resort these men were the enemies of his enemies, ranged on the side of progress, fighters for the advance of reason.

## II

If Marx derived from Hegel his view of the structure – that is, the formal relations between the elements which comprise the process of human history, he obtained his knowledge of the elements themselves from Saint-Simon and his disciples, notably Thierry and Mignet. Saint-Simon was a thinker of bold and original views: he was the first writer to assert that the development of economic relationship is the determining factor in history – and to have done this in his day in itself constitutes a sufficient claim to immortality – and further to analyse the historical process as a continuous conflict between economic *classes*, between those who,

<sup>50</sup> naïve (A217)

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at any given period, are the possessors of the main economic resources of the community, **in virtue of which they automatically accumulate wealth, rank and power**, and those who lack this advantage and come to depend upon the former for their subsistence.<sup>51</sup> According to Saint-Simon, the ruling class is seldom sufficiently able or disinterested to make rational use of its resources, or to institute an order in which those most capable of doing so apply and increase the resources of the community, and those who lack this advantage and come to depend upon the former for this subsistence. According to Saint-Simon, the ruling class is seldom sufficiently able or disinterested to make rational use of its resources, or to institute an order in which those most capable of doing so apply and increase the resources of the community, *and seldom flexible enough to adapt itself, and the institutions which it controls, to the new social conditions which its own activity brings about*. It therefore tends to pursue a short-sighted and egoistic policy, to form a close caste, accumulate the available wealth in a few hands, and, by means of the prestige and power thus obtained to reduce the dispossessed majority to social and economic slavery. The unwilling subjects naturally grow restive and devote their lives to the overthrow of the tyrannical minority; this, when the conjunction [90] of circumstances favours them, they eventually succeed in doing. But they grow corrupted by the long years of servitude, and become incapable of conceiving ideals higher than those of their masters, so that when they acquire power, they use it no less irrationally and unjustly than their own late oppressors; in their turn they create a new proletariat, and so at a new level the struggle continues. Human history is the history of such conflicts: due ultimately – as Adam Smith and the eighteenth-century French philosophers would have said – to the blindness of both masters and subjects to the coincidence of the best interests of both under a rational distribution of economic resources. Instead the ruling classes attempt to arrest all social change, in order to lead idle and wasteful lives, obstructing economic progress in the form of technical invention which, if only it were properly developed, would by creating unlimited plenty and distributing it scientifically, swiftly ensure the eternal happiness and prosperity of mankind.

<sup>51</sup> **and those who lack this advantage and are reduced to the position of dependent or slave. (A220)**

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Saint-Simon, who was a far better historian than his encyclopaedist predecessors, took a genuinely evolutionary view of human society, and estimated past epochs not in terms of their remoteness from the civilisation of the present, but in terms of the adequacy of their institutions to the social and economic needs of their own day; with the result that his account of, for example, the Middle Ages is far more penetrating and sympathetic than that of the majority of his liberal contemporaries. But a social order which responded to genuine needs in its own day may tend to hamper the movements of a later time, becoming a straitjacket the nature of which is deliberately concealed by the classes protected by its existence. The army and the Church, organic elements in the mediaeval hierarchy, are now obsolete survivals, whose functions are performed in modern society by the baker, the industrialist, and the scientist; with the [91] consequence that priests, soldiers, *rentiers*, can survive only as idlers and social parasites, wasting the substance and holding up the advance of the new classes, and must therefore be eliminated. In their place industrious and skilful experts, chosen for their executive ability, must be placed at the head of society: the financiers, engineers, organisers of large, rigorously centralised, industrial and agricultural enterprises, must constitute the government. *Finally the laws of inheritance which lead to undeserved inequalities of wealth must be abolished:* but on no account must this be extended to private property in general: every man has a right to the fruit of his own personal labour. Like the makers of the Revolution, and Fourier and Proudhon after them, Saint-Simon firmly believed that the ownership of property furnished at the same time the incentive to energetic labour and the foundation of private and public morality. Bankers, company promoters, industrialists, inventors must be adequately rewarded by the State in proportion to their efficiency<sup>52</sup>: once the economic life of the society is rationalised by the specialist, the natural virtue of human nature, the natural harmony of the interests of all, will guarantee universal justice, contentment and equality of opportunity for all men alike.

Saint-Simon lived at a time when the last relics of feudalism in Western Europe were finally disappearing before the advance of the bourgeois *entrepreneur* and his new mechanical devices. He had

<sup>52</sup> rewarded by the State for their efforts. (A222)

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endless faith in the immense possibilities of technical invention and in its naturally beneficent effect on human society: **he saw the enemy in the selfish interests of the privileged landowning minority which did all in its power to check this invasion from below (A222)**, he saw in the rising middle class able and energetic men animated by a sense of justice and disinterested altruism, hampered by the blind hostility of the landowning aristocracy and of the Church, which trembled for their own privileges and possessions, and so became enemies to all justice and to all scientific and moral progress.

[92] This belief was not so naïve then as it may now seem to be. As Marx was himself later to repeat, in the actual moment of struggle for social emergence, the vanguard of the rising class naturally identifies its own cause with the whole mass of oppressed humanity, and feels, and to a certain degree is, the disinterested champion of a new ideal, fighting at the furthest outpost of the progressive front. Saint-Simon was the most eloquent prophet of the rising bourgeoisie in its most generous and idealistic mood: he naturally set the highest value on industry, initiative and capacity for large scale planning: but he also sharply formulated the theory of the class struggle, little knowing to what application this portion of his doctrine would one day be put. He was himself a landed aristocrat of the eighteenth century, ruined by the Revolution, who had chosen to identify himself with the advancing power, and so to explain and justify the supersession of his own class. His most celebrated follower, Charles Fourier, was a commercial traveller who lived in Paris during those first decades of the new century, when the financiers and industrialists, upon whom his master had placed all his hopes, so far from effecting social reconciliation, proceeded to sharpen class antagonism by the creation of strongly centralised monopolist concerns. By obtaining control of credit, and employing labour on an unprecedented scale, they created the possibility of mass production and mass distribution of goods, and so competed on unequal terms with the smaller traders and artisans, whom they systematically drove out of the open market, and whose children they absorbed into their factories and mines. The social effect of the Industrial Revolution in France was to create a rift and a state of permanent bitterness between the *grande* and the *petite* bourgeoisie, which dominates the history of that country from that date. Fourier, a typical representative of the

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ruined class, inveighs bitterly against the illusion that capitalists are [93] the predestined saviours of society. *His older contemporary the Swiss economist Sismondi, had pointed out and defended with an immense mass of historical evidence, at a period when it required something akin to genius to have perceived it, the view that, whereas all previous class struggles occurred as a result of the scarcity of goods in the world the discovery of new mechanical means of production which would flood the world with excessive plenty, would themselves unless checked, lead to a class war before which previous conflicts would pale into insignificance. The necessity of marketing the ever-growing produce would lead to a continual competition between the rival capitalists, who would be forced systematically to lower wages and increase the working hours of their employees in order to secure even temporary advantage over a slower rival, which in turn would lead to a series of acute economic crises, ending in social and political chaos, due to the internecine wars between groups of capitalists.* Such artificial poverty growing in direct proportion with the increase of goods, above all the monstrous trampling on those very fundamental human rights, to guarantee which the great revolution was made, could only be prevented by State intervention, which must curtail the right of accumulating capital and of the means of production.<sup>53</sup> Sismondi was a liberal who believed in the possibility of a centrally organised, rationally conducted human society, and confined himself to general recommendations. Fourier distrusted all central authority, and declaring that bureaucratic tyranny is bound to develop, if the government units are too large, proposed that the earth should be divided into small groups which he called phalansteries, each self-governing and federated under larger and larger units; all machinery, land, buildings, natural resources should be owned in common. His vision, an odd blend of eccentricity and genius, at its most apocalyptic [94] moments remains elaborate and precise: a great central electric plant will by its power do all the mechanical labour of the phalanstery: *profits should be divided between labour, capital and talent in the strict proportion 5:3:2, and its members, with no more than a few hours of daily work, will thus be free to occupy themselves with developing their intellectual, moral and artistic*

<sup>53</sup> state intervention must curtail the right to private ownership and the means of production. (A225)

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faculties to an extent hitherto unprecedented in history. This is at times interrupted by bursts of pure fantasy: such as the prophecy of the emergence in the immediate future of a new race of beasts, not dissimilar in appearance of existing species, but more powerful and more numerous – anti-lions, anti-bears, anti-tigers, as friendly and attached to man as their present ancestors are hostile and destructive, and doing much of his work with skill, intelligence and foresight wanting to mere machines. The thesis is at its best at its most destructive. In the intense quality of its indignation, its sense of genuine horror at the wholesale destruction of the life and liberty of the individual by the monstrous regime of financiers and their hirelings, the judges, the soldiers, the administrators, Fourier's indictment is the prototype of all later attacks on the doctrine of the unchecked *laissez-faire*, of the great denunciations of Marx and Carlyle, no less than of the communist, fascist, and Christian protests against the substitution of new forms of privilege for old, and the enslavement of the individual by the very machinery designed to set him free.

The Revolution of 1830, which expelled Charles X and brought Louis Philippe to the throne of France, revived public interest in social questions once more. During the decade which followed, an endless succession of books and pamphlets poured from the presses, **occupied with questions of historical analysis (A226)**, *attacking the evils of the existing system*, and suggesting every kind of remedy from the mildly liberal proposals of Lamartine or Crémieux to the more radical semi[95]socialist demands of Marrast or Ledru Rollin and the developed State socialism of Louis Blanc, and ending with the drastic programmes of Barbés and Blanqui who in their journal *L'Homme libre*, advocated a violent revolution and the abolition of private property.

**The counterpart of the German historical school as represented by Ranke and Savigny, was formed in France by the rising school of historical writers who, whether conservative like Guizot, radical like Thierry and Mignet or anti-capitalist like Sismondi, are all principally occupied by the class struggle. The great liberal journal of the 1830s and 1840s (A226), *La Réforme* was dominated by the Saint-Simonian tradition, and preached economic reorganisation as being of infinitely greater importance than political reform. Fourier's disciple Considérant proclaimed the imminent collapse of the**

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existing system of property relations<sup>54</sup> **and by their means exercised a considerable influence of French social theory (A227)**; and well-known socialist writers of the time, Pecqueur, Louis Blanc, Dézami, and the most independent and original figure among them, Proudhon, published their best known attacks on the capitalist order between 1839 and 1842, and were in their turn followed by a host of minor figures who diluted and popularised their doctrines. In 1834 the Catholic Priest Lamennais published his Christian socialist *Words of a Believer*, and in 1840 appeared the *Bible of Freedom* by the abbé Constant, fresh evidence that even in the Church there were men unable to resist the great popular appeal of the new revolutionary theories<sup>55</sup>.

The sensational success of Louis Blanc's *Ten Years*, a brilliant and bitter analysis of the years 1830-40, indicated the trend of opinion. Literary and philosophical communism began to come into fashion: Cabet wrote a highly popular communist utopia called *Voyage to Icaria*. Pierre Leroux preached a mystical egalitarianism to the novelist George Sand, Heine discussed it with sympathy in his celebrated vignettes of social and literary life in Paris during the July monarchy.

The subsequent fate of these movements is of small importance. The Saint-Simonians, after some years of desultory existence, disappeared as a movement; some of them became highly prosperous railway magnates and rentiers, fulfilling at least one aspect of their master's [96] prophecy. The more idealistic Fourierists founded communist settlements in the United States, some of which, like the Oneida community, prospered and attracted leading American thinkers and writers; in the sixties they had considerable influence through their newspaper, the New York tribune.

Marx familiarised himself with these theories, and verified them as best he could, by acquiring knowledge of the details of recent social history from all available sources, from books, from newspapers, by meeting writers and journalists, and by spending his evenings among the small revolutionary groups composed of German journeymen which, under the influence of communist agitators, **whose chief German representative, Hess, was well-**

<sup>54</sup> **collapse of the existing system of property in the party organs, the Phalanstre of La Phalange, (A227)**

<sup>55</sup> **popular appeal of fashionable theories (A227)**

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**known to Marx (A228)**, met to discuss the affairs of their scattered organisation and more vaguely the possibility of a revolution in their native country. In conversation with these artisans he discovered something of the needs and hopes of a class, of which a somewhat abstract portrait had been drawn in the works of Saint-Simon and his epigoni. He had given little thought to the precise parts which the *petite bourgeoisie* and the proletariat were to play in the advance of reason and improvement of society. *There was in addition the unstable, déclassé element, composed of marginal figures, members of odd trades, bohemians, unemployed soldiers, actors, intellectuals,*<sup>56</sup> neither masters nor slaves, independent and yet precariously situated on the very edge of the subsistence level, *whose existence had hardly been recognised by social historians, still less accounted for or analysed.* His interest in the economic writings of the socialists who formed the left wing of the French party of reform turned his attention to these questions. Ruge had commissioned him to write an essay for his periodical on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. He wrote it together with an essay on the Jewish question, early in 1844. the essay on the Jews was intended as an answer to Bruno Bauer's articles on the Jewish [97] question.

Bauer declared that the Jews, lagging historically a stage behind the Christians, must be baptised before they could reasonably claim full civil emancipation. Marx in his reply declared that Jews were no longer a religious or racial entity, but a purely economic one, forced into usury and other unattractive professions by the treatment they received from their neighbours, and could, therefore, be emancipated only with the emancipation of the rest of European society; to baptise them would be but to substitute one set of chains for another; to give them solely political liberties would play into the hands of those liberals who see in these all that any human being can hope, and indeed ought, to possess. It is an essay of little value, interesting merely because it shows him in a typical mood: he was determined that the sarcasms and insults to which some of the notable Jews of his generation, Heine, Lassalle, Disraeli, were all their lives a target, **and which Ruge and Bakunin had once or twice flung at him too (A264)**, should, so far as he could effect it, never be used to plague him. Consequently he decided to kill the problem of Judaism and the

<sup>56</sup> **those intermediate figures (A228)**

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Jews once and for all, so far as he was concerned, declaring it to be an unreal subject, invented as a screen for other more pressing questions: a problem which offered no special difficulty but belonged to the general social chaos which demanded to be put in order. He was baptised a Lutheran, and was married to a Gentile: he had once been of assistance to the Jewish community in Cologne: during the greater part of his life he held himself aloof from anything remotely connected with his race, showing open hostility to all its institutions.

It is possible that the maladjustment to environment which is often found in the case of the revolutionary and intolerant natures to be the result of an unhappy youth or childhood is, in the case of Marx, whose early life appears to have been entirely normal and contented, to be found in the anomalous position of the Jews in Europe, accentuated for him by the intolerable pathos of his father's submissive attitude to authority, heightened by its complete ineffectiveness in the face of the open and relentless anti-Semitism of Prussia and her neighbours.

**With advancing years, his price, his violent independence and the undisguised contempt for the majority of those with whom he came into contact did not decrease, nor is this altogether surprising in view of the moral and intellectual calibre of persons with whom his vocation obliged him to associate: unsuccessful continental revolutionaries and steady-going English Labour leaders, they were a company not calculated to accord with this proud, ambitious, intolerant, dogmatic, immensely erudite man who detested ignorance, stupidity and ineffectiveness as others hate cruelty or injustice. (A264--66)**

The critique of Hegel is more important: the doctrine which it expounds is unlike anything he had published before. In it he had begun, as he himself declared, to settle his account with the idealist philosophy. It was the beginning of a lengthy, laborious, and thorough process which, when it reached its culminating point four years later, proved to have created the foundation of a [98] new movement and a new outlook, and to have grown into a dogmatic faith and a plan of action which dominates the political consciousness of Europe until this day.

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### III

If what Marx required was a complete plan of action, based on the study of history and observation of the contemporary scene, he must have found himself singularly out of sympathy with the reformers and prophets who gathered in the *salons* and *cafés* of Paris at the time of his arrival. They were, indeed, more intelligent, more politically influential and more responsible than the *café* philosophers of Berlin, but to him they seemed either gifted visionaries like Robert Owen, or reformist liberals like Ledru Rollin, or, like Mazzini, both in one, prepared in his view, to do nothing in the last resort for the working class; or else they were sentimental *petit bourgeois* idealists in disguise, sheep in wolves' clothing like Proudhon or Louis Blanc, whose ideals might indeed be at least partially attainable, but whose gradualist, unrevolutionary tactics showed them to be radically mistaken in their estimation of the enemy's strength, and who were, consequently, to be fought all the more assiduously as the internal, often quite unconscious, enemies of the Revolution. He learnt much from them which he did not acknowledge, notably from Louis Blanc, whose book on the organisation of labour influenced him in his view of the evolution and correct analysis of industrial society.

**For their company he cared nothing, and in later years spoke of them with undisguised contempt. He cannot therefore have regarded it as a supreme misfortune when the, under pressure from the Prussian authorities, which he had repeatedly attacked in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher* and in the *Vorwärts*, expelled him, with several other radicals, among them Herzen and Bakunin, from the territory of France. (A279)**

He was attracted far more strongly to the party, which, to distinguish itself from the moderates who came to be called socialists, adopted the name of communists. Neither was a party in the modern sense of the word: both consisted of loosely associated groups and individuals. But whereas the former consisted predominantly of intellectuals, the latter was almost entirely composed of factory workers and small artisans, [99] the majority of whom were simple and self-educated men, exasperated by their

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wrongs and easily converted to the necessity of a revolutionary conspiracy to abolish privilege and private property, as preached by Babeuf's disciples Blanqui and Barbés, who were implicated in the abortive rising of 1839. Marx was impressed in particular by Blanqui's organising capacity and by the boldness and violence of his convictions; but he thought him lacking in ideas, and excessively vague as to the steps to be taken after the successful result of the *comp d'état*. He found a similarly irresponsible attitude among the other advocates of violence, the most notable of whom, the itinerant German tailor Weitling and the Russian exile Bakunin, he knew well at this time. Only one among the revolutionaries whom he met in Paris seemed to him to display a genuine understanding of the situation. This was a well-to-do young German radical, son of a cotton manufacturer in Barmen, whose name was Friedrich Engels. They met in Paris over the publication of economic articles by Engels in Marx's journal. The meeting proved decisive for both; it was the beginning of a remarkable career of friendship and collaboration which lasted during the remainder of their lives.

Engels began life as a radical poet and journalist and ended it, after the death of Marx, as the acknowledged leader of international socialism, which, in his own lifetime, had grown into a world movement. He was a man of solid and robust, but hardly creative mind; a man of exceptional integrity and strength of character, of many varied gifts, but in particular endowed with a remarkable capacity for the rapid assimilation of knowledge. **He was by nature not a master but a disciple, and admitted this to himself. (A280)** He possessed a shrewd and lucid intellect and a firm sense of reality which few, if any, among his radical contemporaries could claim. Consequently, himself little capable of original discovery, he had an exceptional talent for sifting, assessing and perceiving the practical [100] applicability of the discoveries of others. His knack of writing rapidly and clearly his unbounded loyalty and patience, made him an ideal ally and collaborator for the inhibited and difficult Marx, whose own writing was often clumsy, overcharged and obscure.<sup>57</sup> In his own

<sup>57</sup> **he was an ideal collaborator and populariser for a man of genius whose self-conscious, inhibited and over-fertile mind had often made his own writings clumsy, overcharged and obscure. (A280)**

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lifetime Engels desired no better fate than to live in the light of Marx's teaching, perceiving in him a spring of original genius which gave life and scope to his own peculiar gifts; with him he identified himself and his work, to be rewarded by sharing in his master's immortality. Before they met he had independently arrived at a position not unlike that of Marx,<sup>58</sup> and in later years understood his friend's new, only half articulated, ideas sometimes better than he understood them himself and clothed them in language more attractive and intelligible to the masses than Marx's tortuous style. Most important of all he possessed a quality essential for permanent intercourse with a man of Marx's temperament, a total uncompetitiveness in relation to him, absence of all desire to result the impact of that powerful personality, to preserve and retain a protected position of his own; on the contrary, he was only too eager to receive his whole intellectual sustenance from Marx unquestioningly, like a devoted pupil, and repaid him by his sanity, his enthusiasm, his vitality, his gaiety and, finally, in the most literal sense, by supplying him with means of livelihood at moments of desperate poverty. Marx, who like many intellectually creative men was himself haunted by the feeling of perpetual insecurity, and was at once thin-skinned and jealously suspicious of the least sign of antagonism to his person or his doctrines, **against which he developed a defensive weapon his colossal dogmatism and notorious power of invective (A282)**, required at least one person who understood his outlook, in whom he could confide completely, on whom he could lean as heavily and as often as he wished. In Engels he found a devoted friend and intellectual ally, whose very pedestrianism restored his sense of perspective and his belief in himself and his purpose. [101] Throughout the greater part of his life his actions were performed in the knowledge that this massive and dependable man was always at hand to support the burden in every contingency. For this he paid him with an affection, and a sense of pride in his qualities, which he gave to no one else besides his wife and children.

They met in the autumn of 1844 after Engels had sent him for publication in his periodical a sketch of a critique of the doctrines

<sup>58</sup> **Marx discovered in him, an ideal friend and ally, someone in natural sympathy with him, who had independently arrived at the same position, shared his views, admired his talents. (A281)**

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of the liberal economists. **Marx, who was at this time in open revolt against all romantics and Hegelians, was agreeably surprised by the bold and realistic tone of this, otherwise not very notable, document, from the pen of one whom (A282)** he had hitherto vaguely counted among the Berlin intellectuals, an impression which their only previous meeting had failed to dispel. He now wrote to him at once: the result was a meeting in Paris in the course of which the similarity of their views on the fundamental issues became clear to both. Engels, who had been travelling in England and had published a classical description of the condition of the English working class, disliked sentimental socialism of the school of Sismondi even more acutely than Marx. He provided that for which Marx had long been looking a rich supply of concrete information about the actual state of affairs in a progressive industrial community, to act as the material evidence for the broad historical thesis which was rapidly crystallising in Marx's mind. Engels, on the other hand, found that Marx gave him what he had been lacking, a solid framework within which to fit his facts, so as to make of them a weapon against the prevalent abstractions upon which, in his opinion, no serious revolutionary philosophy could be based. The effect which the meeting with Marx had upon him must have resembled that which it had made earlier on the more impressionable Hess. It heightened his vitality, clarified his hitherto undeveloped political ideas, provided him with a sense of definite orientation, an ordered view of society within which he could work with the assurance of the concrete, attainable character of the revolutionary goal. [102] This, after aimless wandering in the intricate maze of the young Hegelian movement, must have resembled the beginning of a new life, and, indeed, such for him it proved to be. Their immense correspondence which lasted for forty years was, from the very beginning, at once familiar and businesslike in tone; neither was greatly given to introspection; both were entirely occupied with the movement which they were engaged in creating and which became much the most solid reality of their lives. **The period of their later meeting in Brussels is in one sense the most critical and creative of their lives: both had left the intellectually and politically stagnant Prussia for the wide liberal culture of France; after a time both acquired a certain contempt for this too; the French socialists were less provincial and more**

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**civilised and better writers than the Germans, but appeared to Marx and Engels, through lacking a sense of reality as badly as the Germans, to be if anything even more susceptible to the flattery to which reactionaries resorted at moments of crisis: more capable of an easy compromise with the enemy, and no less completely out of touch with the working masses. (A284)** Upon this firm and reliable foundation was built a unique friendship, free from all trace of possessiveness, patronage or jealousy. Neither ever referred to it without a certain shyness and embarrassment; Engels was conscious of receiving far more than he gave, living in a mental universe created and furnished by Marx out of his own inner resources. When Marx died, he looked upon himself as its appointed guardian, jealously protecting it against all attempts at reform by the reckless and impatient younger generation of socialists.

The two years which Marx passed in Paris were the first and last occasion in his life on which he met, and was on terms of friendly intercourse with, men who were his equals, if not in intelligence, at any rate in the originality of their personalities and their lives. After the debacle of 1848, which broke the spirit of all but the strongest characters amongst the radicals, decimated them by death, imprisonment and transportation, and left the majority listless or disillusioned, he withdrew into an attitude of aggressive isolation, preserving contact only with men who had proved their personal loyalty to the cause with which he was identified. Henceforth Engels was his chief of staff; the rest he treated openly as subordinates.

The portrait of him which emerges from the memoirs of those who were his friends at this time, Ruge, Freiligrath, Heine, Annenkov, is that of a bold and energetic figure, a vehement, eager, contemptuous controver[103]sialist, applying to everything his cumbrous and heavy Hegelian weapons, but, in spite of the clumsiness of the mechanism, revealing an acute and powerful intellect, the quality of which even those who were most hostile to him – and there were few prominent radicals whom he had failed to wound and humiliate in some fashion – in later years acknowledged freely.

He met and formed a warm friendship with the poet Heine, whose superb intelligence he valued highly, and in whom he saw a

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more genuinely revolutionary poet<sup>59</sup> than Herwegh or Freiligrath, both, at this time, idolised by the radical youth of Germany; **a man whose conscience could not be lulled by either cajolery or threats on the part of the enemy committed to the struggle and to an alliance with the proletarian masses, whom as an individual and an artist, he feared and detested (A285); however, his intellectual range was narrow, there was not a trace of poetry in his composition. Emotionally, he was both naïve and vulgar to the point of philistinism: he was incapable of understanding any but the simplest and crudest human motives; but he as a figure of more than normal human size and power, whose genius, of more than normal human size and power, whose genius was felt by persons who had only met him on a single occasion, some of whom were wholly repelled by him; all were equally overawed and felt themselves in the presence of a master (A287);** and he was on good terms with the circle of Russian liberals, some among them genuine rebels, others cultivated aristocratic dilettanti, connoisseurs of curious men and situations. One of these, an agreeable *flâneur* called Annenkov for whom Marx conceived a liking, has left a brief description of him at this time: ‘Marx belonged to the type of men who are all energy, force of will and unshakable conviction. With a thick black mop of hair on his head, with hairy hands and a crookedly buttoned frock coat, he had the air of a man used to commanding the respect of others. His movements were clumsy but self-assured. His manners defied the accepted conventions of social intercourse and were haughty and almost contemptuous. His voice was disagreeably harsh, and he spoke of men and things in the tone of one who would tolerate no contradiction, and which seemed to express his own firm conviction in his mission to sway men’s minds and dictate the laws of their being.’ Another, and far more remarkable member of this circle, was the celebrated Mikhail Bakunin, upon whom his meeting with Marx in Paris at this time had a most lasting effect. Bakunin had left Russia at approximately the same period as Marx had left Germany and for much the same reason. He was at this time an ardent ‘critical’ Hegelian, a passionate enemy of Czarism

<sup>59</sup> **one who had conspicuously failed to make his peace with bourgeois society. (A285)**

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and all absolutist govern[104]ment. He had a generous, extravagant, wildly impulsive character, a rich, chaotic, unbridled imagination, a passion for the violent, the immense, the sublime, a hatred of all discipline and institutionalism, total lack of all sense of personal property, and above all, a savage and overwhelming desire to annihilate the narrow society of his time, in which, like Gulliver in Lilliput, the human individual was suffocating for want to room to realise his faculties to their fullest and noblest extent. His friend and compatriot Alexander Herzen, who at once admired him and was intensely irritated by him, said of him in his memoirs:

Bakunin was capable of becoming anything – an agitator, a tribune, a preacher, the head of a party, a sect, a heresy. Put him where you like, so long as it always is the *extremest* point of a movement, and he would fascinate the masses and sway the destinies of peoples ... but in Russia this Columbus without America and without a ship, having served, greatly against his will, a year or two in the artillery, and after that another year or so with the Moscow Hegelians, longed desperately to tear himself away from a land where every form of thought was prosecuted as evil-mindedness, and independence of judgment or speech was looked upon as an insult to public morality.

He was a marvellous mob orator, consumed with a genuine hatred of injustice and a burning sense of his mission to rouse mankind to some act of magnificent collective heroism which would set it free for ever; and he exercised a personal fascination over men, blinding them to his irresponsibility, his mendacity, his fundamental weakness, in the overwhelming revolutionary enthusiasm which he communicated. He was not an original thinker, and easily absorbed the views of others; but he was an inspired teacher, and, although his entire creed amounted to no more than a passionate belief in the need for destruction of all authority and the freeing [105] of the oppressed, he built on this alone a movement which lived on long after his death.

Bakunin differed from Marx as poetry differs from prose; the political connection between them rested on inadequate foundations and was very short-lived. Their main bond was a

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common hatred of every form of reformism;<sup>60</sup> but it sprang from dissimilar roots. Gradualism to Marx was always a disguised attempt on the part of the ruling class to deflect their enemies' energy into ineffective and harmless channels: a policy which the clearer heads among them knew to be a deliberate stratagem,<sup>61</sup> while the rest were themselves deceived by it, as much taken in as the radical reformers, whose fear of violence was itself a form of unconscious sabotage of their professed ends. Bakunin detested reform because he held that all frontiers limiting personal liberty were intrinsically evil, and all destructive violence, when aimed against authority, was good in itself, inasmuch as it was a fundamental form of creative self-expression.<sup>62</sup> On this ground he was passionately opposed to the aim accepted by both Marx and the reformists, namely the replacement of the *status quo* by a centralised State socialism, since, according to him, this was a new form of tyranny at once meaner and more absolute<sup>63</sup> than the personal and class despotism it was intended to supplant. This attitude has as its emotional basis a temperamental dislike of ordered forms of life in normal civilised society, a discipline taken for granted in the ideas of western democrats, but which to a man of his luxuriant imagination, chaotic habits and hatred of all restraints and barriers, seemed colourless, petty, oppressive and vulgar. An alliance built on an almost complete absence of common aims could not last long: the orderly, rigid,

<sup>60</sup> Marx was opposed to reformism because he believed that the desired change in the foundation of social life could not be brought about without a crushing defeat, followed by a radical elimination of the class, whose interest it was to preserve the status quo, and which, therefore whether it was included or not, would when menaced with extinction as a class, do everything in its power to frustrate the threatened reform. (A268)

<sup>61</sup> knew to be deliberately fraudulent. (A268)

<sup>62</sup> Bakunin, who was a natural anarchist and obsessed by the ideal of complete personal freedom, was no less hotly opposed to reformist socialism but not like Marx because he believed it to be a delusive day dream, deliberately fostered by the leaders of the bourgeoisie-the category of delusion was not often applied in his fantastic universe-but for even more fundamental causes: partly because he believed in violent destructiveness as such as a means of creative self-expression. (A268-9)

<sup>63</sup> desperate (A269)

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unimpressible Marx regarded Bakunin as half charlatan, half madman, and his views as absurd and barbarian. He saw in Bakunin's doctrine a development of the wild individualism for which [106] he had already condemned Stirner: but whereas Stirner was an obscure instructor in a High School for girls, a politically ineffective intellectual, neither capable nor ambitious of stirring the masses, Bakunin was a resolute man of action, an adroit and fearless agitator, a magnificent orator, a dangerous megalomaniac consumed by a fanatical desire for power fully equal to that which possessed Marx himself.

Bakunin recorded his view of Marx many years later in one of his political tracts. 'M. Marx' he writes, 'is by origin a Jew. He unites in himself all the qualities and defects of that gifted race. Nervous, some say, to the point of cowardice, he is immensely malicious, vain, quarrelsome, as intolerant and autocratic as Jehovah, the god of his fathers, and like him, insanely vindictive.'

'There is no lie, no calumny, which he is not capable of using against anyone who has incurred his jealousy or his hatred; he will not stop at the basest intrigue if, in his opinion, it will serve to increase his position, his influence and his power.'

'Such are his vices, but he also has many virtues. He is very intelligent, and widely learned. In about 1840 he was the life and soul of a very remarkable circle of radical Hegelians – Germans whose consistent cynicism left far behind even the most rabid Russian nihilists. Very few men have read so much and, it may be added, have read so intelligently, as M. Marx ...'

'Like M. Louis Blanc, he is a fanatical state-worshipper – triply so, as a Jew, a German and a Hegelian – but where the former, in place of argument, uses declamatory rhetoric, the latter, as behoves a learned and ponderous German, has embellished this principle with all the tricks and fancies of the Hegelian dialectic, and with all the wealth of his many-sided learning.'

Their mutual hatred became more and more evident as time went on: outwardly friendly relations continued [107] uneasily for some years, saved from complete rupture by the reluctant and apprehensive respect which each had for the formidable qualities of the other. When the conflict ultimately did break out it all but destroyed the work of both, and did incalculable harm to the cause of European socialism.

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If Marx treated Bakunin as an equal, he did not conceal his contempt for the other famous agitator, Wilhelm Weitling, whom he met at this time. A tailor by profession, a wandering preacher by calling, this earnest and fearless German visionary was the last and most eloquent descendant of the men who raised peasant revolts in the late Middle Ages, and whose modern representatives, for the most part artisans and journeymen, congregated in secret societies dedicated to the cause of revolution; there were branches in many industrial towns in Germany and abroad, scattered centres of political disaffection round which there accumulated many victims and casualties of the social process, men violently embittered by their wrongs and confused as to their cause and remedy, but united by a common sense of grievance and a common desire to eradicate the system which had destroyed their lives.<sup>64</sup> In his books, *A Poor Sinner's Gospel* and *Guarantees of Harmony and Freedom*, Weitling advocated a class war of the poor against the rich,<sup>65</sup> with open terrorism as its chief weapon; and, in particular, the formation of shock troops out of the most deeply wronged and, therefore, the most abandoned and fearless elements in society – the outlaws and criminals – who would fight desperately to avenge themselves on the class which had dispossessed them, for a new and uncompetitive world in which they would begin new lives, **as free citizens with equal rights, in a state of free and peaceful anarchy.** (A272).<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> but united by a common hatred and a common desire to destroy the tyrannous system under which they suffered as rapidly and as ruthlessly as possible. (A271)

<sup>65</sup> Of these, Weitling was incomparably the most articulate as well as the most violent: his constructive proposals which he expounded in several books, and which amounted to a vague form of guild socialism, were muddled and childish, and were later superseded by the far more intelligent and carefully considered proposals elaborated by Proudhon and his followers. (A271)

<sup>66</sup> Wilhelm Weiling had arrived at a position not unlike that of Bakunin by a very different route. By trade a tailor's apprentice, and by temperament a visionary, he influenced Marx as he had earlier influenced Bakunin. In his books, *A Sinner's Gospel* and *Guarantees of Harmony and Freedom*, he advocated the necessity of an open ruthless war of the poor against the rich, in which the dispossessed, being more numerous and more desperate than their masters, would crush them, put an end to the artificial restraints

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Weitling was strongly opposed to any form of political action, believing that no one could make use of the enemy's weapons without becoming hopelessly inveigled into promoting its ends, that is, the unequal division into the ruler and ruled. Hence according to him, the futility of all previous revolutions, which beginning nobly as genuine movements to liberate mankind, invariably ended by imposing some new, more efficient, more up to date, better equipped, and so all the more grinding and inescapable tyranny. To this belief, which he shared with Stirner and bequeathed to Proudhon and the anarchists and syndicalists of a later day, he added another, also shared by Stirner, Bakunin and their followers: a political life being a function of the economic structure of a given society (a belief much older than the nineteenth century, but first comprehensively stated by Saint-Simon) must not be the main sphere of reform or revolution: the concentrated destructive passion of the rebellious slaves must be directed against the economic organisation which has reduced them to the detestable condition by systematically robbing them of the fruits of their toil. Only by destroying this, can they reduce their enemies to impotence, all struggle of political rights, of political power is an illusory goal, a crude imitation of the behaviour of the ruling class which, having abandoned the economic reality, can afford to spend its days playing with each other at capturing the political shadow; an alluring vision which the dispossessed, like weary travellers, straggling in a desert, mistake for an oasis only to find too late that they were deceived by a mirage. (A272-4)

Weitling's belief in the solidarity of the workers of all lands, his personal stoicism, the years which he spent in various prisons and, above all, the fervent evangelical zeal of his writings, attracted to him many devoted followers among his fellow[108]artisans, and made him, for a brief period a figure of European magnitude. Marx, who cared nothing for sincerity when it was misdirected and particularly disliked itinerant prophets and the vague emotionalism with which they inevitably infected serious revolutionary work,

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constituted by any form of government, and inaugurate a period of peaceful anarchy. (A270)

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nevertheless conceded Weitling's importance. His conception of an open declaration of war against the ruling class by desperate men who had nothing to lose and everything to gain, **the uncompromising ferocity of his denunciations (A274)**, the personal experience which lay behind his denunciations and moved his audiences, his emphasis on the economic realities, and attempt to penetrate the deceptive façade of political parties and their official programmes, above all his practical achievement in creating the nucleus of an international communist party, **with his scattered cells of disciples sworn to violent revolution (A275)** impressed Marx profoundly. Weitling's detailed doctrines, however, he treated with open contempt, and, justly believing him to be muddled, hysterical and a source of confusion in the party, set himself to expose his ignorance publicly and lower his prestige in every possible fashion. An account has been preserved of a meeting in Brussels in 1846 in the course of which Marx demanded to be told Weitling's concrete proposals to the working class. When the latter faltered, and murmured something about the uselessness of criticism carried on in the study, far from the suffering world, Marx struck the table, shouted 'Ignorance has never yet helped anyone,' and stormily left the room. They never met again.

**The incident was minimised by Weitling himself, in a letter to Hess, who was everyone's friend, who was distressed by these hostilities. The incident is recorded by Annenkov, an agreeable and cultivated Russian dilettante, a curious observer of persons and events, whose intelligence and charm and perhaps, powers of flattery, won the friendship of Marx himself, who treated him with marked benevolence, having at this time not conceived his later dislike of Slavs in general and Russian aristocrats in particular. Annenov gives a vivid account of [...] (A276)**

His relation to Proudhon was altogether more complicated. While still in Cologne he had read the book which first made Proudhon's name famous, *What is Property?*, and praised the brilliance of its style and the courage of its author. In 1843 everything appealed to him which revealed a revolutionary spark, anything which sounded clear and resolute and openly advocated the overthrow of the existing system, **which was in a word, as dissimilar as it could be from the obscure and resounding**

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rhetoric with which the German radicals half unconsciously sought to shield themselves from the necessity and even the thought of action. Proudhon, in spite of his distaste for violent change, was at least an activist in Marx's sense. He advocated social reform directed against the accumulation of capital, measures which were radical enough to make the governing class prepared to fight openly against them. His attacks upon the existing order were often vehement and acute; the specific measures which he advocated seemed to Marx impracticable from the beginning, but at least the ills they were designed to cure were real: the diagnosis of the situation was thorough and realistic, even if the remedies were Utopian. In this, as in much else, he was a true disciple of Fourier, a thinker for whom Marx, who was not given to exaggerating the merits of his predecessors, always expressed an unusual degree of admiration. (A288) *Soon, [109] however, he became convinced that Proudhon's approach to social problems, for all his declared admiration for Hegel, was ultimately not historical but moral, that his praise and condemnation was directly based on his own absolute ethical standards, and ignored altogether the historical importance of institutions and systems. From this moment he conceived him as merely another French bourgeois moralist, and lost all respect for his person and his doctrines.*

At the time of Marx's arrival in Paris, Proudhon was at the height of his reputation. By origin a peasant from Besançon, by profession a typesetter, he was a man of narrow, obstinate, fearless, puritanical character, a typical representative of the French lower middle class which, after playing an active part in the final overthrow of the Bourbons, found it had merely succeeded in changing masters, and that the new government of bankers and large industrialists, from whom Saint-Simon had taught them to expect so much, had merely increased the tempo of their destruction. **So far as the small traders and artisans were concerned, the new ruling class was no less an enemy than the old, more vigorous, more ruthless and more intelligent.** (A290)

The two forces which Proudhon conceived as fatal to social justice and the brotherhood of man were the tendency towards the accumulation of capital which led to the continual increase of inequalities of wealth, and the tendency directly connected with it, which openly united political authority with economic control, and

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so was designed to secure a growth of a despotic plutocracy under the guise of free liberal institutions<sup>67</sup>. The State, **founded upon the principle by which authority is openly given to one class over the rest, a class whose de facto sovereignty is to be recognised, thus (A291)** became, according to him, an instrument designed to dispossess the majority for the benefit of a small minority<sup>68</sup>, a legalised form of robbery, which systematically deprived the individual of his natural right to property by giving to the rich alone control of social legislation and financial credit, while the *petite bourgeoisie* was helplessly expropriated. Proudhon's best known book, which opens with the statement that all property is theft, has misled many as to his mature [110] views. Early in life he held that all property was misappropriation; later, however, he taught that a minimum of property was required by every man in order to maintain his personal independence, his moral and social dignity: a system, under which this minimum was lost, under whose laws a man could, by a commercial transaction, barter it away, and so, in effect, sell himself into economic slavery to others, was a system which legalised and encouraged theft, theft of the individual's elementary rights without which he had no means of pursuing his proper ends.<sup>69</sup> **The individual lost his rights when power as centralised and vested in the State; *étatisme* was coined to describe the doctrine which justified the process, and anti-*étatisme*, becomes the watchword of Proudhon and his followers, conscious of representing a class which has everything to lost by a policy deliberately aimed at the elimination of independent artisans, shop-keepers, professional men. (A292)**

The principal cause of this process Proudhon perceived in the unchecked economic struggle between individuals, groups, social orders, which necessarily leads to the domination of the ablest and best organised, and of those least restrained by a sense of moral or

<sup>67</sup> was designed to secure the growth of a strong plutocracy by putting political power in the hands of those most interested in perpetuating the economic order. (A290)

<sup>68</sup> an instrument designed to discipline and dispossess the *petite bourgeoisie* and the proletariat. (A291)

<sup>69</sup> theft of elementary rights of individual's personal liberty and happiness. (A291)

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social duty, over the mass of the community.<sup>70</sup> This represents the triumph of unscrupulous force allied to tactical skill over reason and justice; but for Proudhon, who was not a determinist, there was no historical reason why this situation should continue indefinitely. Competition, the favourite panacea of enlightened thinkers of the previous century, which appeared to nineteenth-century liberals and rationalists in an almost sacred light, as the fullest and richest expression of the individual's strenuous idealism, his triumph over the blind forces of nature and over his own undisciplined appetites, **the complete embodiment of human freedom and human reason (A292)**, was to Proudhon the greatest of all evils, the perversion of all the faculties towards the unnatural promotion of an acquisitive and, therefore, unjust society, in which the advantage of each depended on, even consisted in, his ability to outwit, defeat, or exterminate the others. The evil was identical with that attacked earlier by Fourier and Sismondi, but it was differently expressed and differently accounted for. Fourier was heir to both the thought and the style of the eighteenth century **rationalists (A292)** and interpreted the calamities of his time as the results of the suppression of reason by the [111] deliberate policy of those who feared its application, the priests, the well born, the rich. Proudhon was to some extent affected by the historicism of his age: he knew no German, but had had Hegelianism poured into him by Bakunin and later by German exiles. **Bakunin had himself become converted to it when its full tide had, in the previous decade, swept over his native land, altering the lives of a generation of young Russian intellectuals and generating that systemic penetration of social criticism into its life and art which later led to such phenomenal consequences. When Marx arrived he too spent days and nights in explaining to this apt disciple the Hegelian categories and social personal development, the dialectical conception of progress as a succession of conflict simultaneously occurring in all the spheres of nature and of human activity, which, proceeding by successfully resolved**

<sup>70</sup> which led to the domination of those best organised, of those who, partly as the results of the historical process, partly by their own clear sighted pursuit of immediate economic interests, placed themselves in a position whence they can and do dominate the rest. (A292)

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**tradition, culminated in an ultimate harmonious synthesis, a process which neither the state nor the individual can arrest or alter or escape. Proudhon absorbed this the more easily since the categories, on which Marx at this time laid the greatest stress, were social and economic, and the concept of the struggle of class for economic supremacy had already been made familiar by the St Simonians. (A293–4)**

Proudhon's attempt to adapt the new theory to his own doctrine with its stress on justice and human rights, led to results which to Marx seemed a crude caricature of Hegelianism.

The method, indeed, by which everything was described in the form of two antithetical conceptions, which made every statement seem at once realistic and paradoxical, suited Proudhon's talent for coining sharp and arresting phrases, his love of epigram, his desire to move, to startle and to provoke. Everything is contradictory; property is theft; to be a citizen is to be deprived of rights; capitalism is at once the despotism of the stronger over the weaker, and of the lesser over the greater; to accumulate wealth is to rob; to abolish it is to undermine the foundations of morality<sup>71</sup>. Proudhon's remedy for this is the suppression of competition and the introduction in its place of a 'mutualist' co-operative system under which limited private property should be permitted, and indeed enforced, but not the accumulation of capital. Whereas competition evokes the worst and most brutal qualities in men, co-operation, besides promoting greater efficiency, moralises and civilises them by revealing the true end of communal life.<sup>72</sup> The State may be endowed with certain centralising functions, but its activity must be severely controlled by the associations according to trades, professions, occupations, and again of consumers and producers, under which society would be organised; **with the acquisitive instinct thus checked, mutual help would take the place of competition, industrial combinations of all the**

<sup>71</sup> to abolish it undermines all social ties. (A295)

<sup>72</sup> While men can fight for as a large a share of the common social product as they can retain at the expense of others, they will remain in a permanent state of economic insecurity, a state of civil warfare, which necessarily warps their lives and brutalises their character; while cooperation provides both the ideal and the material means towards a humane and free civilised existence. (A295)

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participants in the various processes of production and distribution would replace the political hierarchy which would result in a free and egalitarian system, under which all would discover and perform the tasks for which they were naturally fittest, and poverty due solely to the unemployment which is the symptom and the disease of a maladjusted, because unplanned society, would necessarily disappear. (A295–6) Organise society into a single economic whole on non-competitive ‘mutualist’ lines, and the antinomies will be resolved, the good remain, evil disappear. Poverty, unemployment, the frustration of men forced into uncongenial tasks as a result of the class maladjustments of unplanned society, will disappear and men’s better natures will find it possible to assert themselves; for there is no lack of idealism in human nature, but under the existing economic order it is rendered ineffectual or else, through misdirection, dangerous. **Malice or stupidity, which are the results of deficient education, and the constant frustration of fundamental material and spiritual human needs, turn such inclinations against themselves into blind fanaticism or disillusioned cynicism, each of which by attraction and by repulsion breed further evil, make the malady increasingly incurable.** (A296) But it is useless to preach to the rich; their generous instincts have become atrophied long ago. The enlightened prince dreamt of by the encyclopaedists will not be born, being himself a social contradiction. Only the real victims of the system, the small farmers, the small bourgeoisie and the urban proletariat can be appealed to. They alone can alter their own condition, since being at once the most numerous and the most indispensable members of society, they alone have the power to transform it. To them consequently Proudhon addressed himself. He warned the workers against organising themselves politically, since by imitating the ruling class they will inevitably place themselves at its mercy. The enemy, being more experienced in political tactics, will by bullying, or by financial or social bribes, succeed in luring over the weaker or less astute among the revolutionary leaders, and so render the movement impotent. In any case, even if they were victorious, they would by acquiring control over, and so preserving the political forms of authoritarian government, give a new lease of life to the very contradiction from which they seek to escape. The workers and small bourgeoisie

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must therefore **organise themselves to free federations or syndicates or unions which, being constituted on co-operative profit sharing basis (A297)**, seek, by purely economic pressure, to impose their own pattern on the rest of society; this process should be gradual and peaceful. Again and again Proudhon declared that the workers must on no account have recourse to coercion; **take a direct and active part in the corrupt political life of their country (A297)** not even strikes were to be permitted, since this would infringe upon the individual worker's right to the free disposal of his labour.

**Proudhon was not a metaphysician but a practical journalist by nature, but he liked to think of himself as a philosopher.** Proudhon had the unwisdom to submit his book, *La Philosophie de la misère* (the Philosophy of Poverty) to Marx for criticism. **Marx who had an infallible sense of the general direction and flavour of any movement or doctrine whatever its ostensible appearance, at once recognised irreconcilable enemies in both Proudhon. (A298)** Marx read it in two days and [113] pronounced it fallacious and superficial, but written attractively and with sufficient eloquence and sincerity to mislead the masses. 'To leave error unrefuted', he declared in a similar situation many years later, 'is to encourage intellectual immorality.' For ten workers who might go further, ninety may stop with Proudhon and remain in darkness. He, therefore, determined to destroy it, and with it Proudhon's reputation as a serious thinker, once and for all. In 1847 in answer to *La Philosophie de la Misère* there appeared Marx's book entitled, *La Misère de la Philosophie*, **a document which outdoes Voltaire in homicidal irony, (A298)** containing the bitterest, **personal (A298)** attack delivered by one thinker upon another since the celebrated polemics of the Renaissance. Marx took immense trouble to demonstrate that Proudhon was totally incapable of abstract thought, a fact which he vainly attempted to conceal by a use of pseudo-Hegelian terminology.

**The 'Philosophy of Poverty' is subjected to a long relentless bombardment; phrase after phrase of ponderous effective French is aimed at Proudhon's thesis: he is made to appear as a shrewd, tough, limited French peasant, absorbed in the misfortunes of himself and his class, sincerely anxious to remedy them, but incapable of grasping either the**

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historical origins, or the contemporary significance of its position. He is represented as a foolish amateur philosopher with his head full of the phrases and catch words which then freely circulated in advanced Parisian circles, a curious farrago of half understood economic doctrines served up to the ignorant public as the practical application of the most famous philosophical system of the day; ill-equipped with intelligence or learning, but armed with a facile rhetoric and a talent for coining startling paradoxes and the ringing phrases. He is accused of trying to disguise an essentially mild and thus reformists political view by stating it in unnaturally fierce and bombastic language, of offering an easy remedy for all their ills to a working class driven frantic by their repression, ready, therefore, to catch at any straw even at the worthless nostrums offered by a man who would be thought a charlatan if he were not as hopelessly deceived himself as those unfortunates who followed him. (A299–300)

Marx accused Proudhon of radically misunderstanding the Hegelian categories by naïvely interpreting the dialectical conflict as a simple struggle between good and evil, which leads to the fallacy that all that is needed is to remove the evil, and the good will remain. **He accuses him of taking the same view of the dialectic as the petty bourgeoisie of the character of napoleon: some aspects were good, some evil, such and such an act was beneficent, was followed by one which did harm; if only his virtues had triumphed over his vices what a great and good man he might have been etc. (A300–1)** This is the very height of superficiality: to call this or that side of the dialectical conflict good or bad is a sign of unhistorical subjectivism out of place in serious social analysis. Both aspects are equally indispensable for the **regressive (A301)** development of human society. Genuine progress is constituted not by the triumph of one side and the defeat of the other, but by the duel itself which necessarily involves the destruction of both. In so far as Proudhon continually expresses his sympathy for this or that element in the social struggle, he remains, however sincerely he may think himself convinced of the metaphysical necessity of the struggle itself, hopelessly idealist, that is, committed to viewing objective reality, in terms of his own subjective desires and preferences, *without reference to the stage of evolution which [114] it has*

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*reached.* This is followed by a laborious refutation of Proudhon's economic theory, which Marx declared to rest on a fallacious conception of the mechanism of exchange: Proudhon had misunderstood Ricardo no less profoundly than he had misunderstood Hegel, and confused the proposition that human labour determines economic value, with the proposition that it ought to do so. This leads in its turn to a total misrepresentation of the relation of money to other commodities, which vitiates his entire account of the contemporary economic organisation of capitalist society. The fiercest attack is directed against Proudhon's crypto-individualism, against his obvious hatred of any tendency to collective organisation, his faith in the sturdy yeoman farmer and his morality, his belief in the indestructible value of the institution of private property, *in the sanctity of marriage and of the family, in the absolute moral and legal authority of its head over his wife and children*, which was the basis of his own life and was responsible for his deep-seated fear of any form of violent revolution, of anything likely to destroy the fundamental forms of life on a small farm, in which his ancestors were born and bred, and to which, in spite of his brave revolutionary phrases, he remained immovably loyal. In effect Marx accused Proudhon of wishing to remedy the immediate wrongs of the existing system without destroying the system itself, because, like all Frenchmen of his class, he was emotionally attached to it; of believing, in spite of his veneration of Hegelianism, that the historical process is neither inevitable nor irreversible, nor that it advances by revolutionary leaps, nor yet that the present evils are themselves as strictly necessitated by the laws of history as the stage which will one day supersede them. For it is only on the assumption that such evils are accidental blemishes that is plausible to urge their removal by courageous legislation which need not involve the destruction of the social forms of which [115] they are the historical product. In a rhetorical passage Marx exclaims: 'It is not enough to desire the collapse of these forms, one must know in obedience to what laws they came into being, in order to know how to act within the framework of these laws, since to act against them, whether deliberately or not, in blind ignorance of the causes and character, would be a futile and suicidal act and would, by creating chaos, defeat and demoralise the revolutionary class, and so prolong the existing

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agony.' This is the criticism which he used against all Utopians who claimed to have a new message for the working class.

**In Proudhon's case the attack is particularly brutal since the Hegelian language, the emphasis of the primacy of economic factors, the genuine implacable, revolutionary note, resembled his own doctrine sufficiently closely, to make Proudhon infinitely more considerable and dangerous a figure than the Cabets, Leroux or Dézami with their negligible followings. (A303)** Marx was convinced that Proudhon was constitutionally incapable of grasping the truth; that, despite an undoubted gift for telling phrases, he was a fundamentally stupid man; the fact that he was brave and fanatically honest, and attracted a growing body of devoted followers, only made him more dangerous; hence this attempt to annihilate his doctrine and his influence with one tremendous blow. His brutality over-reached itself, however, and created indignant sympathy for its victim. **Proudhon was wounded and humiliated: he privately complained of being misunderstood, plagiarised, misrepresented, but he could not or would not produce a public refutation of the charges. (A304)** Proudhon's system survived this and many subsequent Marxist onslaughts and its influence increased in the following years.

Proudhon was not primarily an original thinker. He had a gift for absorbing and crystallising the radical ideas current in his time: he wrote well, sometimes with brilliance, and his eloquence was felt to be genuine by the masses for whom he wrote, springing from wants and ambitions which he had in common with them; **consequently his ideas did not die with him but continued not, indeed, in the form which he gave them, but lived by their own momentum, modified and sharpened by Bakunin and Sorel, a tradition which reflects the needs and ideals of the French petite bourgeoisie then and now. Marx had no wish to save or protect this class and its representatives from the inevitable doom which he predicted for it, attacked its most formidable champion and his later disciples with systematic ruthlessness; the history of the struggle between him and them which continue until his death, and for long after it, is the epitome of the history of war of ideas which still divides the adherents of progressive political parties in the world today. (A304—5)**

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The tradition of political non-participation, and of decentralised federalism **and mutualist communities (A298)**, of which he was the most eloquent advocate, survives powerfully to this day among French radicals and socialists, and finds support in the individualist tendency, most pronounced in France and other Latin countries, and natural enough in a land the vast majority of whose inhabitants are [116] small farmers, artisans, professional men, living at a distance from the industrial life of great cities. Proudhonism is the direct ancestor of modern syndicalism. It was affected by Bakunin's anarchism, and half a century later by Sorel's doctrine that, since economic categories were the most fundamental, therefore the units out of which the anti-capitalist force must be constituted should contain men connected not by common convictions, – a mere intellectual superstructure – but by the actual occupations which they pursue, since this is the essential factor which determines their acts. Wielding as its most formidable weapon the threat of disorganising social life by suspending all vital services by a general strike, it became the most powerful left wing doctrine in many parts of France, in Italy and in Spain, wherever indeed, industrialism had not gone too far and an agrarian individualist tradition still survived. Wherever centralisation is difficult to achieve, and the tradition of political action is not strong, it still remains the most powerful single opposition to political socialism. Marx, who had an infallible sense of the general direction and political flavour of movement or a doctrine whatever its ostensible appearance, at once recognised the individualistic, and therefore for him reactionary, substratum of this attitude: and consequently attacked it no less violently than declared liberalism. *La Misère de la philosophie* is now, like the specific views which it attacked, largely out of date. But it represents a definite stage in its author's mental development: the first attempt to synthesise his economic, social and political views into the unified body of doctrine, capable of application to every aspect of the social situation, which came to be known as the theory of historical materialism.

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### HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

A certain individual once took it into his head, that people drown in water only because they are obsessed by the *notion* of weight. If only, he thought, they could rid themselves of this idea, by calling it, for instance, superstitious or religious, they would thereby be saved from all danger of drowning. All his life he fought against the illusion of weight, concerning whose deleterious consequences statistics continually provided him with fresh evidence. This figure is the prototype of the German revolutionary philosophers of our day.

KARL MARX, *German Ideology*

No formal exposition of Historical Materialism was ever published by Marx himself. It occurs in a fragmentary form in all his early work written during the years 1843-8, and is taken for granted in his later thought. He did not regard it as a new philosophical system so much as a practical method of social and historical analysis, and a basis for political strategy. Later in life he often complained of the use made of it by his followers, some of whom appeared to think that it would save them the labour of historical research, by providing ready-made solutions of all historical questions. In a letter, which, towards the end of his life, he wrote to a Russian correspondent who had asked him for his own view of its proper application, he gave as an example of dissimilar development in analogous social conditions the history of the Roman plebs and of the European industrial proletariat. 'When one studies these forms of evolution separately,' he wrote 'and then compares them, one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon; but one will never get there by the universal *passé partout* of particular historico-[118]philosophical theory which explains everything because it explains nothing, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical.'

The most extended statement of the theory occurs in a work which he composed together with Engels in 1846, entitled the *German Ideology*, of which only portions were published before the present century. It is a bizarre compilation, over six hundred pages in length, an amalgam of polemical outbursts against the 'critical' philosophers and exposition of the authors' own views, and contains, among other oddities, an elaborate enquiry into the social

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significance of Eugène Sue's novel, *Les Mystères de Paris*, a popular thriller of the day which displayed a great deal of specious sympathy with the insulted and the oppressed. It contains some effective satire, and passages of considerable critical power, but on the whole it is a verbose and tedious book, dealing with authors and views long dead and justly forgotten. **The treatise was written in great haste, for an impatient publisher who, when the manuscript finally arrived was frightened by its violence and refused to accept it. It was probably never revised. Tremendous rhetorical passages which deal with the political attitudes of the German intelligentsia as relevant to-day as a century ago, are succeeded by barren wastes of minute detail, involve and allusive criticism of this or that text by Stirner or Grun. It begins with a magnificent tirade against the pretentiousness and meaningless procession of books, essays, pamphlets by German writers, whose sole method of activity is to construct screens for themselves, to shut out awareness of the political culture of the prison in which they are carefully kept by men abler and more ruthless than they; they were accused of adulterating and debasing the language of philosophy until words which, in the hands of genuine thinkers, Fichte, Hegel, had been formidable weapons of the revolution, had become inflated until they began to mean everything and nothing, until the audience, deafened by the ceaseless roar ceased listening, and became lulled into a kind of weary sensibility. (A308–9)**

The framework of the new theory is undeviatingly Hegelian. It recognises that the history of humanity is a single, non-repetitive process, which obeys discoverable laws. These laws are different from the laws of physics or of chemistry, which being unhistorical, record unvarying conjunctions and successions of interconnected phenomena, whenever or wherever these may repeat themselves; they are similar rather to those of geology or botany, which embody the principles in accordance with which a process of continuous change takes place. Each moment of this process is new in the sense that it possesses new characteristics, or new combinations of known characteristics; but unique and unrepeatable though it is, it nevertheless follows from the immediately preceding state as a result of the same causes, and in obedience to the same natural laws, as this last state from its own

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predecessor. But whereas according to Hegel the single substance in the succession of whose States history consists, is the eternal universal Spirit, *the internal conflict of whose elements is made concrete in the wars of national States*, each being the embodiment of a developing Idea which it requires a super-sensible intuition to perceive. Marx, following Feuerbach, denounces this as a mystical<sup>73</sup> conception on which no knowledge could be founded. For if the world were a metaphysical substance of this type, its behaviour could not be verified by the only reliable method in our power, namely, empirical observation; and an account of it could not, therefore, be verified by the methods of any science. **This is a tantamount to regarding the question concerning the laws of development as in principle insoluble since the intuition which alone is alone is alleged to be capable of discovering the answer cannot be shown to exist: our recognised modes of experience do not reveal it and it is only held to exist on account of the fallacious assumption that to all abstract words which do not directly refer to sensible entities there corresponds so many abstract substances, acquaintance with which can only be achieved by a special non-empirical faculty: whereas in fact there are no such substances, and all these words are but compendious ways of referring to ordinary empirical phenomena together with the laws which govern their occurrence in a time and place of ordinary experience. (A231)**

The Hegelian can, of course, without fear of refutation, attribute anything he wishes to the unobservable activity of an impalpable world-substance, *much as the believing Christian or deist attributes it to the activity of God*, but only at the price of explaining nothing, of declaring the answer to be an empirically impenetrable mystery. It is such translation of ordinary questions into less intelligible language which makes the resultant obscurity look like a genuine answer. **Transcendentally theologians similarly mystify people by first attributing everything to a divine being, and then declining to describe it or the manner in which it acts on the grounds that it is unknowable. (A231)** To explain the knowable in terms of the unknowable is to take away with one hand what one affects to give with the other. Whatever

<sup>73</sup> **Meaningless (A230)**

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value such procedure may have, it cannot be regarded as equivalent to a scientific explanation, that is to the classification under a comparatively small number of interrelated laws of the great variety of distinct, *prima facie* unconnected phenomena.

But the solutions of the ‘critical’<sup>74</sup> schools of Bauer, Ruge, Stirner, even Feuerbach, are in principle no better. After having so mercilessly unmasked the defects of their master, they thereupon themselves proceeded to fall into far worse illusions: for Bauer’s spirit of self-criticising criticism, Ruge’s progressive human spirit, the individual self and its inalienable possessions apostrophised by Stirner, and even the notion of the human being whose evolution Feuerbach traces, are [120] all generalised abstractions no less empty, no more capable of being appealed to as something over and above the phenomena, as that which causes them, than the equally insubstantial but far more magnificent and imaginative edifice of orthodox Hegelianism.<sup>75</sup>

The only possible region in which to look for this principle of historical motion must be one which is open to scientific, that is empirical, inspection: and since the phenomena to be explained are those of social life, the explanation must in some sense reside in the nature of the social environment which forms the context in which men spend their lives, in that network of private and public relationships, of which the individuals form the terms, of which they are, as it were, the focal points, the meeting-places of the diverse strands whose totality Hegel called civil society.<sup>76</sup>

**Its systematic description, classification and the history of its development forms the scientific account of that society during the specified period of time. This conception of the subject which led to the appearance of new empirical science of physiology might have been born in the head of any**

<sup>74</sup> neo-Hegelian (A232)

<sup>75</sup> ... which Feuerbach traces, are all prospects as general and as shifting, as impotent to act as the dynamic principle, to be appealed to as something over and above the phenomena as being their explanation, than the elaborate paraphernalia of Hegel’s system, which is no less useless, is wider in scope and more imaginative and as a structure far more magnificent. (A232)

<sup>76</sup> the diverse strands which, taken as a single whole, is identical with the sum total of the individual acts and thoughts and attitudes which compose a given society. (A233)

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**intelligent person influenced both by the new historicism of the Hegelian school and the new empiricism of the French philosophers. Indeed it approximately represents the point of Auguste Comte and his disciples in France and of his utilitarian and positivist followers in England: the thinkers of this school conceive of human history as a set movement of a continuously improving society. (A233)** Hegel had shown his genius in perceiving that its growth was not a smooth progression, arrested by occasional setbacks, as Saint-Simon and his disciple Comte had taught but the product of continual tension between opposing forces which guarantee its increasing forward movement: that the appearance of action and reaction is an illusion caused by the fact that now the first, now the second, of the conflicting tendencies makes itself most violently felt. The progress is discontinuous, for the tension, when it reaches the critical point, precipitates a cataclysm; the increase in quantity of intensity becomes a change of quality; rival forces working below the surface grow and accumulate and burst into the open; the violence of their encounter transforms the medium in which it occurs; ice becomes water and water steam; slaves become serfs and serfs free men; all evolution ends in creative revolution, in nature and society alike. In nature these forces are physical, chemical, biological: in society they are specifically social.

What are the social forces between which the con[121]flict arises? Hegel had declared that they were embodied in nations, each of which represents the development of a specific culture of Idea. Marx, following Saint-Simon and Fourier, and not unaffected perhaps by Sismondi's theory of crises, replied that these forces were predominantly economic. 'I was led,' he wrote twelve years later, 'to the conclusion that legal relations, as well as forms of state, could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so-called general progress of the human mind, but that they are rooted in the material conditions of life which Hegel calls ... civil society. The anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy.' The conflict is always a clash between economically determined classes, a class being defined as a group of persons in a society, whose lives are determined by their possession of a common economic status in that society. The status of an individual is determined by the part which he plays in the process of social production, and this in its turn directly depends upon the

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character of the productive forces and their degree of development, at any given stage. All individuals act as they do in virtue of the economic relationships in which they in fact stand to the other members of their society, whether they are aware of them or not. The most powerful of these relationships is based, as Saint-Simon has taught, on ownership of the means of subsistence: the most pressing of all needs is the need for survival.

*Feuerbach for all his crudeness correctly saw that men eat before they reason. The satisfaction of this need can be fully guaranteed only by the control of the means of material production, that is of human strength and skill, of natural resources, of land and water, tools, machines, slaves. There is a natural scarcity of these in the beginning, and they are therefore the objects of violent competition, all the more so because those who secure them are able to control the lives [122] and actions of those who lack them: until they in their turn lose possession of them to their subjects who, grown powerful and cunning in their service, oust them and enslave them, only to be ousted and expropriated by others in their turn. Immense institutions have been created to conserve their possessions in the hands of their present owners, not indeed by deliberate policy, but arising unconsciously out of the general attitude to life of a given society. But whereas Hegel had declared that what gave its specific character to any given society was its national character, the nation being for him the embodiment of a given stage in the development of the world Spirit, for Marx it was the system of economic relations which governed the society in question. In a celebrated passage he summarised this view as follows:*

*In the social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these productive relations constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of [123] the economic foundation the whole vast superstructure is sooner or later*

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*entirely transformed. But in considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophical – in short the ideological forms in which men become conscious of the conflict and fight it out.'*

*Just as it would be impossible to arrive at a correct judgement about an individual by noting only his own view of himself, so it is impossible to judge whole revolutionary periods by the conscious way in which they see themselves, for, on the contrary, such consciousness must be explained as the product of the contradictions of material life, of the conflict between the forces of social production and their actual relations. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have developed, and the new higher relations of production never appear before the conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society ... the problem itself only arises when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.<sup>77</sup>*

Bourgeois society is the last form which these antagonisms take. After its disappearance the conflict will disappear forever. The pre-historic period will be completed, the history of the free human individual will at last begin.

The single operative cause which makes one people different from another, one set of institutions and beliefs opposed to another is, so Marx now came to believe, the economic environment in which it is set, the relationship of the ruling class of possessors to those whom they exploit, arising from the specific quality [124] of the tension which persists between them. The fundamental spring of action in the life of a man, he believed, all the more powerful for not being recognised by him, is his relationship to the alignment of classes in the economic struggle: the factor, knowledge of which would enable anyone to predict successfully a given individual's behaviour, is that individual's actual social position – whether he is outside or inside the ruling class, whether his personal welfare depends on its success or failure, whether he is placed in a position to which the preservation of the existing order is or is not essential. Once this is known, his particular personal motives and emotions become

<sup>77</sup> *Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by N. I. Stone, p. II ff.

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comparatively irrelevant to the investigation: he may be egoistic or altruistic, generous or mean, clever or stupid, ambitious or modest. His natural qualities will be harnessed by the circumstances to operate in a similar way whatever their natural tendency. Indeed it is misleading to speak of 'a natural tendency' or an unalterable 'human nature.' Tendencies may be classified either in accordance with the subjective feeling which they engender, and this is, for purposes of scientific prediction, unimportant, or in accordance with their actual aims, which are socially conditioned. One behaves before one starts to reflect on the reasons for, or the justification of, one's behaviour: and the majority of the members of a community will act in a similar fashion, whatever the subjective motive for which they will appear to themselves to be acting as they do.<sup>78</sup>

This is obscured by the fact that in the attempt to convince themselves that their acts are determined by reason or by moral or religious beliefs, men have tended to construct elaborate rationalisations of their behaviour. Nor are these rationalisations wholly powerless to affect action, for, growing into great institutions like moral codes or religious institutions, they often linger on long after [125] the needs, to explain away which they were created, have disappeared. Thus they themselves become part of the objective social situation, part of the external world which modifies the behaviour of individuals, functioning in the same way as the invariant factors, climate, soil, the physical organism, function in their interplay with social institutions.

**To explain the history of the various human civilisations, it is necessary only to consider at what stage of economic development each arose, and it will be seen that it was required at a certain stage in order to justify the dominant**

<sup>78</sup> Indeed, there is no such thing as a natural tendency: all tendencies are tendencies to behave, and all behaviour is socially conditioned; one behaves before one starts to reflect the reasons for, or the justifications of one's behaviour: and a generous man will do in a generous spirit, what a man will do meanly. But the type of behaviour, the action itself, and its consequences remain the same for whatever motive it is done; our personal estimate may differ in accordance with what we take an impossible motive to be: but not our method of predicting how in fact, he would act in a given situation, when we try to determine this scientifically. (A237)

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class to itself, both in its own eyes and in the eyes of those who were defeated by it and who usually end by accepting the justification, since it justifies their own degradation to them by attributing to the system which justifies it moral or intellectual or religious truth. Economic enslavement thus leads to a peculiar blindness in all other spheres: a man cannot be freed, as the thinkers and fighters of the eighteenth century wished him to be free, until such enslavement becomes no longer possible.

The masters are in reality no freer than the slaves, although they may be more contented: for, being caught in a system which makes the satisfaction of their desires rest on their power to enslave others, they cannot freely alter the mode of their life; it is chosen for them and by the economic-social situation, of which politics is but the external, most public, aspect. The ruling economic class is always engaged in a twofold struggle: to perfect the weapons of oppression, in order to extract what they can from those on whose labour they depend; and to outwit and defeat their competitors in the open market, whose only universal law is that one must eat or be eaten. But by the very acts of inventing new machinery and building factories, and centralising production and distribution, they alter the face of society, creating new conditions from whose consequences they cannot, whether they wish to do so or not, themselves escape. Like Fourier or Sismondi, Marx believed that men begin by creating powerful monsters to fulfil their bidding, and these end by enslaving their own makers. (A238, 240)

In the *German Ideology* the claims of the neo-Hegelians are examined one by one and awarded their exact due. The brothers Bruno, Edgar and Egbert Bauer are dealt with briefly and savagely in a section entitled 'The Holy Family.' They are represented as three sordid peddlers of inferior metaphysical wares, who believe that the mere existence of a fastidious critical *élite*, raised by their intellectual gifts above the philistine mob, will itself effect the emancipation of such sections of humanity as are worthy of it. This belief in the power of a frigid detachment from the social and economic struggle to effect a transformation of society is regarded as academicism run mad, an ostrich-like attitude which will be swept away like the rest of the world to which it belongs by the

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real revolution which could not, by all evidences, now be long in coming.<sup>79</sup>

Stirner is treated at greater length. Under the title of St Max he is pursued through five hundred pages of heavy-handed mockery and insult. Stirner believed that all programmes, ideals, theories, are so many artificially built prisons for the mind and the spirit, means of curbing the will, of concealing from the individual the existence of his own infinite creative powers, and that all systems must therefore be destroyed, not because they are evil, but because they are systems; only when this has been achieved, would man, released from his unnatural fetters, become truly master of himself and attain to his full stature as a human being. This view, which had a great influence on both Nietzsche and Bakunin, is treated as a pathological phenomenon, [126] the agonised cry of a persecuted neurotic, belonging to the province of medicine rather than to that of political theory.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> The Bauers are bitterly pursued through some three hundred dreary pages for preaching doctrines of withdrawal from public affairs, of the creation of an intellectual elite above the rabble, whose exercise of pure critical power alone is sufficient to draw the inter and uncomprehending masses towards freedom; contempt for the masses, and the corollary, isolation of the few elected members, is exposed as a crude attempt to escape the appalling situation in which they found themselves; they are too feeble and dishonest even to look for means of serious resistance. But if their will and power for action is in decay, at least they have some dim conception of the social and political ideal of the freedom of which they speak, some measuring rod in terms of which degrees of reaction can be measured. (A309–11)

<sup>80</sup> His individualism has reached and crossed the frontier which divides the sane from the insane; his intellectual malaise has reached the stage in which the patient can passionately maintain that all systems and all ideal of thought, of government, of art, of sentiments, phrases, slogans, are so many equally tyrannous idols, *idée fixe* bred by the restless human imagination in an effort to escape responsibility for the chaos and suffering in the world by a kind of self-imprisonment, which is then externalised as a set of objective categories- as reason, religion, public morality, patriotism, honour, loyalty, political freedom; all these are desperate inventions, figments created by men in order to fetter themselves and others, a set of rival despotisms each has reached

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and as irrationally as the others intended to keep the mind in chains and obviate the need for free spontaneous activity; all are equally worthless and must be fought against by every man in his own prison, until he has thrown off the impediment of social and personal convention. The individual then begins for the first time in history to live a full and genuine life dedicated to himself alone, and his own powers freed from social and personal taboos which had hitherto terrorised him into real or simulated obedience, following freely wherever his natural instinct, his new born appetite for life and action, leads him. (A311–13)

The exponent of this passionate doctrine was a frail, insignificant looking school-master, who suffered from poverty and ill health, and for his living taught in a Girl's High School; he came occasionally to the Meetings of the Doctor's Club in Berlin, but hardly ever spoke. When his book 'The individual and his own' was published, he leapt into sudden notoriety as the most violent eloquent of all the opponents of the established morality, an instance and dangerous fanatic, wholly dedicated to the subversion of the existing order. To his readers, he doubtless seemed more formidable than he was, and his book might well have become totally forgotten as the majority of the romantic extravaganzas published in spite of the vogue which it enjoyed at this time. The still surviving memory of it is due neither to the onslaught by Marx, which no one read, or reads, but to the sympathetic response which it found in the minds of two men who, indirectly, have had a decisive influence upon the modern world; the first of these, and already mentioned was Bakunin, the other was Nietzsche. The almost mystical individualism, the belief in the goodness and power of the unfettered individual personality, and consequent hatred of organised existence, which is Bakunin's main bequest to revolutionaries, has its immediate origin in Stirner. As for Nietzsche, his influence in the twentieth century on the anti-humanitarianism of our day is to plain to require discussion. He was a writer of genius and transformed Stirner's confused and hysterical periods, into prose of the greatest beauty, and used it as a social and psychological weapon with immense effect. They are not comparable figures, but both were prophets, both in violent personal rebellion against a society which seemed to them servile, mean and oppressive, and themselves lived for the most part respectable and humdrum lives. It is more than probable that Nietzsche's peculiar form of rebellion owed its direction and its flavour to this discovery of Stirner. (A313–15)

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Feuerbach is more gently treated. He wrote more soberly, and had made an honest, if crude, attempt to expose the mystifications of idealism. In the *Eleven Theses on Feuerbach* which he composed during the same period, Marx declared that while Feuerbach had correctly perceived that men are largely the product of circumstances and education, he had not gone on to see that circumstances are themselves altered by the activity of men, and that the educators themselves are children of their age. His doctrine artificially divides society into two parts: the masses, which being helplessly exposed to every influence, must be freed; and the teachers, who contrive somehow to remain immune from the effect of their environment. But the relation of mind and matter, of men and nature, is reciprocal; otherwise history becomes reduced to physics. Feuerbach is praised for showing that religion deludes men by inventing an imaginary world to redress the balance of misery in real life, and thus becomes, in a phrase made celebrated by Marx, the opium of the people: the criticism of religion must therefore be anthropological in character, and take the form of analysing its secular origin. But he is accused of leaving the major task untouched: of seeing that religion is the anodyne to soften the pain caused by the contradictions of the material world, but then failing to see that these contradictions, must, in that case, be removed: the revolution which alone can do so must occur not in the super-structure – the world of thought – but in its material substratum, the real world of men and things. ‘Philosophers have previously offered various interpretations of the world. Our business is to change it.’

The so-called ‘True Socialists,’ Grün and Hess, fare no better. It is true that they wrote about the [127] actual situation; but placing ideals before interests in order of importance, they were equally far removed from a clear view of the facts. They believed indeed that the political inequality and the general emotional *malaise* of their generation were both traceable to economic contradictions which could only be removed by the total abolition of private **property; and the introduction of human uncoercive form of communism, whose advantage could be so persuasively presented to the minds of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie alike as to obviate the minds of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie alike as to obviate the need for a violent overthrow of the regime. (A317)** But they believed that the

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technological advance which made this possible was not an end but a means; that action could be justified only by appeal to moral sentiment; that the use of force, however noble the purpose for which it was employed, defeated its own end, since it brutalised both parties in the struggle and made them both incapable of true freedom after the struggle was over. If men were to be freed, it must be by peaceful and civilised means alone, to be effected as rapidly and painlessly as possible, before industrialisation had spread so widely as to make class warfare inevitable. Indeed, unless this was done, violence alone would become practicable and this would in the end defeat itself; for a society set up by the sword, even if justice initially were on its side, could not fail to develop into a tyranny of one class over the rest, which is incompatible with that human equality which true socialism seeks to create. **Proudhon was on similar grounds opposed to strikes and indeed, any form of workers combination which he denounced with passion only equalled by the ultra-reactionaries themselves because they curtailed the liberty of the individual and impeded free competition under which alone man was economically free to act as he chose so that prices were fair and services obtained their just remuneration. (A319)** The ‘True Socialists’ naturally opposed the doctrine of the necessity of open class war on the ground that it blinded the workers to those rights and ideals for the sake of which they fought. Only by treating men as equal from the beginning, by dealing with them as human beings, that is by renouncing force and appealing to the sense of human solidarity, the sense of justice, and the generous sentiments of mankind, could a lasting harmony of interests be obtained. **The alternative was the suppression of one evil only to make room for another. (A319)** Above all, the burden of the proletariat must not be removed by being shifted on to the shoulders of some other class. Marx and his party, they maintained, merely desired to reverse the roles of the existing [128] classes, to deprive the bourgeoisie of its power, only to ruin and enslave it. But this, besides **not solving the problem of justice (A320)** and being morally unacceptable, would leave the class-war itself in existence and so would fail to reconcile the existing contradiction in the only way possible, by fusing conflicting interests into one common ideal.

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Marx looked upon all this as so much worthless earnestness. The whole argument, he wearily points out, rests on the premise that men, even capitalists, are amenable to a rational argument, and under suitable conditions will voluntarily give up the power which they have acquired by birth, or wealth, or ability, for the sake of a moral principle, to create a juster world. To Marx this was the oldest, most familiar, most outworn of all the rationalist fallacies. He had met it in its worst form in the belief of his own father and his contemporaries that in the end reason and moral goodness were bound to triumph, a theory which had long become discredited by events during the dark aftermath of the French Revolution. To preach it now, as if one were still living in the early eighteenth century, was to be guilty either of boundless stupidity, or **as seemed more likely to Marx' suspicious mind, of deliberate irresponsibility and dishonesty**, of cowardly escape into mere words, else deliberate Utopianism, when what was needed was a scientific examination of the actual situation. *He was careful to point out that he did not himself fall into the opposite error: he did not simply contradict their thesis about human nature, and say that whereas they assumed man to be fundamentally generous and just, he found him rapacious, self-seeking and incapable of disinterested action. That would have been an hypothesis as subjective and irrelevant as that of his opponents. Each was vitiated by the fallacy that men's acts were in the end determined by their moral character, which could be described in comparative isolation from their environment. Marx, true to the method if not to the conclusions of Hegel, maintained that a man's purposes were made what they [129] were by the social, that is economic, situation in which he was in fact placed, and were made so, whether he knew it or not. Whatever his opinions, a man's actions were inevitably guided by his real interests, by the requirements of his material situation; the conscious aims of at any rate the bulk of mankind did not clash with their real interests, although they sometimes appeared disguised as so many independent, objective, disinterested ends, political, moral, aesthetic, emotional, or the like. Most individuals concealed their own dependence on their environment and situation, particularly the class-affiliation, so effectively even from themselves, that they quite sincerely believed that a change of heart would result in a radically different mode of life.*

This was much the profoundest error made by modern thinkers. It arose partly as a result of protestant individualism which, arising as the 'ideological' counterpart of the growth of freedom of trade and production, taught men to believe that the

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individual held the means for his happiness in his own hands, that faith and energy were sufficient to secure it, that every man had it in his power to attain to spiritual or material well-being, that for his weakness and misery he ultimately had only himself to blame. Marx maintained against this that liberty of action was severely curtailed by the precise position which the agent occupied in the social structure map. All notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, altruism and egoism were beside the point, as referring exclusively to the mental states which, while in themselves quite genuine, were never more than symptoms of the actual condition of their owner. Sometimes when the patient was himself acquainted with the science of pathology he could accurately diagnose his own condition; this is indeed what was meant by genuine insight on the part of a social philosopher. But more frequently the symptom would pose as the only true reality occupying [130] the whole attention of the sufferer. Since the symptoms in this case were mental states, it was this which bred the otherwise inexplicable fallacy that reality was mental or spiritual in character, or that history could be altered by the isolated decisions of unfettered human wills. **As for the conflict between the classes that, in more than any other predicament, in which men find themselves is not brought about by free human choice; all my comments, my whole system of likes and dislikes, approvals and disapprovals, my scale of values and interests will, upon examination, be found, however dimly to be dependent on the peculiar situation which I occupy in society which is itself an element in the total situation of the class in which my economic condition necessarily places me; that is-talk of human goodness and the power of ideas and principles as against the power of material needs and interests struck Marx not merely as meaningless, but when practical policies were built on such foundations, as cynical and ruinous. (A321-2)** Principles and causes, unless allied to expressions of real interests, were so many empty phrases; to lead men in their name was to lead them into an impasse, into a state in which their very failure to apprehend their true situation would involve them in chaos and destruction.

To alter the world one must first understand the material with which one deals. The bourgeoisie which wishes not to alter it, but

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to preserve the *status quo*, acts and thinks in terms of concepts, which, being products of a given stage in its development, themselves served in addition as an instrument of temporary preservation. The proletariat, in whose interest it is to alter it, blindly accepts the entire intellectual paraphernalia of middle-class thought born of middle-class needs and conditions, although there is an utter divergence of interest between the two classes. Phrases about justice or liberty represent something more or less definite when they are uttered by the middle-class liberal, namely, his attitude to his own mode of life, his actual or sought for relation to members of other social classes. But they are empty sounds when repeated by the proletarian, since they describe nothing real in his life, his actual or sought for relation to members of other social classes. But they are empty sounds when repeated by the proletarian, since they describe nothing real in his life and only betray his muddle state of mind, the result of the hypnotic power of phrases which, by confusing issues, not only fail to promote, but hinder and sometimes paralyse his power to act.<sup>81</sup> Mutualists, True Socialists, mystical Anarchists, however pure their motives, are thus even more dangerous enemies of the proletariat than the bourgeoisie: for the latter is at least an open enemy whose words and deeds the workers can be taught to distrust: but these others, who proclaim their solidarity with [131] the workers spread error and delusion in the proletarian camp itself and thus weaken it for the coming struggle.

The workers must be made to understand that the modern industrial system, like the feudal system before it, like every other social system, is, so long as the ruling class requires it for its continuance as a class, an iron despotism imposed by the events themselves, from which no individual, whether he be master or slave, can escape. All visionary dreams of human liberty, of a time

<sup>81</sup> So that phrases about justice and liberty which represent something more or less definite when uttered by the middle-class liberals, namely his own mode of life, his relation to other social classes, means nothing when repeated by the proletarian, being only a muddle and a confusion, the hypnotic power of phrases, which since they describe nothing in his life, not only fail to promote, but positively hinder and paralyse his power to act, by confusing issues, by rendering the world unintelligible and infecting him with a sense of his own helplessness. (A323)

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when men will be able to develop their natural gifts to their fullest extent, living and creating spontaneously, no longer dependent on others for the freedom to do or think as they will, remain an unattainable utopia so long as the fight for control means of production continues. It is no longer a struggle strictly for the means of subsistence, for modern inventions and discoveries have abolished natural scarcity: it is now an artificial scarcity created by the very struggle for securing new instruments itself, which necessarily leads to the centralisation of power by the creation of monopolies at one end of the social scale, and the increase of penury and degradation at the other; only one remedy – the disappearance of the class struggle – can achieve the abolition of this widening gulf. *But the essence of a class is to compete with other classes. Hence this end can be achieved not by creating equality between classes – a utopian conception – but by the total abolition of classes themselves.*

For Marx, no less than for earlier rationalists, man is potentially wise, creative and free: if his character has deteriorated beyond recognition that is due to the long and brutalising war in which he and his ancestors have lived ever since society ceased to be that primitive communism, **in which all property was held by society as a whole and (A242)** out of which, according to the current anthropology, it has developed. Until this state is reached again, embodying, however, all the conquests, technological and spiritual, which mankind has won in the [132] course of its long wandering in the desert, neither peace nor freedom can be obtained. The French Revolution was an attempt to bring them about by altering political forms only – which was no more than the bourgeoisie required, since it possessed the economic reality: and, therefore, all it succeeded in doing (as indeed was its appointed historical task at the stage of development at which it occurred) was to establish the bourgeoisie in a dominant position by finally destroying the corrupt remnant of an obsolete feudal regime. This task was inevitably continued by Napoleon, whom no one could suspect of wishing consciously to liberate humanity; whatever his personal motive for acting as he did, the influence of his historical environment made him an instrument of social change, and by his agency Europe advanced yet another step towards the realisation of its destiny.

**For even if the current Utopias were intrinsically worthless, taking no cognisance of the true causes of social**

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**change and painting pictures of humanity in accordance with the subjective caprice and imagination of the thinker, it does not follow that the liberation of mankind would never be achieved: since Hegel was in principle not mistaken, and human history was not a haphazard succession of contingent unpredictable events of which no scientific account is possible, the present tension too would culminate in the Revolution. (A243)**

The gradual freeing of mankind has pursued a definite irreversible direction: every new epoch is inaugurated by the liberation of a hitherto oppressed class, nor can a class, once it has been destroyed, ever appear again. History does not move backwards or in cyclical movements: all its conquests are final and irrevocable. **Humanity has reached the stage at which one class alone remains to be set free, and when this has been achieved the period of class struggle will necessarily and automatically be over, for there will be no masters or slaves: by securing its emancipation, the proletariat will emancipate mankind. (A244)** Most previous ideal constitutions were worthless because they ignored actual laws of historical development and substituted in their place the subjective caprice or imagination of the thinker. A knowledge of these laws is essential to effective political action. The ancient world gave way to the mediaeval, slavery to feudalism, and feudalism to the industrial bourgeoisie. These transitions occurred not peacefully, but were born in wars and revolutions, for no established order gives way to its successor without a struggle.

**A single thread is perceptible through the process of the gradual growth of human liberty. (A243)** And now only one stratum remains submerged below the level of the rest, one class alone remains enslaved, the landless, propertyless proletariat, created by the advance of technology, **born at the moment at which one man acquired the power of forcing another to labour for him (A243—4)**, perpetually assisting classes [133] above itself to shake off the yoke of the common oppressor, always, after the common cause has been won, condemned to be oppressed by its own late allies, the new victorious class, by masters who were themselves but lately slaves.

The proletariat is the lowest possible rung of the social scale: there is no class below it; by securing its own emancipation the

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proletariat will therefore emancipate mankind. Its fight is thus not a fight for the rights of an oppressed section of society: for natural rights are but the ideal aspect of bourgeois attitude to the sanctity of private property: the only real rights are those conferred by history: the right to act the part which is historically imposed upon one's class. The bourgeoisie in this sense has a full right to fight its final battle against the masses, but its task is hopeless: it will necessarily be defeated, as the feudal nobility was defeated in its day. As for the masses, they fight for freedom, not because they choose, but because they must, or rather they choose, because they must: to fight is the condition of their survival; the future belongs to them, and in fighting for it, they, like every rising class, are fighting against a foe doomed to decay, and thereby fighting for the whole of humanity. But whereas all other victories placed in power a class itself doomed to ultimate disappearance, this conflict will be followed by no other, being destined to end the condition of all such struggles by abolishing classes; to abolish the State itself, by dissolving it, hitherto the instrument of a single class, into a free, because classless society.

**For the individual to recognise that this is so is to recognise his own position in society: whether he belongs to the forces of the future or of the past; one's moral judgments are determined by this. Men in general will be found to approve that which their immediate society proves, and that will always be, whether it is recognised to be such or not, whatever promotes the victory of the class to which the society in question belongs.**

Moral judgements, like everything else of the universe must be explained naturalistically, that is, as phenomena proceeding from discoverable causes. A given individual's own judgment as what makes him think this good, that bad, while not necessarily false, is no more reliable as a guide to the actual facts than his opinion on any other subject in which he is inexpert: to discover the causes of a man's disease a physician does not begin by asking for the patient's own theory of the subject, he is guided by the observable symptoms: and in particular by the behaviour of the patient's body, in which his own statements constitute but a small portion of the multitude of relevant data. With the aid of scientific hypothesis he then makes his diagnosis. Similarly a

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man's own view as to his own loyalties, his own beliefs, his likely mode of action is slender evidence for his probable behaviour: to determine that, it is essential to discover to which class he belongs, and what stage of development that class has reached: for this alone will determine the actual behaviour of its members, each of whom will coin his own private explanations of his acts. What are the various motives which guide each soldier in an army? Some will sincerely claim to act for generous motives, others from motives of fear or greed, some to satisfy personal ambition, others for the good of the state, but the actual behaviour of the army, whether it will advance swiftly, whether it is strong or weak, whatever the individual variations, can only be predicted from more objective data: motives may vary greatly, but the behaviour of a man will be sufficiently uniform to enable scientific students of society to foretell, under given conditions, that members of one economic class will act in one way, of another in another way. (A244-6)

One must judge a man's behaviour, therefore, not by his expressed opinion but by his own actual past behaviour which will reveal his class affiliation: a process which in fact has always been adopted by shrewd political prophets and successful men of affairs. Earnest liberalism which dogmatically believes in the power of ideas to sway men's minds on a large scale, irrespective of their actual relation to the class struggle is condemned in advance to be refuted by experience, to disappear as a discredited ineffective, because unscientific, view. An individual is where he is whether or not he knows it: but to render him more effective it is necessary for him to *know* on which side he finds himself placed: which economic interest he represents, whether he is on the winning or the losing side, and to begin to do consciously that which before he did unconsciously and, therefore, more weakly and chaotically. (A248)

The great political dormant masses must be awoken, must be made aware of its own proper interests of that unique role which it is destined to play in history, as the conqueror of the last tyrant, the liberator of humanity. (A250) The proletariat must be made to understand that no compromise with the enemy is possible: that, while it may conclude temporary alliances with

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him to defeat some common adversary, it must ultimately turn against him. In backward countries, where the bourgeoisie is itself still fighting for power, the proletariat must throw in its lot with it, asking itself not what the ideals of the bourgeoisie [134] may be, but what it is *compelled* to do in the particular situation: and must adapt its tactics to this. And while history is determined – and the victory will, therefore, be won by the rising class whether any given individual wills it or not – how rapidly it will occur, how efficiently, how far in accordance with the conscious popular will, depends on human initiative, on the degree of understanding of their task by the masses and the courage and efficiency of their leaders.

To make this clear, and to educate the masses for their destiny is therefore, according to Marx, the whole duty of a contemporary philosopher. But, it has often been asked, how can a moral precept, a command to do this or that, be deduced from the truth of a theory of history? Historical materialism may account for what does in fact occur, but cannot, precisely because it is concerned solely with what is, provide the answer to moral questions, that is tell us what ought to be. Marx, like Hegel, flatly rejected this distinction. Judgments of fact cannot be sharply distinguished from those of value: all one's judgments are conditioned by practical activity in a given social milieu: one's views as to what one believes to exist and what one wishes to do with it, modify each other. If ethical judgments claim objective validity – and unless they do so, they cannot, according to Marx, be either true or false – they must refer to empirical phenomena and be verifiable by reference to them. He rejected any notion of a non-empirical, specifically moral intuition or moral reason, **as not compatible with his belief that all concepts are empirical in character and ultimately derive from sensible experience. (A 251)** The only sense in which it is possible to show that something is good or bad, right or wrong, is by demonstrating that it accords or discords with the historical process, assists it or thwarts it, will survive or will inevitably perish. All causes permanently lost are by that fact made bad and wrong, and indeed this is what constitutes the meaning of these terms. *But this is a dangerous empirical criterion, [135] since causes which may appear lost may, in fact, have suffered only a temporary setback, and will in the end prevail.*

His view of truth in general derives directly from this position. He is sometimes accused of maintaining that, since a man is wholly

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determined to think as he does by his social environment, even if some of his statements are objectively true, he cannot know it, being conditioned to think them true by material factors, not by their truth. Marx's statements on this subject are vague to a degree; but in general it may be said that he would have accepted the normal interpretation of what is meant by saying that a theory or a proposition of natural science or of ordinary sense experience is true or false. But he was not interested in this, the most common, type of truth. He was concerned with the reasons for which social, moral, historical statements are thought true or false, where arguments between opponents can conspicuously not be settled by direct appeal to empirical facts accessible to both. He might have agreed that the bare proposition that Napoleon died in exile would have been accepted as equally true by a bourgeois and a socialist historian. But he would have gone on to say that no historian can confine himself to a list of events and dates: that the plausibility of his account of the past depends upon his choice of fundamental concepts, his power of emphasis and arrangement, that the very process of selection betrays an inclination to stress this or that event as truly significant, as adverse or favourable to human progress, this or that act as important or trivial, wise or stupid. And this tendency the social origin and environment and class affiliation of the historian affect only too clearly.

This attitude underlies his purely Hegelian view of freedom as identical with the knowledge of the laws of necessity. If you know in which direction the world process is working, you can either identify yourself with [136] it or not; if you do not, if you fight it, you thereby compass your own certain destruction, being necessarily defeated by the forward advance of history. To choose to do so deliberately is to behave irrationally. Only a rational being is truly free to choose between alternatives: where one of these leads to his own irresistible destruction, he cannot choose it freely, because to say that an act is free, as Marx employs the term, is to deny that it is contrary to reason.<sup>82</sup> The bourgeoisie as a class is indeed fated to disappear, but individual members of it may follow reason and save themselves (as Marx might have claimed to have done himself) by leaving it before it finally founders. They can

**<sup>82</sup> while anyone anyone who is rational and also acquainted with the facts cannot but choose to identify himself with the new forces and abandon the old. (A252)**

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obtain their freedom by discovering the true state of the **historical (A252)** balance of forces and acting accordingly; freedom thus entails knowledge of historical necessity.

**To say of causes likely to be defeated that they are, despite themselves, intrinsically good or noble seemed to Marx self-contradictory, a form of subjective preference, random caprice, founded on insufficient diagnosis of the situation: those who did so were moved by some pathological irrationalism which blinded them to the real facts. (A253)** Marx's use of words like 'right' or 'free,' or 'rational,' whenever he does not slip insensibly into ordinary usage, owes its eccentric air to the fact that it derives from his metaphysical views; and therefore diverges widely from that of common speech which is largely intended to record and communicate something scarcely of interest to him – the subjective experience of individuals, their states of mind or of body as revealed by the senses or in self-consciousness.

Such in outline is the theory of history and society which constitutes the metaphysical basis of communism. It is a wide and comprehensive doctrine which derives its structure from Hegel, and its dynamic principle from Saint-Simon, its belief in the primacy of matter from Feuerbach, and its view of the proletariat from the French communist tradition. Nevertheless it is wholly original; the combination of elements does not in this case lead to syncretism, but forms a bold, clear, coherent system with the wide range and the massive architectonic quality which is at once the greatest pride and the fatal defect of all forms of [137] Hegelian thought. But it is not guilty of Hegel's reckless and contemptuous attitude towards the results of the scientific research of his time; on the contrary, it attempts to follow the direction indicated by the empirical sciences, and to incorporate their general results. Marx's practice has not always conformed to this theoretical ideal, *and that of his followers even less*: while not actually distorted, the facts are sometimes made to undergo peculiar transformations in the process of being fitted into the intricate dialectical pattern. It is not a wholly empirical theory, since it does not confine itself to the description of the phenomena and the formulation of hypotheses concerning their structure; the doctrine of movement in dialectical opposites is not a hypothesis, liable to be made less or more probable by the evidence of facts, but a metaphysical belief, known

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to be true by a special, non-empirical, historical intuition; to deny this would be tantamount, according to Marx, to a return to 'vulgar' materialism, which recognises only those connexions as real for which there is the evidence of the physical senses. **But when Engels drew the celebrated distinction between Utopian and Scientific socialism, he was paying his friend and master no empty compliment: the originality and attractiveness of a Utopia is too easily purchased if it is formed without specific regard to existing conditions out of whatever arbitrarily chosen characteristics its creator finds most personally congenial, or most compatible with the freely conceived imagined human beings who are to inhabit it: Marx is guilty of no such intellectual irresponsibility, nor, it may be added, of the fundamental levity or cynicism which leads men to condemn the actual world for falling short of some ideal condition, for the attainment of which they offer no practical policy. His work possesses an originality and power of an altogether profounder order, the consequences of a rigorous sifting of the existing theories and doctrines and utopias for such grains of gold as they contain, such true analysis of actual facts as seemed embedded in them, rejecting whatever seemed mere fancy or wistful wish fulfilment, and out of this, built, within the narrow limits left open by the actual inescapable conditions of the present, a system designed at once to explain the past and in terms of it to indicate the future, a system which recognising no authority higher than human observation, allows all its hypotheses to be tested by experience. (A254–5)**

In the sharpness and the clarity with which it formulates its questions, in the rigorism of the method by which it searches for the answers, in the combination of attention to detail and power of wide comprehensive generalisation, it is without parallel. Even if all its specific conclusions were proved false, its importance in creating a wholly new attitude to social and historical questions, and so opening new avenues of human knowledge, would be unimpaired.<sup>83</sup> The scientific study of economic relations and their

<sup>83</sup> **Its reasoning is often invalid, and its conclusions false, but no theory which claims to have superseded it has learnt from it questions which it is essential to ask and that method it is proper to employ in solving the; in this sense, it has by practicing it,**

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bearing on other aspects of the lives of communities and individuals began with the application of Marxist canons of interpretation. Previous thinkers, as, for example, Vico, Hegel, and Saint-Simon, drew up general schemata, but their direct results, as embodied in the gigantic systems of Comte or Spencer, are at once too abstract and too vague, and as [138] forgotten in our day as they deserve to be.

**Marx spent much of his remaining thirty years of life in developing the conclusions, adding complementary hypotheses, accumulating evidence for his central thesis: a process in which he became a father of economic history in its modern form, producing models of a precise analysis of political events in terms of the social and economic conflicts between classes out of which they grew. HE more than any other thinker is responsible for the contempt among serious historians for certain forms of superficiality, for empty social utopianism on the one hand, and for social historical journalism on the other: confined to accounts of individuals, their characters and their lives, their savings and their deeds, a contempt which was no longer consciously recognised because it has become too familiar. If to convert to platitudes what had previously been paradoxes is a test of genius, Marx was liberally endowed with it: his achievements are necessarily unnoticed in proportion to the extent to which their effects have become part of the permanent backgrounds of civilised thought. (A256–7)**

The true father of modern economic history, and, indeed, of modern sociology, in so far as any one man may be called that, is Karl Marx. If to have turned into truisms what had previously been paradoxes is a mark of genius, Marx was richly endowed with it. His achievements in this sphere are necessarily unnoticed in proportion as their effects have become part of the permanent background of civilised thought.

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created a new subject of scientific sociology as the proper method of writing history. (A255)

[139]CHAPTER VII

1848

Gegen Demokraten Helfen nur Soldaten.  
(Against democrats, only soldiers are of use.)

Prussian Song

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity ... when what this republic  
really means is Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery....

KARL MARX, Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

Marx was expelled from Paris in the beginning of 1845 by the Guizot government, as a result of representations from Prussia,<sup>84</sup> which had demanded the suppression of the socialist *Vorwärts* in which offensive comments had appeared concerning the character and life of the reigning Prussian king. The order of expulsion was originally intended to apply to the entire group, including Heine, Bakunin, Ruge and several other lesser foreign exiles. Ruge, being a Saxon citizen, was left unmolested; the government itself did not venture to press the order against Heine, a figure of European fame, then at the height of his powers and reputation. Bakunin and Marx were duly expelled in spite of vigorous protests in the radical Press. Bakunin went to Switzerland; Marx, with his wife and one-year-old daughter Jenny, to Brussels where shortly afterwards he was joined by Engels who had returned from England for this purpose. In Brussels he lost no time in establishing contact with the various German communist workers' organisations which contained members of the dissolved League of the Just, an international society of proletarian revolutionaries with a violent, but vague, programme, which was influenced by Weitling and had branches in various European [140] cities. **Having decided on the proper tactics to pursue, Marx put them into immediate practice: he had concluded, while still in Paris, that the class of society which was both inevitable and desirable could only be treated by a violent revolution made by the proletariat, conscious of its two-fold historical task of**

<sup>84</sup> The Guizot government acceded to the requests of the Prussians. (It is said that the agent of the Prussian government was a humanist and liberal A. Humboldt.) (A337)

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**destroying the old order and creating a new; and proceeded to explain their mission to such as representatives of the workers as he could find in Belgium. (A338)** He entered into relations with Belgian socialists and radicals, carried on an active correspondence with members of similar bodies in other countries, *and established regular machinery for the exchange of political information*, but the chief sphere of his activity lay among the German workmen in Brussels itself. To these he attempted *by means of lectures, and of articles in their organ, the Brüsseler Zeitung*, to explain their proper part in the coming revolution, which he, like the majority of European radicals, believed to be imminent.

From the moment that he concluded that the establishment of communism could only be achieved by an armed rising of the proletariat<sup>85</sup>, his entire existence turned into an attempt to organise and discipline it for its task. His personal history which up to this point, can be regarded as a series of episodes in the life of an individual, now becomes inseparable from the general history of socialism in Europe. An account of one is necessarily to some degree an account of the other. Attempts to distinguish the part which Marx played in directing the movement from the movement itself, obscure the history of both.<sup>86</sup>

**In this respect, he is a completely exceptional figure among the men of his generation: the middle decades of the nineteenth century formed the period in which private lives and private feelings were assiduously and devotedly cultivated, in which public characters and their words and acts were seen by others, and often by themselves, as springing from a personal experience of which their public lives are about the most conspicuous aspect, socially most significant and intelligible only in terms in which there existed side by side with elaborate private worlds of highly self-conscious, meticulously introspected experience insulated from each other by these thin but virtually**

<sup>85</sup> from the moment that he concluded that it was his duty to become a revolutionary, (A338)

<sup>86</sup> and if one is to attempt to keep distinct the part which Marx played in directing the movement from the movement itself this cannot be done by paying attention to events of his private life whose increasing monopoly is the measure of their absorption in a wider whole. (A339)

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**impenetrable walls, and presenting to the historian a complex scene of involved personal relationships whose inner history is nowhere recorded, and of which no detailed account could possibly be given. (A339)**

*The task of preparing the workers for the revolution was for him a scientific task, a routine occupation, something to be performed as solidly and efficiently as possible, and not a direct means of personal self-expression. The external circumstances of his life are therefore as monotonous as those of any other devoted expert, as those of Darwin or Pasteur, and offer the sharpest possible contrast to the restless, emotionally involved, lives of the other revolutionaries of his time.*

The middle decades of the nineteenth century form a period in which an enormous premium was placed on sensibility. *What had begun by being the isolated experience of exceptional individuals, of Byron and Shelley, Rousseau and Chateaubriand, Schiller and Jean Paul, by insensible degrees became part of the [141] general attitude of European society.* For the first time a whole generation became fascinated by the personal experience of men and women<sup>87</sup>, as opposed to the external world composed of surfaces of the lives of whole groups or societies. This tendency obtained public expression in the lives and doctrines of the great democratic revolutionaries, and in the passionate adoration with which they were regarded by their followers: Mazzini, Kossuth, Garibaldi, Bakunin, Lassalle, were admired not only as heroic fighters for freedom, but for their romantic, poetical properties as individuals. Their achievements were looked upon as the expression of a profound inner experience, the intensity of which gave their words and gestures a moving personal quality wholly different from the austere impersonal heroism of the men of 1789, a quality which constitutes the distinguishing characteristic, the peculiar Hegelian essence of the age. Karl Marx belonged in spirit to an earlier or a later generation; but certainly not to his own time. **He neither used nor understood the current romantic idiom, and indeed looked at it with distaste as so much vulgar sentimentality. (A339)** He was insensitive by nature, and poverty and hard work did not increase his emotional receptiveness; he had had a brief sentimental period as a student in Berlin: this was now over the done with. He looked upon moral or

<sup>87</sup> became conscious of the superior value of the individual's own experiences, (A340)

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emotional suffering, and spiritual crises, as so much bourgeois self-indulgence, unpardonable in time of war: like Lenin after him, he had nothing but contempt for those, who during the heat of the battle, while the enemy gained one position after another, were preoccupied with the state of their souls.

**He differed from his contemporaries not in degree but in kind: there is no other political figure during this period, not even Cavour, who remotely resembles Marx in the extent to which he invested his entire life and character in his public activity, until nothing was left for private life except a bare unfurnished framework.**

Like Rousseau, he lived before his day: if Jean-Jacques was a man of the nineteenth century born a century too early and seemed abnormal, because he was out of harmony with the society in which he lived, Marx possessed certain of the leading characteristics of a later date, which caused no surprise to a Lenin or a Clemenceau: his contemporaries found him unsympathetic, and no wonder. The stress on action and contempt and distrust of passive thought; the anti-individualistic, anti-humanitarian attitude to government; the individualism for centralised collective action on the part of well-disciplined bodies of men obeying a simple, lucid, easily intelligible plan against which there is no appeal. The scepticism about the possibility of disinterestedness and the belief that by nature, every individual and association of individuals is inevitably competitive; that victory consists in invasion and the enemy's losses, consequently the necessity of so-altering the economic springs of action so as to remove the possibility of private competition for material goods, an end which neither human reason nor human benevolence nor the sense of solidarity can achieve unaided. The futility of individual conversion is thus for the first time stated unambiguously. He detested the superfluous, the gradual the inconclusive, and sought for a simple, direct, forceful mode of action which would right the situation once and for all solve the problems both of society and of the individual. He was at once the precursor of the new attitude and one of the influences which helped to make it. He reacted against the prevailing liberal and individualist temper of his period half a

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century before anyone else. This too contributes to the curious isolation from the prevailing tendencies, from the main currents of European culture in which this by nature intellectually alert and curious man found himself after 1848. He read nothing later than Balzac, save scientific works and occasionally light literature. For the next thirty years he cannot be said to develop at all, only systematically in accordance with his beliefs and his inclinations, unaffected by and more often than not directed against the humane, pacific currents of his day. (A340–3)

In Brussels, Marx met the first serious revolutionaries of his career, the German artisans in whom the spirit of the great revolution was still obscurely at work, who belonged to the loose communist federation with branches in many lands. (99.1) He set to work to create an international revolutionary organisation.<sup>88</sup> He resolutely refused to meet intellectuals, whom he suspected of entertaining thoughts of revolution when occupying themselves seriously with the details of its execution. His energy, single-mindedness, growing fanaticism of outlook, the solidly laid-foundations of his beliefs and exceptional practical ability were recognised with nervous respect by the cosmopolitan society of political exiles and Belgian artisans, in which at this period they moved. The exiled German poet, Freiligrath, who living in the same city, spoke of him as ‘that nice energetic fellow’. He was immediately active, he lectured to groups of workers on economic questions, and he wrote pamphlets and articles on socialist tactics and organisation: the revolution was imminent, and a trained body of working class must be created to guide it into the proper channels. With this end in view, he corresponded with various proletarian groups and associations seeking to unite them by establishing machinery while exchanging information and criticism: Proudhon, whom he invited to become the Paris correspondent declined, preferring to preserve complete independence and distrusting the Germans in general. (99.1-100.4)

<sup>88</sup> Consequently, he set himself to get in touch with and co-ordinate this scattered activity which was occurring sporadically in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany. (99.1)

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He received the warmest response from London, from a society called the German Workers' Educational Association, headed by a small group of exiled artisans, whose revolutionary temper was beyond suspicion: the type-setter Schapper, the watch-maker Moll and the cobbler Bauer were his first reliable [142] political allies. *They had affiliated their society to a federation called the Communist League which succeeded the dissolved League of the Just.* He met them in the course of a journey to England with Engels, and found them men after his own heart, determined, capable and energetic. They looked on him with considerable suspicion as a journalist and an intellectual: and their relations for some years preserved a severely impersonal and business-like character. It was an association for immediate practical ends, such as he approved. Under his guidance, the Communist League grew fast and began to embrace groups of radical workers, scattered for the most part in the industrial areas in Germany, with a sprinkling of army officers and professional men. Engels wrote glowing reports of the increase in their numbers and their revolutionary zeal in his own native province. For the first time Marx found himself in the position which he had long desired, the organiser and leader of an active and expanding revolutionary party. Bakunin, who had in his turn arrived in Brussels, and was on equally good terms with the foreign radicals and members of the local aristocracy, complained that Marx preferred the society of artisans and workmen to that of intelligent people, and was spoiling good and simple men by filling their heads with abstract theories and obscure economic doctrines, which they did not begin to understand, and which only made them intolerably conceited. **Bakunin disliked and mistrusted Marx who did not conceal his suspicion of those idealistic members of the Russian gentry who were abroad, and when they returned treated their serfs no less heartlessly, than the rest of their class; who like Bakunin, sat still and waited for an immense outbreak of elemental force, a sudden earthquake which would change the contours of European society, but themselves contributed nothing towards it, save mere words.** (102.9) He saw no point in lecturing to, and organising small groups of ill-educated and hopelessly limited German artisans, who understood little of what was so elaborately expounded to them, drab, underfed creatures who could not conceivably turn the scale in any decisive conflict. Marx's attack on Proudhon still

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further estranged them; Proudhon was an intimate friend, and in Hegelian matters, a disciple of Bakunin; and the attack was aimed no less at Bakunin's own habit of [143] indulging in vague and exuberant eloquence in place of detailed political analysis.

The result of 1848 altered the view of both on the technique of the coming revolution, but in precisely opposed directions. Bakunin in later years turned to secret terrorist groups, Marx to the foundation of an open official revolutionary party proceeding by recognised political methods. He set himself to destroy the tendency to rhetoric and vagueness among the Germans, nor was he wholly unsuccessful, as may be seen in the efficient and disciplined behaviour of the members of his organisation in Germany during the two revolutionary years and after. **His activities, even in the free country of Belgium, were not entirely unimpeded: the Prussian Ambassador requested his expulsion, the unfriendliness of King Leopold's cautious officials grew from day to day. Marx took little notice and continued his propaganda. (103.11)**

In 1847, he went to London to attend a banquet held to commemorate the Polish insurrection of 1838. The cause of revolutionary Poland drew all radicals together. For many years the Polish cause functioned as the greatest common symbol of the struggle for freedom. Marx spoke, as usual harshly and soberly. He began with a denunciation and a warning: he attacked the nationalism which played a greater part in the Prussian intelligence than social motives, and warned his hearers that unless the social needs were made clear and unequivocal, the opportunist alliance, between the Polish democrats, who wanted freedom and the Polish nobility, who wanted the restoration of their power, would disrupt the movement. On the same day however, Bakunin spoke at a similar meeting in Paris with magnificent eloquence and passion. He declared that the Czar was an enemy of the Russians no less than to the Poles; in Russia, vast masses were stirring uneasily against the hated rule. This great popular discontent would blaze into open revolt, and the Poles would stretch out their hand to their Russian brothers, in new great Slav alliance for freedom and justice. The effects of this speech were immense and unforgettable. Russians and Poles embraced and wept: the differences of

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years and decades seemed obliterated in the generous warmth of this unique occasion; old enmities and jealousies seemed healed in the wave of common humanity. Marx was right and Bakunin was wrong, as subsequent events were to show. Bakunin's prophecy proved false because the evidence for it existed only in his imagination: he had invented it, the movements and the Russian masses and all, from the beginning to the end. It was this capacity for deception on a realistic scale which drove Marx to fury and contempt. His own prediction was accurately borne out by the fate of the next Polish rebellion. His analysis was correct, but he stated it so coldly and unsympathetically, that it is unlikely that he obtained the credit for it either before or after the event. (103.11-105.16)

In 1847 the London centre of the Communist League showed its confidence in him by commissioning him to compose a document containing a definitive statement of its beliefs and aims. He eagerly embraced this opportunity for an explicit summary of the new doctrine which had lately assumed its final shape in his head. He delivered it into their hands early in 1848. It was published a few weeks before the outbreak of the Paris revolution under the title of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

Engels wrote the first draft in the form of questions and answers, but since this was not thought sufficiently forcible, Marx completely re-wrote it. According to Engels the result was an original work which owed hardly anything to his own hand; but he was excessively modest wherever their collaboration was concerned, so that it is virtually impossible to say how great a share he had in its composition. The result is very nearly a work of genius. No other modern political movement or cause can claim to have produced anything comparable with it in eloquence or power. **No other political movement or cause can claim to possess anything remotely reproaching it in brilliance of style and sharpness of effects, a document intellectually and emotionally so moving. It was written in haste and in a state of considerable although rigidly controlled fury: it could only have been composed during the rising phase of a crisis in a mood of unconcealed excitement produced by the sense of vast unrest and unsuspected power whose menace largely lay in the fact that its strength was unknown, ready to be**

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**precipitated into the battle with sudden overwhelming effect. (19-20)** It is a document of prodigious dramatic force; in form it is an edifice of bold and arresting historical generalisations, mounting to a denunciation of the existing order in [144] the name of the avenging forces of the future, much of it written in prose which has the lyrical quality of a great revolutionary hymn, whose effect overwhelming even now, was probably greater ninety years ago.

It opens with a menacing phrase which reveals its tone and its intention: 'A spectre is wandering over Europe to-day – the spectre of communism. All the forces of Europe have united to exorcise it: the Pope and the Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals and German policemen ... it is recognised as a real force by all the European powers.' It proceeds as a succession of interconnected theses which are developed and brilliantly embroidered, and ends with a famous and magnificent invocation addressed to the workers of the world.<sup>89</sup>

*The first of these theses is contained in the opening sentence of the first section: 'the history of all previous society is the history of class struggles.' At all periods within recorded memory mankind has been divided into exploiter and exploited, master and slave, patrician and plebeian, and in our day proletarian and capitalist. The immense development of discovery and invention has transformed the economic system of modern human society: guilds have given way to local manufacture, and this in its turn to great industrial enterprises. Each stage in this expansion is accompanied by political and cultural forms peculiar to itself. The structure of the modern State reflects the domination of the bourgeoisie – it is in effect a committee for managing the affairs of the bourgeois class as a whole. The bourgeoisie fulfilled a highly revolutionary role in its day; it overthrew the feudal order and in so doing destroyed the old, picturesque, patriarchal, relations which connected a man to his 'natural masters' and left only one real relation between them – the cash nexus, naked self-interest. It has turned personal dignity into a negotiable*

<sup>89</sup> It begins with a dramatic account of history of class war as the central dynamic element in the history of human society, it continues with the analysis of the contemporary state of this war, of the alignment of powers and of the nature of the coming struggle: it calls upon the doomed bourgeois world to capitulate before it is too late to the irresistible and ruthless might of a new and youthful class which was about to claim its historic heritage and ends with a peroration of immense rhetorical power calling upon the workers of the world to unite for final victory. (20)

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*commodity, to be bought and sold; in place of ancient liberties, secured [145] by writs and charters, it has created freedom of trade; for exploitation disguised by religious and political masks, it has substituted exploitation, direct, cynical and unashamed. It has turned professions formerly thought honourable, as being forms of service to the community, into mere hired labour: acquisitive in its aims, it has degraded every form of life. This was achieved by calling immense new natural resources into existence: the feudal framework could not contain the new development, and was split asunder. Now the process has repeated itself. The frequent economic crisis due to over-production are a symptom of the fact that capitalism can in its turn no longer control its own resources. When a social order is forced to destroy its own products, to prevent its own faculties from expanding too rapidly and too far, that is a certain sign of its approaching bankruptcy and doom. The bourgeois order has created the proletariat which is at once its heir and its executioner. It has succeeded in destroying the power of all other rival forms of organisation, the aristocracy, the small artisans and leaders, but the proletariat it cannot destroy, for it is necessary to its own existence, is an organic part of its system, and constitutes the great army of the dispossessed, whom in the very act of exploiting it inevitably disciplines and organises. The more international capitalism becomes – and as it expands, it inevitably grows more so – the wider and more international the scale on which it automatically organises the workers, whose union and solidarity will eventually overthrow it. the international of capitalism breeds inevitably, as its own necessary complement, the international of the working class. This dialectical process is inexorable, and no power can arrest it or control it. Hence it is futile to attempt to restore the old mediaeval idyll, to build utopian schemes on a nostalgic desire to return to the past, for which the [146] ideologists of peasants, artisans, small traders so ardently long. the past is gone, the classes which belonged to it have long been decisively defeated by the force of history; their hostility toward the bourgeoisie, often falsely called socialism, is a reactionary attitude, a futile attempt to reverse the advance of human evolution. Their only hope of triumph over the enemy lies in abandonment of their independent existence and fusion with the proletariat, whose growth corrodes the bourgeoisie from within; for the increases of crises and of unemployment forces the bourgeoisie to exhaust itself in feeding its servants instead of feeding on them, which is its natural function.*

*From attack the manifesto passes to defence. The enemies of socialism declare that the abolition of private property will destroy liberty and subvert the foundations of religion, morality and culture. This is admitted. But the values which it will thus destroy will be only those which are bound up with the old order – bourgeois liberty and bourgeois culture, whose appearance of absolute*

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*validity for all times and places is an illusion due solely to their function as a weapon in class struggle. True personal freedom rests on a basis of power by independent action, of which the artisan, the small trader, the peasant, has long been deprived by capitalism. As for culture, 'the culture the loss of which is lamented is, for the enormous majority, a mere training to act as a machine.' With the total abolition of the class struggle these illusory ideals will necessarily vanish and be succeeded by the new and wider form of life founded upon a classless society. To mourn their loss is to lament the disappearance of an old familiar ailment.*

*The revolution must differ in differing circumstances, but its first measures everywhere must be the nationalisation of land, credit, transport, the abolition of rights of inheritance, the increase of taxation, the [147] intensification of production, the destruction of the barriers between town and country, the introduction of compulsory work and of free education for all. Only then can serious social reconstruction begin. The rest of the Manifesto exposes and refutes various forms of pseudo-socialism — attempts of various enemies of the bourgeoisie, the aristocracy, or the Church, to gain the proletariat to its cause by specious pretence of common interest. Into this category enters the ruined petite bourgeoisie, whose writers, adept as they are at exposing the chaos of capitalist production, the pauperisation and degradation caused by the introduction of machinery, the monstrous inequalities of wealth, offer remedies which, being conceived in obsolete terms, are utopian. Even this cannot be said of the German 'True Socialists,' who by translating French platitudes into the language of Hegelianism, produce a meaningless collection of nonsense phrases which cannot long deceive the world. As for Proudhon, Fourier or Owen, their followers draw up schemes to save the bourgeoisie, as if the proletariat did not exist, or else could be drawn upwards into capitalist ranks, leaving only exploiters and no exploited. This endless variety of views represents the desperate plight of the bourgeoisie unable or unwilling to face its own impending death, concentrating upon vain efforts to survive under the guise of a vague and opportunist socialism. As for the communists, they are not a party or a sect, but the self-conscious vanguard of the proletariat itself, obsessed by no mere theoretical ends, but seeking to fulfil their historical destiny. they do not conceal their aims. They openly declare that these can be gained only when the entire social order is overthrown by force of arms, and they themselves seize all political and economic power. The Manifesto ends with the celebrated words 'The workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all lands, unite!'*

[148] No summary can convey the quality of its opening or its closing pages. As an instrument of destructive propaganda it has

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no equal anywhere; its effect upon succeeding generations is unparalleled outside religious history; had its author written nothing else, it would have ensured his lasting fame.<sup>90</sup> Its most immediate effect, however, was upon his own fortunes. The Belgian Government, which behaved with considerable tolerance to political exiles, could not overlook this formidable publication, and brusquely expelled him and his family from its territory. On the next day the long expected revolution broke out in Paris. Flocon, a radical member of the new French Government, in a highly flattering letter, invited Marx to return to the revolutionary city. He immediately set off and arrived a day later.

He found the city in a state of universal and uncritical enthusiasm. The barriers had fallen once more, this time it seemed for ever. *The king had fled, a new Government had been appointed containing representatives of all the friends of humanity and progress: the great physicist Arago and the poet Lamartine received portfolios, the workers were represented by Louis Blanc and Albert. Lamartine composed an eloquent manifesto which was read, quoted, declaimed everywhere. The streets were filled with an immense singing, cheering throng of democrats of all hues and nationalities.* The opposition showed no sign of life. The Church published a manifesto in which it asserted that Christianity was not inimical to individual liberty, that on the contrary it was its natural ally and defender; its kingdom was not of this world, and consequently such support as it had been accused of giving to the reaction, sprang neither from its principles nor from its historical position in European society, and could be radically modified without doing violence to the essence of its teaching. These announcements were [149] received with enthusiasm and credulity. the German exiles vied with the Poles and the Italians in their predictions of the imminent and universal collapse of the reaction, and of the immediate appearance on its ruins of a new moral world. News presently arrived that Naples had revolted, then Milan, Rome, Venice and other Italian cities. Berlin, Vienna, and

<sup>90</sup> **Its sharp and concentrated eloquence is as fresh and stirring now as on the day on which it appeared: the new gospel of the revolutionary socialism is contained in its totality in its intoxicated pages; as an instrument of destructive propaganda it is the most potent weapon in the hands of any revolutionary party and had its author done nothing else it would have ensured his lasting fame.**  
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Budapest had risen in arms. Europe was ablaze at last ! (25)Excitement among the Germans in Paris rose to fever pitch. To support the insurgent republicans a German Legion was formed, which the poet Georg Herwegh and a Prussian communist and ex-soldier named Willich were to lead. It was to start at once. The French Government, not unwilling, perhaps, to see so many foreign agitators leave its soil, encouraged the project. Engels was greatly attracted by the scheme and would almost certainly have enlisted, but was dissuaded by Marx, who viewed the proceeding with the greatest mistrust and hostility. He saw no sign of any large-scale revolt of the German masses: here and there autocratic governments were overthrown, and the princes were forced to promise constitutions and appoint mildly liberal governments, but the Prussian army was still largely loyal to the king, while the democrats were scattered, badly led, and unable to reach agreement among themselves on vital points. The elected popular congress which met in Frankfurt to decide the future government of Germany was a failure from the first, and the sudden appearance of a legion of untrained *émigré* intellectuals on German soil appeared to Marx a needless waste of revolutionary energy, likely to have a ludicrous or a pitiful<sup>91</sup> end, and to be followed by a paralysing mood of shame and disillusionment., **even more fatal to the cause of the revolution than the indiscriminate but vigorous pessimism of the forties.** (26)Consequently, Marx opposed the formation of the legion, took no interest in it after it had left Paris for its inevitable defeat by the royal army, and went to Cologne to see what could be done by propaganda, in his native Rhineland. He [150] was there largely instrumental in persuading a group of liberal industrialists and communist sympathisers to found a new *Rheinische Zeitung* (NRZ), in succession to the journal of that name which had been suppressed five years before, and to appoint him its editor. Cologne was then the scene of an uneasy balance of power between the local democrats, who controlled the local militia, and a garrison under orders from Berlin. **The articles which he printed in his newspaper in 1848-1849 threw a very clear light on the history of the German revolution as viewed through the eyes of an active revolutionary.** (27)Acting in the name of

<sup>91</sup> farcical (26)

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the Communist League, Marx sent his agents to agitate among the German industrial masses, and used their reports as the material for his leading articles. There was at this time no formal censorship in the Rhineland, and his inflammatory words reached an ever-widening public. The *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was well informed, and alone in the left wing press possessed a clear policy of its own. Its circulation increased rapidly and it began to be widely read in other German provinces.

Marx had come armed with a complete political and economic plan of action founded on the solid theoretical basis which he had built carefully during the preceding years, **and which he now believed with something approaching fanaticism, gradually became maddened by the collapse of all his hopes, due he believed to the combination of corrupt weakness and cowardice on the part of the bourgeoisie, the ineffective chatter of the Frankfurt liberals, the unpractical extremism of a handful of honourable and brave radical in Cologne and Frankfurt, remote from all sense of reality, ignorant of the rudiments of political strategy, ignorant of their own strength and that of the enemy, limited provincial, full of revolutionary commonplace which had long lost their meaning. (28)**

He advocated a conditional alliance between the workers and the radical bourgeoisie for the immediate purpose of overthrowing a reactionary government<sup>92</sup>, declaring that whereas the French had freed themselves from the yoke of feudalism in 1789, and were by this enabled to take the next step forward in 1848, the Germans had achieved their revolutions in the region of pure thought alone; as thinkers they had far outstripped the French in the radicalism of their sentiments: politically they still inhabited the eighteenth century. The most backward of western nations, they thus had two stages to achieve before they could hope to attain to that of developed industrialism, thenceforth to march in step with the neighbouring democracies. *The dialectical movement of history permits no leaps* and the representatives of the proletariat did [151] ill to overlook the claims of the bourgeoisie which, in working for its own emancipation, was furthering the general cause, and was

<sup>92</sup> **overthrowing a government, which Marx declared, was no better than a hostage to the reaction, unable to move without its consent, more terrified of the arrival of the future than of the return of the past. (33)**

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economically and politically far better organised and capable of ruling than the ignorant, scattered, badly organised masses of the working class. The proper<sup>93</sup> step, therefore, for the workers to take was to conclude an alliance with their fellow victims among the middle and lower middle class and then, after the victory, to seek to control, and if necessary, obstruct the work of their new allies, who by this time would doubtless be anxious to end their compromising association, by the sheer weight of their numbers and economic power. He opposed the Cologne democrats, Anneke and Gottschalk, who advocated absolute abstention from such naked opportunism, and indeed from all political action, as likely to compromise and weaken the pure proletarian cause. *This seemed to him a typically German inability to perceive the true balance of forces.* He demanded direct intervention and the sending of delegates to Frankfurt, as the only effective practical course. *Political aloofness seemed to him the height of tactical folly, since it was likely to leave the workers isolated, and at the mercy of the victorious class.* In foreign policy he was a pronounced pan-German and a rabid Russophobe. Russia had for many years occupied the same position in relation to the forces of democracy and progress and evoked the same emotional reaction as the fascist powers in the present day [sc. 1938]. It was hated and feared by democrats of all persuasions as the great champion of reaction, able and willing to crush all attempts at liberty within and without its borders.

As in 1842, Marx demanded an immediate war with Russia, *both because no attempt at democratic revolution could succeed in Germany in view of the certainty of Russian intervention,* and as a means of welding the German principalities into a united democratic whole in [152] opposition to a power whose entire influence was ranged on the side of the dynastic element in European politics; perhaps also in order to aid those scattered revolutionary forces within Russia itself to the existence of which Bakunin used to make constant mysterious references. Marx was prepared to sacrifice many other considerations to the ends of German unity – since in its disunion he, no less than Hegel and Bismarck, saw the cause at once of its weakness, its inefficiency and its political backwardness. He was neither a romantic, nor a nationalist, and regarded small nations, and even federations, as so many obsolete survivals impeding

<sup>93</sup> natural (34)

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social and economic progress. He therefore acted quite consistently in publicly approving the German invasion of the Danish province of Schleswig-Holstein; an act, the open support of which by most of the leading German democrats, caused considerable embarrassment to their allies among the liberals and constitutionalists of other lands.

He denounced the succession of short-lived liberal governments which, easily and, it seemed to him, almost with relief, allowed the power to slip through their grasp back into that of the king and his party. There were furious outbursts against 'empty chatter' and of 'parliamentary cretinism' in Frankfurt, which ended in a storm of indignation hardly paralleled in *Das Kapital* itself. He did not either then or later despair of the ultimate outcome of the conflict, but his conception of the revolutionary tactics, and his view of the intelligence and reliability of the masses and their leaders, changed violently: he declared their own incurable stupidity to be a greater obstacle to their progress than capitalism itself. His own policy, as it turned out, proved as impracticable as that of the intransigent radicals whom he denounced. In his subsequent analysis he attributed the disastrous result of the revolution to the weakness of the bourgeoisie, the ineffectiveness of the parlia[153]mentary liberals, but principally to the political blindness of the infinitely gullible masses, obstinately loyal to the agents of their own worst enemy, who deceived and flattered them and led them only too easily to their destruction. **His articles began after a burst of enthusiasm and appeals to the people to grow into attacks and in these aimed at the liberals who easily and almost with relief allowed the power to slip through their grasp back into those of the king and his generals, and ends in a fury of indignation hardly paralleled in *Das Kapital* itself. He did not either then or later despair of the ultimate outcome of the conflict, but his conception of the revolutionary tactics and his view of the intelligence and reliability of the masses and their leaders changed violently: their own blindness seemed a greater obstacle to their progress than capitalism itself. (29-30)** If the rest of his life was spent as much over purely tactical problems, as much in consideration of what method it was best for revolutionary leaders to adopt in the interests of their uncomprehending flock, as in the analysis of its actual condition, this was largely due to the lesson of

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the German revolution. In 1849, after the failure of the risings in Vienna and in Dresden, he wrote violent diatribes against liberals of all persuasions as being cowards and *saboteurs*, still hypnotised by the king and his drill sergeants, frightened by the thought of too definite a victory, prepared to betray the revolution for fear of the dangerous forces which it might release, and so virtually defeated before they began. He declared that, even if the bourgeoisie succeeded in making its corrupt deal with the enemy at the expense of its allies among the *petite bourgeoisie* and the workers, at best it would not gain more than had been won by French liberals under the July monarchy in France, while at worst the bargain would be repudiated by the king and become the prelude to a new monarchist terror. No other journal in Germany dared to go as far in denouncing the government. The uncompromising directness of these analyses, and the audacity of the conclusions which Marx drew from them, fascinated his readers against their will, although unmistakable signs of panic began to show themselves among the shareholders.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>94</sup> This was entirely due to the experience of the German revolution of 1848. From the beginning the *NRZ*, in spite of its industrialist backers, systematically devoted itself to backing the bourgeois governments appointed in Berlin by the frightened king, itself denounced as the government of cowards and saboteurs, more afraid of the ultimate fruit of their own power on the part of the emancipated working class than even their own masters, the army and aristocracy, who were perhaps prepared to demolish themselves, prepared to betray the revolution for fear of the dangerous forces which it might unchain: themselves consequently helpless pawns in the hand of the reaction, which finding itself unconquered to its own surprise, worked upon the fears of the new regime to achieve its own restoration. At best the result being the bourgeoisie was allowed to make its corrupt bargain at the expense of allies among the petit bourgeois and the workers could not achieve a state preferable to that of the July monarchy in France, at worst it would lead to a new monarchist terror. No other journal in Germany of that day dared to go as far in denouncing the government. The boldness and directness of these insults fascinated their readers against their will in creating for its editor that reputation for savage intransigence which he preserved for the rest of his life. (31-32)

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By July, 1848, the heroic phase of the Paris revolution had spent itself, and the conservative forces began to rally their strength. The socialist and radical members of the Government, Louis Blanc, Albert, Flocon, were forced to resign. The workers rebelled against the right-wing republicans who remained in power, [154] threw up barricades, and after three days' hand-to-hand fighting in the streets, were dispersed and routed by the National Guard and troops which remained loyal to the Government. The July *émeute* may be considered as the first purely socialist rising in Europe, consciously directed against liberals no less than against legitimists. Blanqui and Barbès called upon the people to seize power and establish an armed dictatorship: the spectre of *The Communist Manifesto* acquired substance at last; for the first time revolutionary socialism revealed itself in that savage and menacing aspect in which it has appeared ever since to its opponents in every land.

Marx reacted at once. Against the frantic protests of the owners of his newspaper, who looked upon all forms of bloodshed and violence with profound horror, he published a long and fiery leading article, taking as his subject the funeral accorded by the State to the soldiers killed during the riots in Paris:

*'The fraternity of the two opposing classes (one of which exploits the other) which in February was inscribed in huge letters upon all the façades of Paris, upon all the prisons and all the barracks ... this fraternity lasted just so long as the interests of the bourgeoisie could fraternise with the interests of the proletariat. Pedants of the old revolutionary tradition of 1793, socialist systematisers who begged the bourgeoisie to grant favours to the people, and were allowed to preach long sermons ... needed to lull the proletarian lion to sleep, republicans who wanted the whole of the old bourgeois system, minus the crowned figurehead, legitimists who did not wish to doff their livery but merely to change its cut – these had been the people's allies in the February revolution! Yet what the people hated was not Louis Philippe, but the crowned dominion of a class, capital enthroned. Nevertheless, magnanimous as ever, it fancied it had destroyed its own enemies when it had merely overthrown the [155] enemy of its enemies, the common enemy of them all.*

*'The clashes that spontaneously arise out of the conditions of bourgeois society must be fought to the bitter end; they cannot be conjured out of existence. The best form of State is the one in which opposed social tendencies are not slurred over ... but secure free expression, and are thus resolved. But we shall*

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*be asked: 'Have you then no tears, no sighs, no words of sympathy for the victims of popular frenzy?'*

*'The State will care for the widows and orphans of these men. They will be honoured in decrees: they will be given a splendid public funeral; the official press will proclaim their memories immortal ... but the plebeians, tormented by hunger, reviled in the newspapers, abandoned by the surgeons, stigmatised by all 'decent' people as thieves, incendiaries, convicts, their wives and their children plunged into greater misery than ever, the best among the survivors transported – surely the democratic press may claim the right to crown with laurel their sad and darkened brow?'*

This article not unnaturally caused a panic among the subscribers and the paper began to lose money. Presently the Prussian Government, by this time convinced it had nothing to fear from popular sentiment, ordered the dissolution of the democratic assembly. The latter replied by declaring all taxes imposed by the government illegal. Marx vehemently supported this decision and called upon the people to resist attempts to collect the tax. This time the government acted promptly and ordered the immediate suppression of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. The last issue was printed in a red type, contained an inflammatory article by Marx and a magnificent poem by Freiligrath, and was bought up as a collector's curiosity. Marx was arrested for incitement to sedition and tried before a Cologne jury. He turned the occasion into the opportunity of delivering [156] a speech of great length and erudition in which he analysed in detail the social and political situation in Germany and abroad. The result was more than unexpected: the foreman of the jury in announcing the acquittal of the accused said that he wished to thank him in his own name and that of the jury for an unusually instructive and interesting lecture by which they had all greatly profited. The Prussian government, which had annulled his Prussian citizenship four years previously, unable to reverse the verdict itself, in July 1849 expelled him from the Rhineland. He went to Paris, where the Bonapartist agitation in favour of Napoleon's nephew made the political situation even more confused than before, and it looked as if something of importance might occur at any moment. His collaborators scattered in various directions: Engels, who disliked inactivity, and declared he had nothing to lose, joined the Paris legion commanded by Willich, a single-minded communist and capable commander, whom Marx detested as a romantic

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adventurer, and Engels admired for his sincerity, coolness and personal courage. The legion was defeated in Baden by the royal forces without difficulty, and retired in good order to the frontier of the Swiss Confederation, where it dispersed. The majority of the survivors crossed into Switzerland, among them Engels, who preserved the pleasantest memories of his experiences on this occasion, and in later life used to enjoy telling the history of the campaign, which he represented as a gay and agreeable episode of no particular importance. Marx, whose capacity for enjoyment was more limited, found Paris a melancholy place. The revolution had patently failed. Legitimist, Orleanist and Bonapartist intrigue were between them undermining whatever remained of the democratic structure: such socialists and radicals as had not fled were either in prison or liable to find themselves there at any moment. The appearance of [157] Marx, who was by this time **an acknowledged leader of the German revolutionaries and a figure of European notoriety**, was highly unwelcome to the Government. Soon after his arrival he was presented with the alternative of leaving France or retiring to the distant marshes of the Morbihan in Brittany. Of free countries Belgium was close to him; Switzerland, which had expelled Weitling and showed little friendliness to Bakunin, was unlikely to permit him to say: only one European country placed no obstacle in his path. Marx arrived in Paris from the Rhineland in July; a month later a subscription among his friends, among whom Lassalle's name occurs for the first time, enabled him to pay his fare to England. He arrived in London on the 24th August 1849; his family followed a month later, and Engels, after dallying in Switzerland, and making a long and agreeable sea voyage from Genoa, came in the beginning of November. He found Marx convinced that the revolution might at any moment break out once more, and engaged on a pamphlet against the conservative republic. **By this time, Marx as already deep in local German affairs: London contained a conflux of German émigrés, members of the legion, exiled poets and intellectuals, German artisans who had never left England and Communists from Paris and Switzerland who had lately been expelled, gathered there and presently reconstituted themselves into a central communist party which established relations with English radicals and trade union leaders. Marx followed his usual tactics and kept rigidly to the society of**

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the Germans, not troubling to conceal is his distrust and dislike of the other fugitives from political storm. Russians, Poles, Italians, Hungarians on their side answered with gradual hatred and suspicion of which he took small notice: indeed he seemed almost to prefer any atmosphere of violent agitation penetrated by sharp bouts of mutual recrimination to any other. It stimulated him and strengthened his sense of his special mission: to foil the adventurers and crooks who attempted to deflect the moment to their own ends and to indoctrinate the masses with social and economic theory and strategy in the form which he himself had come to hold them after the lesion of 1848.

He continued to read enormously, to write and to agitate without ceasing. For the next twenty years his doctrinal works are occasionally interrupted by the need to extirpate heresies which, by confusing issues create confusion and dissension in the working class, and so weaken its power of resistance. At first, he believed that another and even more violent European upheaval was at hand, but later events convinced him of his error. Yet every cloud in the European horizon, an economic crisis, a commercial dispute, the threat of war, the rumour of a rising, excited his hopes immoderately. He died in 1883, no less convinced of the inevitability of a world war and world revolution than at any time since 1849. He was in all respects a most impatient man and events moved more slowly than he predicted: but both occurred when they did much as he had foretold that they should: which in the eyes of his followers redeems his minor inaccuracies and affords striking proof of the truth and profundity of his analysis of history and society. (42-46)

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EXILE IN LONDON: THE FIRST PHASE

There is only one antidote to mental suffering, and that is physical pain.

KARL MARX, *Herr Vogt*

Marx arrived in London in 1849 expecting to stay in England for a few weeks, perhaps months: and in fact lived there uninterruptedly until his death in 1883. **His existence like that of Herzen and Mazzini and indeed the majority of the foreign exiles who flocked to England after the debacle was largely ignored by the majority of even those most politically advanced inhabitant: he was not widely known even to the officials of the various worker's organisations who had heard something of his work and reputation, so much so that although on his death in a house in Haverstock Hill a few lines appeared in 'The Times' the obituary was quoted as a message of its Paris Correspondent who reported that he was a figure of great notoriety and fame. (322.54)** The isolation of England intellectually and socially from the main currents of Continental life had always been great, and the middle years of the nineteenth century offered no exception. The issues which shook the Continent took many years to cross the English Channel, and when they did, did so in some new and peculiar shape, transformed and Anglicised in the process of transition. Foreign revolutionaries were on the whole left unmolested, provided they behaved themselves in an orderly and inconspicuous manner, but neither was any kind of contact established with them. Their hosts treated them with correctness and civility, mingled with a mild indifference to their affairs, which at once irritated and amused them. Revolutionaries and men of letters, who for many years had spent their lives in a ferment of intellectual and political activity, found the London atmosphere inhumanly cold. The sense of total isolation and exile was brought home to them even more sharply by the benevolent, distant, often slightly patronising manner in which they were treated by the few Englishmen with whom they came into contact; and while this tolerant and civilised attitude did indeed create a vacuum, in which it was possible to recover

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physically and morally after the [159] nightmare of 1849, the very distance from events which created this feeling of tranquillity, the immense stability which the capitalist *regime* appeared to possess in England, the complete absence of any symptom of revolution, at times tended to induce a sense of hopeless stagnation which demoralised and embittered all but very few of the men engaged in it. In the case of Marx desperate poverty and squalor were added factors in desiccating his never unduly romantic or pliant character. While these years of enforced inactivity benefited him as a thinker and a revolutionary, they caused him to retire almost entirely into the narrow circle composed of his family, Engels, and a few intimate friends, such as Liebknecht, Wolff and Freiligrath. As a public personality his natural harshness, aggressiveness, and jealousy, his desire to crush all rivals, increased with years; his dislike of the society in which he lived became more and more acute and his personal contact with individual members of it more and more difficult: he quarrelled easily and disliked reconciliation. While he had Engels to lean on he required no other help; and towards the end of his life when the respect and admiration which he received were at their highest, no one else dared to approach him too closely for fear of some particularly humiliating rebuff: **there was no doubt that there was little he enjoyed so much as humiliating and inspiring terror in his inferiors. (326.58-327.59)** Like many great men he liked flattery, and even more, total submission: in his last years he obtained both in full measure, and died in greater honour and material comfort than he had enjoyed during any previous period of his life.

These were the years in which romantic patriots, like Kossuth or Garibaldi, were fêted and publicly cheered in the streets of London; they were regarded as picturesque figures from whom heroic behaviour and noble words were to be expected, rather than as interesting or distinguished men with whom human relations could be established. The majority of their followers were looked upon as harmless eccentrics, as indeed [160] many of them were. Marx, who did not possess sufficient fame or charm to attract much attention, found himself with few friends, and practically penniless, in a country which, although he had visited it less than three years previously, he knew very superficially. He remained in this isolated condition all his life. Living as he did in the midst of an immensely variegated and thriving society, then in the very

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heyday of the phenomenal growth of its economic and political power, he remained all his life remarkably insulated from it, **he was sufficiently remote and unsalted from it to be able to (326.58)** treat it solely as an object of scientific observation. The collapse of militant radicalism abroad left him no choice, at any rate for a time, but that of a life of observation and scholarship. The important consequence of this was that, since the material upon which he drew was largely English, being confined to what could be found in the library of the British Museum, he relied for the evidence for his hypotheses and generalisations almost entirely on English authors and experience. **It is probable that the whole course of his studies was determined by the fact that the history of Great Britain and its colonies offered far the richest field for research to anyone anxious to trace the course of commercial and industrial development of contemporary society. (326.58)**

**This completed his personal education: while philosophically, he was a typical German and a direct disciple of Hegel, and as a social theorist his views had been most strongly influenced by thought during the past one hundred years, as a historian an economist in the concrete application, the liberation and verification of his hypotheses he relied almost entirely on English authors and English experience. (327.59)** Those pieces of detailed social and historical research, which form the best and most original chapters in *Das Kapital*, are chiefly occupied with periods for which most of the evidence could be obtained from **economic histories published in England, (327.59)** the financial columns of the *Economist* newspaper, from economic histories, from statistical material to be found in government Blue Books (which he was the first scholar to put to serious scientific use) and other sources to which access could be had without leaving the confines of London. It was done in the midst of a life spent in ceaseless agitation and practical organising activity, but with an air of extreme aloofness, as if the writer were situated many miles from the scene of his discussion, a fact which sometimes causes an entirely false impression of Marx, as having grown, during the years of exile, into a remote and detached man of learning who at the age of thirty-two had left the life of action behind him to engage in purely theoretical inquiries.

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Circumstances and his own convictions during the next twenty years of his life caused him to spend the greater portion of it at a readers' desk in the British Museum: not until the day of his death did he cease to be in the fullest revolutionary agitator: by letters, pamphlets and treatises he dominated his views amongst workers' organisations: and from 1863 onwards he became the active head of an international organisation which absorbed practically his whole time and thought and which he ruled with an iron hand, personally controlling its minutest activities. Disinterested pursuit of the truth he neither approved nor thought possible. He was in his own eyes engaged in furnishing an instrument which in the ultimately indiscriminable provinces of theory and practice would in the hands of the men for whom he made it hasten the victory of the proletariat, and by abolishing the class struggle, abolish its own usefulness. Certainly he sometimes grew so much absorbed by the intrinsic interest of his task and became so adept at carrying it out that he frequently entered into popular inquiries whose value is independent of the practical goal for which they were in theory intended: he would certainly not have thanked anyone for saying so: indeed he would have doubtless pointed out such statement rests on a fallacy which all his life he, and Hegel before him, had been engaged on exposing: that theory can be divorced from practice and its truth possess a value not created by the motive, the method and the social circumstances of its discovery was the possibility of its social application. As he lived on, he became increasingly immersed, increasingly interested in establishing particular historical theories and deducing from them particular policies to be followed in the present day: and correspondingly lost interest in the more abstract question of what constitutes historical and practical validity. But during the period in question-1850 or thereabouts-he took a pragmatists view of such questions, regarded the truth of a theory as capable of degrees and as constituted by the effectiveness of its application in practice.

Much earlier in his liberal days, he declared of certain Hegelian views which he in fact believed to be fallacious, that they nevertheless were powerful affections, adding that

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affections which decisively influence the actions of men, were, *pro tanto*, true: for truth consists not as might be supposed in correspondence with fact but in capacity to stimulate action. It is equally true that both in his earlier and his later writings, the criterion of truth of beliefs which he professes is in no sense pragmatist and indeed precisely that which the ordinary assumes it to be- i.e. some direct correspondence between belief and normal experience. It is doubtful whether this would have distressed him or indeed seemed worth explaining away. He would have said perhaps that he did not wish to dispute the sense in which the statements of scientists could be said to be true had little to do with their own or others' behaviour as a result of them: but it is in the sense of truth which matured in the province of the social sciences, which deal not with nature but with action; even if what might be called truth in the abstract sense must be recognised as universally valid, he wished to discuss only that sense which materialists and ideologists, liberal economists, or conservative politicians asserted that their statements were true and their opponent's false which, differ from those, for example, of the physical sciences because they cannot be directly tested under artificially created conditions but refer to and are literally proved true or false solely by actual human behaviour. Since all history is the history of all and by, members of this or that society, its truth, too, will be conditioned by the social position of the historian. Marx could doubtless have agreed that the bare proposition that Napoleon was dead would have been equally assented to by a bourgeois and a communist historian: but the sense of truth in which this is true while it may be fundamental did not interest him: he would have said that no historian could confine himself to a list of events and dates: that the very selection of dates betrays a tendency to stress this or that as constituting the significant connection between events, that such champions of significance or value, that is, moral, social, political, aesthetic judgments, implicit or articulate, necessarily enter into the texture of every account of the past, the present or the future: and in so far as they are called true or false, and it is these not the poor skeleton of the account which makes it history and affects

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mens' minds and gains them celebrity or neglect. The sense in which historical judgments are therefore recognised as profound or shallow, true or false, is related to standards which are themselves socially conditioned: impartiality, scientific disinterestedness, is itself a kind of partiality in favour of liberalism or toleration or egalitarianism or laissez-faire-no less a product of this time and condition, no less a form of propaganda for their perpetuation than the so-called biased and tendentious accounts of open partisans. This position, whatever its degree of plausibility, is at any rate, wholly sustained. If the term truth is indeed ambiguously used a pragmatist analysis of one sense of it does not affect the rigorous, quite different scientific or logical sense of it: the paradoxes of ordinary pragmatism no longer follows. (328.60-332.68)

[161] The moment at which Marx arrived in England was singularly unfavourable to any prospects of the revolution. The mass movement to which Continental socialists looked as a model of organised proletarian action among the most highly industrialised and therefore the most socially advanced European nation – Chartism – had lately suffered an overwhelming defeat: foreign observers, including Engels, had seriously overestimated its strength. It was a loose congeries of heterogenous interests and persons, and included romantic Tories, advanced radicals influenced by Continental models, evangelical reformers, philosophical radicals, dispossessed farmers and artisans, apocalyptic visionaries. They were united by a **common distress and hatred of the new control of manufactures and merchants (323.69)**, a common horror of the growing pauperisation and social degradation of the lower middle class which marked every advance of the industrial revolution, **and little else (323.69)**; *many of them recoiled from all thought of violence and belonged to the class so contemptuously referred to in 'The Communist Manifesto as 'economists, philanthropists humanitarian improvers of the conditions of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind.'*

The movement was badly organised. Its leaders neither agreed among themselves nor possessed individually, and still less collectively, clear beliefs as to the ends to be set before their

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followers, or the means to be adopted for their realisation. The most steadfast members of the movement were those trade unionists of the future, who were principally anxious to improve the conditions and wages of labour, and were interested in wider questions only so far as they concerned their particular cause. It is doubtful whether a serious revolutionary movement could under any circumstances have been created out of this peculiar amalgam. *As [162] it was, nothing happened.* It may have been the specious relief afforded by the great Reform Bill, or the power of Nonconformity which originally stemmed the tide. At any rate by 1850 the great crisis which had begun in 1847 was over. It was succeeded by the first consciously recognised economic boom in European history, which enormously increased the rate of development of industry and commerce and extinguished the last embers of the Chartist conflagration. Organisers and agitators remained to fight the workers' wrongs, but the exasperated years of Peterloo and the Tolpuddle martyrs, which in the grim and moving pamphlets of Hodgskin and Bray and the savage irony of William Cobbett, have left a bitter record of stupid oppression and widespread social ruin were insensibly giving way to the milder age of John Stuart Mill and the English positivists with their socialist sympathies, the Christian Socialism of the sixties, and the essentially non-political trade-unionism of such prudent and cautious opportunists as Cremer or Lucraft, who distrusted the attempts of foreign doctrinaires to teach them their own task.

Marx naturally began by establishing contact with the German exiles. London at this time contained a conflux of German *émigrés*, members of the dissolved revolutionary committees, exiled poets and intellectuals, vaguely radical German artisans who had settled in England long before the revolution, and active communists lately expelled from France or Switzerland, who attempted to reconstitute the Communist League and to renew relations with sympathetic English radicals. Marx followed his usual tactics and kept rigidly to the society of the Germans; he believed firmly that the revolution was not over: indeed he remained convinced of this until the *coup d'état* which placed Louis Napoleon on the throne of France. Meanwhile he spent what he regarded as a mere lull during the battle in the normal activities of life in exile, attending meetings [163] of refugees, and quarrelling endlessly with those who incurred his suspicion. The cultured and fastidious Herzen, who

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was in London at this time, conceived a violent dislike for him, and in his memoirs gave a malicious and brilliant description of the position occupied by Marx and his followers then and later, among the other political *émigrés*. The Germans in general were notoriously incapable of co-operating with the other exiles, Italians, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, whose lack of method and passion for intense personal relations shocked and disgusted them. The latter, for their part, found the Germans equally unattractive; they disliked their woodenness, their coarse manners, their colossal vanity, above all their sordid and unceasing internecine feuds, in the course of which it was usual for intimate details of private life to be dragged into the open and brutally caricatured in the public Press.

The disasters of 1848 did not indeed shake Marx's theoretical beliefs, but they forced him seriously to revise his political programme. In the years 1847-8 he was so far influenced by the propaganda of Weitling and Blanqui as to begin to believe, against his natural Hegelian inclination, that a successful revolution could be made only by means of a *coup d'état*, carried out by a small and resolute body of trained revolutionaries, who having seized power, would hold it, constituting themselves the executive committee of the masses in whose name they would act. This body would function as the spear-head of the proletarian attack. The broad masses of the working class after years of bondage and darkness cannot be expected to be ripe either for self-government, or for the control and liquidation of the forces they have displaced. A party must therefore be formed which shall function as a political, intellectual, and legislative *élite* of the people, enjoying its confidence in virtue of its disinterestedness, its superior training and its practical insight into the needs of the [164] immediate situation, able to guide the people's uncertain steps during the first period of its new freedom. **This view which owes much to the Jacobin tradition of the great revolution was not held by him for long: before he was 47 he had not considered in detail the precise plan of the revolution: in 1848 and thereafter he formulated the concept of revolutionary socialism or communism as the declaration of a permanent state of revolution. (316.48)** This necessary interlude he termed the state of permanent revolution, during which there is the class dictatorship of the proletariat over the rest 'as a necessary

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intermediate step to the abolition of all class distinctions, to the abolition of all the existing productive relations upon which these distinctions rest, to the abolition of all social relations which correspond to these productive relations, and to the complete reversal of all ideas which derive from these social relations.’ But here, although the end is clear, the means are left comparatively vague. The ‘permanent revolution’ is to be brought about by the dictatorship of the proletariat: but how is this stage to be effected and what form is it to take? there is no doubt that by 1848 Marx thought of it in terms of a self-appointed *élite*: not indeed working in secret, or headed by a single dictatorial figure, as advocated by Bakunin, but as Babeuf had conceived it in 1796, a *small body of convinced and ruthless individuals, who were to wield dictatorial power and educate the proletariat until it reached a level at which it comprehended its proper task*. It was as a means to this that he advocated in Cologne in 1848-9 a temporary alliance with the leaders of the radical bourgeoisie. the *petite bourgeoisie* struggling against the pressure of the classes immediately above it is the workers’ natural ally at this stage: but being unable to rule by its own strength, it will become more and more dependent on the workers’ support, until the moment arrives at which the workers, already economic masters of the situation, acquire the official forms of political power, whether by a violent *coup*, or by gradual pressure.<sup>95</sup> This doctrine is familiar to the world because it was adopted by Lenin and was put into practice with the most literal fidelity by him and by Trotsky in Russia in 1917. Marx himself, however, in the light of the events of 1848, abandoned [165] it, at any rate in practice, in vital respects. He discarded the whole conception of the *élite*, which seemed to him powerless to effect anything in the face of a hostile regular army and a supine and untrained proletariat. The leaders of the workers were devoid neither of courage nor of practical sense, yet it would plainly have been quite impossible for them to remain in power in 1848 against the combined force of the royalists, the army and the upper middle class. Unless the proletariat as a whole is made conscious of its historic part, its leaders are helpless. They may provoke an armed rising, but cannot hope to retain its fruits without conscious and intelligent support from the majority of the

<sup>95</sup> a process of painless transference which the weakened forces of the adversary will be unable to resist (317.49)

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working class. Consequently, the vital lesson which the events of 1848 contain is, according to Marx, that the first duty of a revolutionary leader is to disseminate among the masses the consciousness of their destiny and their task. Inevitably this is a lengthy and laborious process, but unless it is performed, nothing will be achieved, save the squandering of revolutionary energy in sporadic outbursts led by adventurers and hot-heads, which, having no real basis in the popular will, must inevitably be defeated after a short period of triumph, by the recovered forces of reaction, and be followed by brutal repression which cripples the proletariat for many years to come. On this ground he denounced, on the eve of its occurrence, the revolution which resulted in the Paris Commune of 1871: although later, and largely for tactical motives, he wrote it a moving and eloquent epitaph.

The second point on which he radically changed his views was the possibility of collaboration with the bourgeoisie. Theoretically, he still believed that the dialectic of history necessitated a *petit bourgeois* regime as a prelude to complete communism; but the strength of this class in Germany and France, and its open determination to protect itself against its [166] ally, convinced him that a compact with it would militate against the workers as the weaker power: the plan to govern from behind the scenes could not be realised yet. This had been the chief point of difference between him and the Cologne communists who had opposed alliance with the liberals as being suicidal opportunism. He now maintained their point of view himself, although not for their reasons: not, that is to say, because opportunism was morally degrading or necessarily self-defeating, but because it was in this particular case bound to be unsuccessful, bound to confuse issues in a party<sup>96</sup>, not too securely organised, and to lead to internal weakness and defeat. Hence his continued insistence in later years on preserving the purity of the party, and its freedom from any compromising entanglements. The policy of gradual expansion and the slow conquest of political power through recognised parliamentary institutions, accompanied by systematic pressure on an international scale upon employers through trade unions and similar organisations, as a means of securing improved economic conditions for their workers, which characterises the tactics of

<sup>96</sup> bound to adulterate a party (320.52)

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socialist parties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was the legitimate product of Marx's analysis of the causes of the catastrophe of the revolutionary year 1848.

His main objective – the creation of conditions in which the dictatorship of the proletariat, 'the permanent revolution,' might be realised – was left unaffected: the bourgeoisie and all its institutions were inevitably doomed to extinction. The process might take longer than he had originally supposed; if so, the proletariat must be taught patience; not until the situation itself is ripe for intervention must the leaders call for action<sup>97</sup>: in the meanwhile it must devote itself to husbanding, organising and disciplining its forces into readiness for the decisive crisis. History has [167] offered a curious commentary on this conclusion: the makers of the communist revolution in Russia, by acting in accordance with the earlier view, and striking while the popular masses were palpably unripe for their task, did, at any rate, succeed in averting the consequences of 1848 and 1871: while at this same period, the German and Austrian social democrats, faithful to the orthodox doctrine, by moving carefully and with caution, and expending their energy upon the education of the masses to a sense of their mission, were overwhelmed by the re-organised reactionary class, whose strength the march of history, and constant sapping on the part of the proletariat, should long before have finally undermined.

Meanwhile no sign of revolution could be detected anywhere, and the mood of irrational optimism was succeeded by one of profound depression. 'One cannot recollect those days without acute pain,' wrote Herzen in his memoirs. '... France was moving with the velocity of a falling star towards the inevitable *coup d'état*. Germany lay prostrate at the feet of Tsar Nicholas, dragged down by wretched, betrayed Hungary. **The Condotterie of the secret police were flocking to the ecumenical councils and met in secret sessions to discuss common measures of international espionage (327.73)** ... the revolutionaries carried on empty agitation. **The men who stayed at the head of affairs, once deceived in their hopes began to lose their heads. Kossuth had returned from America having lost half his democratic**

<sup>97</sup> the proletariat must be taught to be patient and restrained from indulgence in premature attacks bound to end in failure (321.53)

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feeling. Mazzini, with Ledru-Rollin and Ruge, actually founded a Central European Committee, while the forces of reaction grew more and more ferocious with every moment. The European Committee, which had genuinely scared the governments of Europe in fact did nothing at all but remained quite anxious of this fact. (327.73-328.74) Even the most serious persons are sometimes overcome by the fascination of mere forms and manage to convince themselves that they are in fact doing something if they hold meetings with a mass of documents and protocols, conferences at which facts are recorded, decisions are taken, proclamations are printed, and so forth. The bureaucracy of the revolution is capable of losing itself in this sort of thing just as much as real officialdom: England teems with hundreds of associations of this sort: solemn meetings take place which dukes and peers of the realm, clergymen and secretaries, ceremoniously attend: treasurers collect funds, journalists write articles, all are busily engaged in doing nothing at all. These philanthropic or religious gatherings fulfil the double function of serving as a form of amusement and acting as a sop to the troubled consciences of these somewhat worldly Christians ... The whole thing was a contradiction in terms: an open conspiracy, a plot concocted behind open doors.'

In the sultry atmosphere of continual intrigue, suspicion and recrimination which fills the early years of any large political emigration whose members are bound to each other by circumstances rather than by any clearly conceived common cause. Marx spent his first two years in London. *He resolutely declined to have any dealings with Herzen, Mazzini and their associates*, but he was not inactive. He edited the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* as a review, organised committees to help refugees, *published a highly successful denunciation of the methods of the police in the Cologne trials of his associates, tracking down and exposing the gross forgeries and perjury perpetrated by its agents; which, if it did not free his comrades, made trials of the same kind more difficult in the future*; carried on a vendetta against Willich within the Communist League, and, believing that an institution which promotes half-truths is more dangerous than total inactivity, and is better dead, by remorseless intrigue brought about its dissolution. Having thus successfully torpedoed his own former associates, and feeling nothing but contempt for the rest of the emigration as a collection of ineffective and harmless chatterers, he constituted himself and

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Engels as an independent centre of propaganda, a personal union round which the broken and scattered remnants of German Communism would gradually be gathered into a force once more. The plan was successful. **By the time of the foundation of the First International, Marx's position was unquestioned: the results achieved almost entirely by intensive correspondence and continual propaganda. (330.76)**

His most important writings of this period are concerned with the recent events in France: his style, often opaque and obscure when dealing with abstract issues, is luminous when dealing with facts. The essays on the class struggle in France, and the articles [169] reprinted under the title *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, are models of penetrating and cruel pamphleteering. *The two pamphlets cover much of the same ground and give a brilliant, polemical description of the revolution and the second republic, analysing in detail the relations and interplay of the political, economic and personal factors, in terms of the alignment of classes whose needs they embody. In a series of sharp epigrammatic sketches the leading representatives of the various parties are classified and assigned to the classes on whose support they depend. The evolution of the political situation from vague liberalism to the conservative republic and thence to the open class-struggle, ending in naked despotism, is represented as a travesty of the events of 1789: then every successive phase was more violent and revolutionary than the last; in 1848 the exact reverse occurred: in June the proletariat was deserted and betrayed by its petit bourgeois allies; later those were in their turn abandoned by the middle class; finally they too were outmanoeuvred by the great landowners and financiers and delivered into the hands of the army and Louis Napoleon. Nor could this have been prevented by a different policy on the part of individual politicians since it was the inescapable result of the stage of historical development reached by French society at this time. The three essays appeared in the German periodical directed almost entirely by himself: its circulation was low and when presently money ran short, it died. The articles were later reprinted and are still of considerable interests if only as being the first account of the brief debut of French socialism in practice written in terms of the new economic interpretation. (330.76)*

Marx's other activities at this period included popular lectures on political economy to the German Workers' Educational Union, and finally a considerable correspondence with the German revolutionaries now scattered everywhere, and notably with

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Engels, who reluctantly and unhappily, having no other means of supporting himself, made his peace with his parents and settled down in Manchester to work in the office of his father's firm of cotton-spinners. **Engels, who had no independent means of his own, saw no further purpose in wandering about Europe in which reaction grew daily stronger and more intolerant and there was for some time no obvious possibility of response to it. He valued his own association with Marx beyond everything and being of a practical turn of mind, saw that the sole possibility of remaining in England depended upon making peace with his parents. (331.77)**

The comparative security which he obtained by this means he used [170] to support Marx, materially and intellectually, during the remainder of the latter's long life. Marx's own financial position was desperate: he had no regular source of income, a growing family, and a reputation which precluded the possibility of employment by any respectable concern. The squalid poverty in which he and his family lived during the next twenty years, and the unspeakable humiliations which this entailed, have often been described: at first the family wandered from one hovel to another, from Chelsea to Leicester Square and thence to the disease-ridden slums of Soho; often there was no money to pay the tradesmen and the family would literally starve until a loan or the arrival of a pound note from Engels temporarily eased the situation; sometimes the entire clothing of the family was in pawn, and they were forced to sit for hours without light or food, interrupted only by the visits of dunning creditors, who were met on the doorstep by one or other of the children with the unvarying and automatic answer 'Mr Marx ain't upstairs.'

*A lively description of the conditions in which he lived during the first seven years of exile survives in the report of a Prussian spy who somehow contrived to worm his way into the Dean street establishment: '... He lives in one of the worst and cheapest neighbourhoods in London. He occupies two rooms. There is not one clean or decent piece of furniture in either room, everything is broken, tattered, and torn, with thick dust over everything ... manuscripts, books and newspapers lie beside the children's toys, bits and pieces from his wife's sewing basket, cups with broken rims, dirty spoons, knives, forks, lamps, an inkpot, tumblers, pipes, tobacco ash — all piled up on the same table. On entering the room smoke and tobacco fumes make your eyes water to such an extent that at first you seem to be groping about in a cavern — until you get used to it, [171]*

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*and manage to make out certain objects in the haze. Sitting down is a dangerous business. Here is a chair with only three legs, there another which happens to be whole, on which the children are playing at cooking. That is the one that is offered to the visitor, but the children's cooking is not removed, and if you sit down you risk a pair of trousers. But all these things do not in the least embarrass Marx or his wife. You are received in the most friendly way and are cordially offered pipes, tobacco, and whatever else there may happen to be. Presently a clever and interesting conversation arises which repays for all the domestic deficiencies and this makes the discomfort bearable...*<sup>98</sup>

A man of genius forced to live in a garret, to go into hiding when his creditors grow importunate, or to lie in bed because his clothes are pawned, is a conventional subject of gay and sentimental comedy. Marx was not a bohemian, and his misfortunes affected him tragically. He was proud, excessively thin-skinned, and made great demands upon the world: the petty humiliations and insults to which his condition exposed him, the frustration of his desire for the commanding position to which he thought himself entitled<sup>99</sup>, the repression of his colossal natural vitality, made him turn in upon himself in paroxysms of hatred and rage. His bitter feeling often found outlet in his writings and in long and savage personal vendettas. He saw plots and conspiracies everywhere; the more his victims protested their innocence, the more convinced he became of their duplicity and their guilt.

His mode of living consisted of daily visits to the British Museum reading-room, where he normally remained from nine in the morning until it closed at seven; this was followed by long hours [172] of work at night, accompanied by ceaseless smoking, which from a luxury had become an indispensable anodyne; his health was affected permanently and he became liable to frequent attacks of a disease of the liver sometimes accompanied by boils and an inflammation of the eyes, which interfered with his work, exhausted and irritated him, and interrupted his never certain means of livelihood. *'I am plagued like Job, though not so God-fearing,'* he wrote in 1858. *'Everything that these gentlemen [the doctors] say boils down to the fact that one ought to be a prosperous rentier and not a poor devil like me, as poor as a church mouse.'* Engels, whose annual income during those

<sup>98</sup> Quoted from *Karl Marx, Man and Fighter*, by B. Nicolaevsky and O. Maenchen-Helfen.

<sup>99</sup> **Desire for a position of fame and power. (332.78)**

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years does not appear to have exceeded one hundred pounds, with which, as his father's representative, he had to keep up a respectable establishment in Manchester, could not, with all his generosity, afford much systematic help at first: occasionally, his friends in Cologne, or generous German socialists like Liebknecht or Freiligrath, managed to collect small sums for him, which, together with fees for occasional journalism, and occasional small legacies from relatives, enabled him to continue on the very brink of subsistence. It is not therefore difficult to understand that he hated poverty, and the vicious slavery and degradation which it entails, more passionately even than servility. The descriptions scattered in his works of life in industrial slums, in mining villages or plantations, and of the attitude of civilised opinion towards them, are given with a combination of violent indignation and frigid, wholly unhysterical bitterness, which particularly when his account grows detailed and his tone becomes unnaturally quiet and flat, possess a frightening quality and induce a sense of intolerable anger and shame in readers left unmoved by the fiery rhetoric of Carlyle, by the dignified and humane pleading of J. S. Mill, or by the sweeping eloquence of William Morris and the [173] Christian Socialists. During these years three of his children, his two sons Guido and Edgar and his daughter Franziska died, largely as a result of the conditions in which they lived.<sup>100</sup> When Franziska died he had no money to pay for a coffin, and was rescued only by the generosity of a French refugee. The incident was described in harrowing detail in a letter written by Frau Marx to a fellow exile. She was herself often ill, and the children were looked after by their devoted family servant, Helene Demuth, who remained with them until the end.

*'I could not and cannot fetch the doctor,' he wrote to Engels on one of these occasions, 'because I have no money for the medicine. For the last eight or ten days I have fed my family on bread and potatoes, and to-day it is still doubtful whether I shall be able to obtain even these.'*

*He was uncommunicative by nature, and less than anyone who has ever lived given to self-pity; indeed, in his letters to Engels he sometimes satirised his own misfortunes with a grim irony which may conceal from the casual reader the desperate condition in which he frequently found himself. But when in*

<sup>100</sup> **Franziska died, largely for want of medical attention for which he could not pay, his male children died, partially at least of under nourishment. (333.79-334.80)**

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*1856, his son Edgar, of whom he was very fond, died at the age of six, it broke through even his iron reserve: 'I have suffered every kind of misfortune,' he wrote to his friend, 'but I have only just learnt what real unhappiness is ... in the midst of all the suffering which I have gone through in these days the thought of you, and your friendship, and the hope that we may still have something reasonable to do in this world, has kept me upright. ...' Bacon says that really important people have so many contacts with nature and the world, have so much to interest them, that they easily get over any loss. I am not of those important people. My child's death has affected me so greatly that I feel the loss as [174] bitterly as on the first day. My wife is also completely broken down.'*

*The only form of pleasure which the family could allow itself was an occasional picnic on Hampstead Heath during the summer months. They set out on Sunday morning from the house in Dean Street, and accompanied by the faithful Lenchen Démuth and one or two friends, carrying a basket of food and newspapers bought on the way, walked to Hampstead. There they would sit under the trees, and while the children played or picked flowers their elders would talk, or read or sleep. As the afternoon wore on, the mood, grew more and more gay, particularly when the jovial Engels was present. They joked, sang, ran races, Marx recited poetry, which he was fond of doing, took the children for rides on his back, entertained everyone, and, as a final turn, would solemnly mount and ride a donkey up and down in front of the party, a sight which never failed to give general pleasure. At nightfall they would walk back, often singing patriotic German or English songs on their way home to school. These agreeable occasions were, however, few and rare, and did little to lighten what Marx himself in one of his letters to Engels called the sleepless night of exile.*

To this condition some slight relief was brought by the sudden invitation to write regular articles on affairs in Europe for the *New York Daily Tribune*. The offer was made by Charles Augustus Dana, its foreign editor, who had been introduced to Marx by Freiligrath in Cologne in 1849, and was greatly impressed by his political shrewdness. The *New York Tribune* was a radical newspaper, founded by a group of American followers of Fourier, which had at this period a circulation of over 200,000 copies, then probably the greatest of any newspaper in the world; its outlook was broadly progressive: in internal affairs it pursued an [175] anti-slavery, free trade policy, while in foreign affairs it attacked the principle of autocracy, and so found itself in opposition to virtually every government in Europe. Marx, who stubbornly refused offers of

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collaboration in Continental journals, the tendency of which he thought reactionary, accepted this offer with alacrity. The new correspondent was to be paid one pound sterling per article. For nearly ten years he wrote weekly despatches for it, roaming over a wide field of subjects, which are of some interest even now. Dana's first request to him was to write a series of articles on the strategy and tactics of both armies during the civil war in Germany and Austria, together with general comments on the art of modern warfare. As Marx was entirely ignorant of the latter subject and had at this period very little English, he found the request far from easy to fulfil: but to refuse anything which offered a steady if meagre source of income was unthinkable. In his perplexity he turned to Engels, who, as on so many occasions in later life, readily and obligingly wrote the articles and signed them with Marx's name. Henceforward, whenever the subject was unknown or uncongenial to him, or he was prevented from working by absence or ill-health, Engels was applied to, and performed his task with such efficiency that the *Tribune's* London correspondent soon acquired a considerable popularity in America as an exceptionally versatile and well-informed journalist, with a definite public of his own.

Engel's articles on the German revolution were reprinted as a pamphlet by Marx called *The German Revolution and Counter Revolution*, and end with the assurance that the revolution is about to break out with even greater violence in the near future: **that the intervention on the part of the reactionary powers, notably by the Slavs-the Serbs led by Jelachich, the temporising Czechs in Prague, the Russian Army which crushed the revolt in Hungary, cannot long hope to repress forces whose victory is a historical necessity. In 1852, Marx no less than Engels firmly believed that the revolution might at any moment once more break out in France: even the *coup d'état* and Napoleon's enthronement failed to convince them of the vanity of these hopes. (346.82–347.83)** Later they admitted that they were over-optimistic. Marx formulated the celebrated generalisation that only an economic slump can lead to a successful revolution; thus the [176] revolution of 1848 was nurtured in the economic collapse of 1847, and the boom of 1851 removed all hope of imminent political conflagration. **Something on the subject occurs in every letter exchanged between**

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**Marx and Engels: their correspondence grew in volume and became more familiar in ton although it scarcely ever grew intimate, not indeed because of any lack of warmth or personal devotion in their relations, but because their lives were entirely absorbed in their public activities, neither was exceptionally sensitive or introspective by nature. Everything that does not touch on their political activities tends to be dull, conventional and commonplace. Marx had no gift and no craving for private life and Engels if ever he had it, had long dedicated himself and it to the sole service of his friend and master. (347.83–348.84)**

*Henceforth the attention of both is concentrated upon detecting symptoms of a major economic crisis. Engels from his office in Manchester filled his letters with information about the state of world markets; gold losses by the Bank of England, the bankruptcy of a Hamburg bank, a bad harvest in France or America, are noted exultantly as indicating that the great crisis cannot be far off. In 1857 a genuine slump did at last occur on the required scale. It was not, however, except in agricultural Italy, followed by any revolutionary developments. After this there is less mention of inevitable crises, and more discussion of the organisation of a revolutionary party. The acute disappointment had left its effect.*

While Engels dealt with the military intelligence required by the American public, Marx published a rapid succession of articles on English politics, internal and external, on foreign policy, on Chartism, and the character of the various English ministries, which he became expert at summing up in a few malicious sentences, usually at the expense of *The Times*, which always remained his bugbear.<sup>101</sup> He wrote a good deal about the English rule in India and in Ireland. India was, he declared, bound in any case to have been conquered by a stronger power:

*The question is not whether the English had any right to conquer India, but whether we should have preferred her to have been conquered by Turks or Persians, or Russians ... Of course it is impossible to compel the English bourgeoisie to want the emancipation or improvement of the social condition of the Indian masses, which depends not only on the development of the forces of production, but on the ownership*

<sup>101</sup> of which 'The Times' in an incautious moment spoke as an approach to the millennium, a millennium, Marx observed, only with respect to the sum total of the combined ages of its component member. (339.86)

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*of them by the people. But what it can do is to create [177] the material conditions for the realisation of this double need.*

*And again:*

*However melancholy we may find [he wrote in 1853] the spectacle of the ruin and desolation of these tens of thousands of industrious, peaceful, patriarchal, social groups ... suddenly cut off from their ancient civilisation and their traditional means of existence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities ... always provided a firm basis to oriental despotism, confining the human intelligence within the narrowest limits, making of it the obedient traditional instrument of superstition, stunting its growth, robbing it ... of all capacity of historical activity; let us not forget the egoism of barbarians who, concentrated on an insignificant portion of earth's surface, watched unmoved while immense empires crumbled, unspeakable cruelties were committed, the populations of entire cities were butchered – observed this as if they were events in nature, and so themselves became the helpless victims of every invader who happened to turn his attention to them.... In causing social revolution in India, England was, it is true, guided by the lowest motives, and conducted it dully and woodenly. But that is not the point. The question is whether humanity can fulfil its purpose without a complete social revolution in Asia. If not, then England, in spite of all her crimes, was the unconscious instrument of history in bringing about this revolution.<sup>102</sup>*

Of Ireland he said that the cause of English labour was inextricably bound up with the liberation of Ireland, whose cheap labour was a continual threat to the English unions, and whose economic subjection, as in the analogous cases of serfdom in Russia, and slavery in the United States, must be abolished before their English masters, among whom the English working class (*who treated the Irish much as the 'poor whites' [178] of the southern states of America treated the negroes*) must be included, could hope to emancipate themselves and create a free society. In both cases he consistently underestimated the force of rising nationalism: his hatred of all separatism, as of all institutions founded on some purely traditional or emotional basis, blinded him to their actual influence. In a similar spirit Engels, writing of the Czechs,

**<sup>102</sup> He wrote with great acuteness on the English in India and in Ireland: of the first that brutal and self-interested though it was, English rule had in fact forced India through a process of economic progress which it might have taken many more years to perform, more slowly and more wastefully, before it could hope for true emancipation. (339.86)**

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observed that the nationalism of the Western Slavs was an artificially preserved, unreal phenomenon, which could not long resist the advance of the superior German culture. Such absorption was a fate inevitably in store for all small and local civilisations, in virtue of the force of historical gravitation which causes the smaller to be merged in the greater: a tendency which all progressive parties should actively encourage. **Marx, he detested Slavs and looked on small powers as irritating anachronisms never let himself grow to this degree: and a pamphlet which accuses him of pan-German bias published by the Swiss Bakunist Guillaume in 1915 demonstrated that it preferred German socialists to French and regarded them as more reliable but nothing more. (340.87)** Both Marx and Engels believed that nationalism, together with religion and militarism, were so much anachronisms, at once the by-products and the bulwarks of the capitalist order, irrational, counter-revolutionary forces which, with the passing of their material foundation, would automatically disappear. **The people must be attacked everywhere as counter-revolutionary forces, but need no independent considerations, being mere by-products of a fundamental process. The attitude, which owes something to eighteenth century rationalism, which also tended to attribute all forms of irrationalism to a common source had predicted their simultaneous downfall led to considerable tactical errors on the part of Marx and Marxists. (351.89)** Marx's own tactical policy with regard to them was to consider whether in a given case they operated for or against the proletarian cause, and to decide in accordance with this criterion alone, whether they were to be supported or attacked, **systematically ignoring any independent additional effects which its triumph or defeat might have. (351.89)** Thus he favoured it in India and in Ireland, because it was a weapon in the fight against imperialism, and attacked the democratic nationalism of Mazzini or Kossuth because in such countries as Italy, Hungary or Poland, it seemed to him to work merely for the replacement of a foreign by a native system of capitalist exploitation, and so to obstruct the social revolution. **This was correct in their case, as it turned out, hence his hostility to Mazzini, Kossuth and Ruge, and the other members, Ledru-Rollin, Vorcel and Bretianu, who**

**represented France, Poland and Romania on the European Democratic Committee. (352.90)**

Among English politicians he attacked Russell as a pseudo-radical who betrayed his cause at every step, but his *bête noire* was undoubtedly Palmerston, whom he accused of being a disguised Russophile, and mocked for his sentimental support of small nationalities in Europe. He was, how[179]ever, a connoisseur of political skill in all its forms, and confessed to a certain admiration of the *élan* and adroitness with which that cynical and light-hearted statesman carried off his most unscrupulous strokes.

His attacks on Palmerston brought him into contact with an exceedingly odd and remarkable figure. David Urquhart had in his youth been in the Diplomatic Service, and after becoming a warm Philhellene in Athens had been transferred to Constantinople, where he conceived a violent and life-long passion for Islam and the Turks, the 'purity' of whose constitution he admired, and for the Church of Rome, with which he remained on excellent terms, although he was born and died a Calvinist, and with this an equally violent hatred for Whigs, free-trade, the Church of England, industrialism, and, in particular, the Russian Empire, whose malevolent and omnipotent influence he regarded as responsible for all the evils in Europe. This eccentric figure, **who among other things believed in nudism and the moralising effects of Turkish baths, which he introduced in England, (353.99)** a picturesque survival from a more aristocratic age, sat in Parliament as an Independent for many years, and published a newspaper and numerous tracts devoted almost entirely to the single purpose of exposing Palmerston, whom he accused of being a hired agent of the Tsar, engaged in a life-long attempt to subvert the moral order of Western Europe in his master's interest. Even Palmerston's attitude during the Crimean War did not shake him **or his conviction in the statesman's corruptness (353.99)**: he explained it as a cunning ruse to cloak the nature of his real activities; hence his deliberate sabotage of the entire campaign, which was designed to do Russia as little damage as possible. Marx, who had somehow arrived at the same curious conclusion, was no less genuinely convinced of Palmerston's venality. The two men met and formed an alliance; Urquhart published anti-Palmerston pamphlets by Marx while Marx became an official Urquhartite, contributed to Urquhart's paper and appeared on the platforms of

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his meetings. *His articles were later [180]published as pamphlets. The most peculiar are Palmerston, What Has He Done? and The Secret Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century, both of which were devoted to exposing the hidden hand of Russia in all major European disasters.* Each was under the impression that he was skilfully using the other for his own ends: Marx thought Urquhart a harmless monomaniac of whom use might be made; Urquhart, for his part, thought highly of Marx's abilities as a propagandist, and on one occasion congratulated him on possessing an intelligence worthy of a Turk. This bizarre association continued harmoniously, if intermittently, for a number of years: **the common bugbear was the triumphant industrial bourgeoisie and Palmerston as its most brazen public representative, each was temperamentally preferred fanaticism, however wrong-headed, to utilitarianism, liberalism and belief in goodwill on all sides. (354.92)** After the deaths of Palmerston and Tsar Nicholas, the alliance was gradually dissolved. Marx obtained a good deal of amusement, and as much financial help as he could get, from his relationship with his strange patron, of whom he soon grew quite fond; indeed, the later was unique among his political allies in that their relation continued to be entirely friendly until Urquhart's death. **It is curious to reflect that Urquhart, a typical Highland Scot and romantic Tory, an eccentric, wildly, self-opinionated survivor from a more aristocratic age, should be the only one of Marx's political allies, of whom the latter never spoke harshly, and with whom he never quarrelled: perhaps he was too mad to quarrel with. (355.93)**

He found few sympathisers among the trade union leaders. **Marx had neither sympathy for, nor any genuine common language with the other Chartists, the majority of whom at this time were either crypto-liberals seeking to disappear into the ranks of the bourgeoisie, or vague-minded inflammatory agitators, with little following, who still lived on slogans and vague millennial hopes, and were regarded as harmless lunatics by the policy. (355.93)** The ablest of them had either become followers of Owen, who by the shining example of his own achievements, **and still trusting the essential goodness and the rationality of man, still sought by the truly shining example of his own life, and the happiness of the cotton-spinners, (356.95)** sought to prove the wicked baselessness of the

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doctrine of class war: or else, like Harney, were busy local labour leaders working for the immediate needs of this or that trade or industry, dead to wider issues, prepared to welcome all radicals equally in a federation called 'The Fraternal Democrats,' the very name of which revolted Marx.. The only Englishman who stood at all close to him in those days was Ernest Jones a revolutionary Chartist, who made a vain attempt to revive that dying movement. Jones was born and brought up in Germany and resembled more closely than anyone else in England the type of continental socialist familiar to Marx; his views were too similar to those of the 'True Socialists' Hess and Grun to [181] please Marx entirely but he needed allies, the choice was limited, and he accepted Jones as the best and most advanced that England had to offer. Jones, who conceived a great admiration and affection for Marx and his household, supplied him with a great deal of information about English conditions; it was he who turned Marx's attention to the land enclosures which still went on in Scotland where many hundreds of small tenants and crofters had been evicted to make room for deer parks and pasture. The result was a vitriolic article by Marx in the *New York Tribune* on the private affairs of the Duchess of Sutherland, who had expressed sympathy for the cause of the Negro slaves in America.<sup>103</sup> The article, which is a sketch for the longer passage in *Kapital*, is a masterpiece of bitter and vehement eloquence, directly descended from the masterpieces of Voltaire and Marat, and a model for many later pieces of socialist invective. The attack is not so much personal as directed at the system under which a capricious old woman no more deranged, heartless, and vindictive than the majority of her immediate society has it in her absolute power, with the full approval of her class and of public opinion, to humiliate, uproot and ruin an entire population of honest and industrious men and women, rendered destitute overnight in a land which was rightfully theirs, since all that was man-made in it they and their ancestors had created by their labour.

Such pieces of social analysis and polemic pleased the American public no less than Marx's dry and ironical articles on foreign affairs. **On these he wrote with complete detachment and a dry contempt for both sides in any European conflict which he chose**

<sup>103</sup> **Who had had the effrontery to plead the cause of the negro slaves in America. (347.96)**

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to examine which was precisely what the radical anti-European tribune wished to give its readers. (348.97) The articles were well-informed, shrewd and detached in tone: they showed no particular power of prescience, nor was there any attempt to give a comprehensive survey of contemporary affairs as a whole: as a commentary on events they were less candid and less interesting than the letters which their author wrote to Engels at this period, but as [182] journalism they were far in advance of their time. Marx's method was to present his readers with a rapid sketch of events or characters, emphasising hidden interests and the activity likely to result from them, rather than the explicit motives furnished by the actors themselves, or the human or social value of this or that measure or policy. This gives his journalism a highly twentieth-century flavour, and exhibits more vividly than his theoretical writings, the genuine difference between his naturalistic, empirical, ethically neutral attitude, and that employed by the great majority of the more or less humanitarian and idealistic social historians and critics of his time.

**Evidently, his hatred of the common enemy entirely compensated for the absence of moral earnestness from his dispatches: for his contributions found considerable favour in the United States and were frequently printed as leading articles by Greeley who was himself a typical nineteenth century idealistic liberal and personally no more sympathetic to Marx than the English radicals at this time reinforced by numerous French democratic exiles who made London their headquarters and wildly irritated the serious and long-winded Germans by the ceaseless flow of passionate and largely meaningless eloquence. (349.98)**

At the same time he was engaged in gathering material for the economic treatise which should serve as a weapon against the vague idealism<sup>104</sup> of the loosely connected radical groups, which, in his view, led to confusion both of thought and of action, and paralysed the efforts of such few clear-headed leaders as the

<sup>104</sup> **Meanwhile his political activity among the émigrés, disunited, disillusioned and largely ineffectual, remained sporadic and became confined to the task of delivering lectures and publishing treaties and pamphlets upon the economic structure of capitalism, a task which he undertook as an indispensable means towards eliminating the vague idealism. (349.98)**

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workers possessed. He applied himself to the task of establishing, in the place of this, a rigorous doctrine, unambiguous in theory and definite in practice, adherence to which would become at once the test, the reason and the guarantee of a united, and above all, active body of social revolutionaries. Their strength would derive from their unity, and their unity from the coherence of the practical beliefs which they had in common.

*The foundations of his doctrine were embodied in his previous writings, notably in 'The Communist Manifesto'. In a letter written in 1852 he carefully stated what he regarded as original in it: 'What I did that was new was to prove (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular, historic phases in the development of production; (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and [183] to a classless society.'* On these foundations the new movement was to be built.

In a sense he succeeded more rapidly than he could have hoped: the rise and swift growth upon the ruins of 1848 of a new and militant party of socialist workers in Germany created for him a sphere of new practical activity in which the latter half of his life was spent. This party was not indeed created by him, but his ideas, and above all a belief in the political programme which he had elaborated, inspired its leaders. He was consulted and approached at every turn; everyone knew that he, and he alone, had inspired the movement and created its basis; to him all questions of theory and practice were instinctively referred; he was admired, feared, suspected and obeyed. Yet the German workers did not look to him as their foremost representative and champion: the man who had organised them into a party and ruled it with absolute power was Marx's junior by several years, born and brought up under similar conditions, but in temper and in outlook more unlike and even opposed to him than at the time either explicitly admitted.

Ferdinand Lassalle, who created German Social Democracy and led it during its first heroic years, was the most ardent public personality of the nineteenth century. By birth a Silesian Jew, by profession a lawyer, by temperament a romantic revolutionary, he was a man whose outstanding characteristics were his intelligence, his vanity, his boundless energy and self-confidence. Since most of the normal avenues of advancement were barred to him on account of his race and his religion, he threw himself with immense passion into the revolutionary movement, where his

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exceptional intelligence, his enthusiasm, but most of all his genius as an agitator and a popular orator swiftly raised him to leadership. During the German revolution he delivered inflammatory speeches against the Government, for which he [184] was tried and imprisoned. During the years which followed the period of recantations and dishonour, when Marx and Engels were in exile, and Liebknecht alone among the original leaders who remained in Germany remained faithful to the cause of socialism, Lassalle took upon himself the task of creating a new and better organised proletarian party upon the ruins of 1848. He conceived himself in the part of its sole leader and inspirer, its intellectual, moral and political dictator. He accomplished this task with brilliant success. His beliefs were derived in equal parts from Hegel and from Marx: from the latter he derived the doctrines of economic determinism, of the class struggle, of the inevitability of exploitation in capitalist society. But, following Hegel, he rejected the distinction between State and society, refusing to follow Proudhon and Marx in regarding the former as a mere coercive instrument of the ruling class, and accepting the Hegelian thesis, according to which the State, even in its present condition, constitutes the highest function of a collection of human being assembled to lead a common life. He strongly believed in centralisation and, up to a point, in internal national unity: in later years he began to believe in the possibility of an anti-bourgeois coalition between the king, the aristocracy, and the workers, culminating in an authoritarian collectivist State, headed by the monarch, and organised in the interests of the only truly productive, that is, the labouring, class.

His relations with Marx and Engels had never been wholly easy: like Proudhon, he declared that Marx was in theoretical matters his master, and treated him with nervous respect. He heralded him everywhere as a man of genius, **offered him hospitality when the latter came to Berlin (355.105)**, arranged for the German publication of his books, and otherwise strove to be of service to him in many ways. Marx grudgingly recognised the value of his energy and his organising ability, but was repelled by him personally, and was deeply [185] suspicious of him politically. He disliked his ostentation, his extravagance, his vanity, his histrionic manners, his loud public profession of his tastes, his opinions and his ambitions; he detested the very brilliance of his impressionistic surveys of social and political facts, which seemed to him flimsy,

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superficial, and fallacious by comparison with his own painful and laborious thoroughness: he disliked and distrusted the temperamental and capricious control which Lassalle exercised over the workers, and even more, his absorbed flirtation with the enemy. Finally, he felt jealous and possessive about a movement which owed to him both its practical policy and its intellectual foundations, and now seemed to have deserted him, infatuated by a political *femme fatale*, a specious, glittering adventurer, an avowed opportunist both in private life and in public policy, guided by no fixed plan, attached to no principle, moving towards no clear goal. Nevertheless, a certain intimacy of relations existed between them, or if not intimacy, a mutual appreciation. Lassalle was born and brought up under intellectual influences similar to his own, they fought against the same enemy, and on all fundamental issues spoke the same language, which Proudhon, Bakunin, and the English trade unionists had never done, and the former young Hegelians had longed ceased to do. Moreover, he was a man of action, a genuine revolutionary, and absolutely fearless. Each recognised that with, *perhaps, the exception of Engels*, the other possessed a higher degree of political intelligence, penetration, and practical courage than any other member of their party. They understood each other instinctively, and found communication both easy and exhilarating: when Marx went to Berlin, he stayed quite naturally with Lassalle. When Lassalle came to London, he stayed with Marx, and maddened his proud and sensitive host, then in the last stage of penury, by the mere fact of being a witness of his condition, and even more [186] by his gay patter and easy extravagance, spending more on cigars and buttonholes than Marx and his family spent on a week's livelihood. There was some difficulty too, about a sum of money which Marx had borrowed from him. Of all this Lassalle, it seems, was totally unaware, being exceptionally insensitive to his surroundings, as vigorous and flamboyant natures often are. Marx never forgot his humiliation, and after Lassalle's London visit their relations deteriorated abruptly.

Lassalle created the new party by a method still novel in his day, and employed only sporadically by the English Chartists, although familiar enough later: he undertook a series of highly publicised political tours through the industrial areas of Germany, making fiery and seditious speeches which overwhelmed his proletarian

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audiences and roused them to immense enthusiasm. There and then he formed them into sections of the new workers' movement, organised as an official, legally constituted party, thus breaking openly with the old method of small revolutionary cells which met in secret and carried on underground propaganda. His last journey among his followers was a triumphal tour over conquered territory: it strengthened his already unique influence upon German workers of all types, ages and professions: **it strengthened his already unique influence upon German workers of all types, ages and professions. The spirit and principle of his role persisted after his death. (359.109)**

The theoretical foundations of the programme were borrowed, largely from Marx, and perhaps to some extent from the radical Prussian economist Rodbertus-Jaetzow, but the party had many strongly non-Marxist characteristics: it was not specifically organised for a revolution; it was opportunist, and prepared for alliance with other anti-bourgeois parties; it was nationalistic and largely confined to German conditions and needs. One of its foremost ends was the development of a workers' co-operative system, not indeed as an alternative to, but as an intrinsic element in, political action, [187] to be organised or financed by the State, yet still sufficiently similar to Proudhon's anti-political mutualism, and the politically sluggish English trade unionism, to incur open hostility from Marx. Moreover, it had been created by means of the personal ascendancy of one individual. There was a strong emotional element in the unquestioned dictatorship which Lassalle exercised in his last years, a form of hero-worship which Marx, **who approved of character, skill and intelligence, but (360.110)** who disliked every form of unreason, and distrusted spell-binders in politics, instinctively abhorred. Lassalle introduced into German socialism the theory that circumstances might occur in which something like a genuine alliance might be formed with the absolutist Prussian government against the industrial bourgeoisie. This was the kind of opportunism which Marx must have considered the most ruinous of all possible defects; the experience of 1848, if it taught no other lesson, had conclusively demonstrated the fatal consequence to a young, and as yet comparatively defenceless, party of an alliance with a well-established older party, fundamentally hostile to its demands, in which each attempts to exploit the other, and the better armed

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force inevitably wins. Marx, as was made evident from his address to the Central Communist Committee in 1850, considered himself to have erred seriously in supposing that an alliance with the radical bourgeoisie was possible and even necessary before the final victory of the proletariat. But even he had never dreamed of an alliance with the feudal nobility for the purpose of delivering an attack on individualism as such, merely for the sake of attaining some kind of State control. Such a move he regarded as a typical Bakuninist caricature of his own policy and aspirations.

**How far Lassalle had gone in this direction was subsequently shown by the discovery in 1928 of Bismarck's private documents on the subject: even half the truth was sufficient to repel Marx; he did not disapprove of authoritarianism in itself, but he resented the appearance of this glittering and self-introduced figure who offended against his fundamental love of thoroughness and order: Lassalle appeared like a sudden comet in the social movement which by its impact alters the course of the established planets, only to disappear no less suddenly and melodramatically beyond the horizon leaving nothing but a revolutionary memory. (364-365.112)**

Both Marx and Engels were fundamentally solid German democrats in their attitude to the masses, and instinctively reacted against the seeds of romantic fascism which can now be so clearly discerned in [188] Lassalle's beliefs and acts, particularly in his expressed patriotism, his belief in a State-planned economy controlled, at any rate for a time, by the military aristocracy, his advocacy of intervention by Germany on the side of the French Emperor in the Italian campaign (which he defended against Marx and Engels on the ground that only a war would precipitate a German revolution), his unconcealed sympathy with Mazzini and the Polish nationalists, finally his belief, on which the National Socialism of our day offers a curious commentary, that the existing machinery of the Prussian State can be used to aid the *petite bourgeoisie* as well as the proletariat of Germany against the growing encroachment of merchants, industrialists and bankers.

**On this last issue, which to Marx seemed smacking of Bonapartism, war broke out between the Lassalleans and the Marxists, shortly after Lassalle's death: after a period of indecisive skirmishing, Marx won a formal victory, but is**

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**fruits were smaller than he had hoped. The Lassalle tradition was driven underground and after Engel's death reappeared in the late nineties in the form of a modified Marxism which characterised German social democracy in the immediate pre-war and post-war years. The gradualism of such men as Ebert, Scheidemann, Noske and the rest derived as much from him as from Eduard Bernstein and his liberal reformist socialism. (372.113-373.114)**

He actually went to the length of negotiating with Bismarck on these lines, each being under the impression that, when the time came, he could use the other as a cat's paw for his own ends: each recognised and admired the other's audacity, intelligence, and freedom from petty scruple; they vied with each other in the candour of their political realism, in their open contempt for their mediocre followers, and in their admiration for power and success as such. Bismarck liked vivid personalities, and in later years used to refer to these conversations with pleasure, saying that he never hoped to meet so interesting a man again. How far Lassalle had in fact gone in this direction was subsequently revealed by the discovery in 1928 of Bismarck's private record of the negotiations. They were cut short by Lassalle's early death in a duel, which arose out of a casual love-affair. If he had lived, and Bismarck had chosen to continue to play on his almost megalomaniac vanity, Lassalle would in the end most certainly have lost, and the newly created party might have foundered long before it did; indeed, as a theorist of State supremacy and as a demagogue, Lassalle should be counted among the founders not only of European socialism, but equally of the [189] doctrine of personal dictatorship and fascism, a fact which the reading of his works and in particular his speeches in the light of subsequent history, bears out to an astonishing degree.

In the subsequent conflict between the Marxists and the Lassalleans, Marx won a formal victory which saved the purity of his own doctrine and political method, not, oddly enough, for Germany, for which it was primarily intended, but for application in far more primitive countries which scarcely entered his thoughts, Russia, China, and, up to a point, Spain and Mexico. The report of Lassalle's death in a duel in the spring of 1864 roused little sympathy in either Marx or Engels. To both it seemed a typically foolish end to a career of absurd self-dramatisation.

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**Neither cared naturally for qualities of hear[?] and sensibility: they judged men, and in particular their allies, exclusively by their fitness and devotion to the task in hand.** (373.114) Lassalle, had he lived, might well have proved an obstacle of the first magnitude. Yet the relief, at least in the case of Marx was not unmixed with a certain sentimental regret for the passing of so familiar a figure on which he looked, in spite of all his failings, with something not wholly unlike affection. He was a German and a Hegelian, inextricably connected with the events of 1848, and his own revolutionary past: a man who, in spite of all his colossal defects, stood head and shoulders above the pygmies among whom he moved, creatures into whom he had for a brief hour infused his own vitality, and who would soon sink exhausted into their old apathy, appearing even smaller, pettier, meaner than before.

*He was, after all, one of the old stock,' he wrote, 'the enemy of our enemies ... it is difficult to believe that so noisy, stirring, pushing a man is now as dead as a mouse, and must hold his tongue altogether ... the devil knows, the crowd is getting smaller and no new blood is coming forward.'*

The news of Lassalle's death sent him into one of his rare moods of personal melancholy, almost of despair, very different from the cloud of anger and resentment [190] in which he normally lived. He suddenly became overwhelmed by the sense of his own total isolation, and the hopelessness of all individual endeavour in the face of the triumphant European reaction, a feeling which the tranquillity and monotony of life in England sooner or later induced in all the exiled revolutionaries. Indeed the very respect, and even admiration with which many of them spoke of English life and English institutions were an implicit acknowledgment of their own personal failure, their loss of faith in the power of mankind to achieve its own emancipation. They saw themselves gradually sinking into a cautious almost cynical, quietism which they themselves knew to be a declaration of defeat and a complete stultification of a life spent in warfare, the final collapse of the ideal world in which they had invested beyond recovery everything that they themselves possessed, and much that belonged to others. This mood, with which Herzen, Mazzini, Kossuth were intimately acquainted, was with Marx uncommon: he was genuinely convinced that the process of history was both inevitable and progressive, and this intense belief excluded all

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possibility of doubt or disillusionment on fundamental issues; he had never relied on reason or the idealism of individuals or of the masses, as decisive factors in social evolution, and having staked nothing, lost nothing in the great intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the sixties and seventies. All his life he strove to destroy or diminish the influence of popular leaders *and demagogues* who believed in the power of the individual to alter the destinies of nations: **by this fundamental error in social psychology, by misreading history and so misunderstanding what can and cannot be effected in altering the social system, these men seemed to him to lead their credulous followers to an inevitable doom. (375.116-376.117)** His savage attacks on Proudhon and Lassalle, his later duel with Bakunin, were not mere moves in the struggle for personal supremacy on the part of an ambitious and despotic man resolved to destroy all possible rivals. It is true that he was by nature almost insanely jealous: nevertheless, mingled with [191] his personal feelings there was genuine indignation with the gross errors of judgment of which these men seemed to him too often guilty: and, even more strongly felt, ironical as it may seem when his own position is remembered, a violent disapproval of the influence of dominant individuals as such, of the element of personal power, which, by creating a false relation between the leader and his followers, is, sooner or later, bound to blind both to the demands of the objective situation.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>105</sup> **Although in fact he did think this he thought it not solely because they hampered his own ambition, for never desired to become a tribune of the people and steadily avoided limelight and popular acclamation. He was despotic by nature and doubtless there was a strong element of hostility to rival prophets in the relentless campaigns he conducted against them, but he justified them to himself by claiming that he wished to remove the influence of dominant individuals as such, but what was necessary was the realisation of a political and economic programme whose truth and necessity could be demonstrated from premises carried out by scientific examination; consequently all popular heroes were to be distrusted as such however sympathetic their general attitude since the personal sway which they exercised was bound sooner or later to blind both them and their followers to the demands of the external situation. He wished to convince by personal magnetism, to be regarded as a scientific, not as a religious leader: just as he abhorred nationalism as an ideal and**

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Yet it remains the case that the unique position of authority which he himself occupied in international socialism during the last decade of his life, did far more to consolidate and ensure the adoption of his system than either attention to his works or the consideration of history in the light of them could ever have achieved. **In fact, Marx occupied the position which Proudhon did not covet and indeed was too small a man to have been able to support, which Bakunin for all his anti-authoritarianism vainly strove for which Lassalle, who might have held it sacrificed to a private crisis in his life and which no one ever succeeded in occupying after him (337.119)** *His writings during these years make depressing reading: apart from journalism in German and American papers, and literary hackwork forced on him by his poverty, he confined himself almost entirely to polemical tracts, the longest of which, Herr Vogt, written in 1860, designed to clear his own name from the imputation of having brought his friends into unnecessary danger during the Cologne trials, and to counter-attack his accuser, a well-known Swiss physicist and radical politician, Karl Vogt, by alleging that he was in the pay of the French Emperor. It is of interest only for the melancholy light which it throws on ten years of frustration, filled with squabbles and intrigues, which succeeded the heroic age. In 1859 he finally published his Critique of Political Economy, but it was little read: its main theses were much more impressively stated eight years later, in the first volume of Das Kapital.*

*His faith in the ultimate victory of his cause remained unaffected even during the darkest years of the reaction. Speaking in the early fifties at a dinner given to the [192] composers and staff of The People's Paper, in answer to the toast 'The proletarians of Europe' he declared: 'In our days everything seems pregnant with its contradictory. Machinery gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour we behold starving and overtaking it. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. Even the pure light of science seems able to shine only against the dark background of ignorance.... This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, and modern misery and dissolution on the other, this antagonism between the productive forces and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable and overwhelming. Some may wail over it, others may wish to get rid of modern arts in order to get rid of modern conflicts.... For our part we*

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**systematically under-estimated its actual influence, so he detested personal ascendancy and thought it possible to achieve revolution without it. (374.116-377.19)**

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*do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to mark these contradictions ... we recognise our old friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast ... the revolution.' It must have seemed a singularly unpalatable thesis to the majority of his listeners: certainly the events of the years which followed did little to bear out his prophecy.*

In 1860 Marx's fame and influence were confined to a narrow circle: interest in communism had died down since the Cologne trials in 1851; with the phenomenal development of industry and commerce, faith in liberalism, in science, in peaceful progress, began to mount once more. *Marx himself was almost beginning to acquire the interest of a historical figure, to be regarded as the formidable theorist and agitator of a former generation, now exiled and destitute, and supporting himself by casual journalism in an obscure corner of London. Fifteen years later all this had altered. Still comparatively unknown in England, he had grown abroad into a figure of vast fame and notoriety, regarded by some as the instigator of every revolutionary move[193]ment in Europe, the fanatical dictator of a world movement pledged to subvert the moral order, the peace, happiness and prosperity of mankind. By these he was represented as the evil genius of the working class, plotting to sap and destroy the peace and morality of civilised society, systematically exploiting the worst passions of the mob, creating grievances where there were none before, pouring vinegar in the malcontents' wounds, exacerbating their relations with their employers in order to create the universal chaos in which everyone would lose, and so finally all would be made level at last, the rich and the poor, the bad and the good, the industrious and the idle, the just and the unjust.* Others saw in him the most indefatigable and devoted strategist and tactician of labouring classes everywhere, the infallible authority on all theoretical question, the creator of an irresistible movement designed to overthrow the prevailing rule of injustice and inequality by persuasion or by violence. To them he appeared as an angry and indomitable modern Moses, the leader and saviour of all the insulted and the oppressed, with the milder and more conventional Engels at his side, an Aaron ready to expound his words to the benighted, half-comprehending masses of the proletariat. The event which more than any other was responsible for this transformation was the creation of the first Workers' International in 1864, which radically altered the character and history of European socialism.

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THE INTERNATIONAL

The French Revolution is the precursor of another, more magnificent revolution which will be the last.

GRACCHUS BABEUF, *Manifeste des Égaux*, 1796

*The International came into being in the most casual possible fashion. In spite of the efforts of various organisations and committees to co-ordinate the activities of the workers of various countries, no genuine ties between them had been established. This was due to several causes. Since the general character of such bodies was conspiratorial, only a small minority of radically minded, fearless and 'advanced' workers were attracted to them; moreover, it was generally the case that before anything concrete could be achieved, a foreign war, or repressive measures by governments, put an end to the existence of the secret committees.* To this must be added the lack of acquaintance and sympathy between the workers of different nations, working under totally different conditions. And finally, the increased economic prosperity which succeeded the years of hunger and revolt, by raising the general standard of living, automatically made for greater individualism, and stimulated the personal ambition of the bolder and more politically minded workers towards local self-improvement and the pursuit of immediate ends, and away from the comparatively nebulous ideal of an international alliance against the bourgeoisie. The development of the German workers, led by Lassalle, is a typical example of such a purely internal movement, rigorously centralised but confined to a single land, spurred on by an optimistic hope of gradually forcing [195] the capitalist enemy to terms by the sheer weight of numbers, without having recourse to a revolutionary upheaval or violent seizure of power. This was encouraged by Bismarck's anti-bourgeois policy which appeared to weight the scales in favour of the workers. In France the fearful defeat of 1848-9 left the city proletariat broken, and for many years incapable of action on a large scale, healing its wounds by forming small local associations more or less Proudhonist in inspiration. Nor were they entirely discouraged in this by the government of Napoleon III. The Emperor himself had in his youth posed as a friend of the peasants, artisans and factory workers against capitalist bureaucracy, and wished to

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represent his monarchy as an entirely novel form of government, an original blend of monarchism, republicanism and Tory democracy, in which political absolutism was tempered by economic liberalism; while the government, although centralised and responsible to the Emperor alone, in theory rested ultimately on the confidence of the people, and was therefore to be an entirely new and thoroughly modern institution, infinitely sensitive to new needs, responsive to every nuance of social change.

**Napoleon believed in cleverness and elaborately concealed far-sighted moves whose precise significance eluded all observers: the whole ramshackle structure of his policy, internal and external, was based on a belief in the effectiveness of a series of skilfully constructed facades each more hollow and precarious than the next with which to conceal real intentions which, so lost did he become in the problem of camouflage, sometimes turned out to be missing altogether. So accustomed did he become to concealing everything from everyone that he ended by concealing from himself the fact that what he was so elaborately concealing was not there to conceal; that behind the disguise there was nothing, a void, no consistent economic policy, no genuine political ideas, only evasions for evasion's sake, a passion for tactics and compromise with no more definite goal in view than a strong desire for self-perpetuation. (122-12)** Part of Napoleon's elaborate policy of social conciliation was the preservation of a delicate balance of power between the classes by playing them off against each other. The workers were therefore permitted to form themselves into unions under strict police supervision, in order to offset the dangerously growing power of the financial aristocracy with its suspected Orleanist loyalties. The workers, with no alternative choice before them, accepted this cautiously outstretched hand, and began constituting trades associations, a process half encouraged, half hampered, by the authorities, **as everything save in the pursuit of pleasure was in that reign. (123)**

When the great Exhibition of Modern Industry was opened in London in 1863, French workers were given facilities for visiting it, and a selected deputation duly [196] came to England, half tourists, half representatives of the French proletariat, theoretically sent to the Exhibition in order to study the latest industrial

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developments. A meeting was arranged between them and the representative English unions. At this meeting, which originally was probably as vague in intention as other gatherings of its kind, there naturally arose such questions as comparative hours and wages in France and England, and the necessity of preventing employers from importing cheap black-leg labour from abroad with which to break strikes organised by local unions. A meeting was called in order to form an association which should be confined not merely to holding discussions and comparing notes, but for the purpose of beginning active economic and political co-operation, and perhaps for the promotion of an international democratic revolution. **Out of this meeting grew the first International Working Men's Association destined to haunt and terrify-quite without reason as it turned out-both capitalists and governments in every land as the concrete embodiment of the universal spectre of bloody revolution.** (124) The initiative on this occasion came not from Marx, but from the English and French labour leaders themselves. On their fringe were other radicals of various kinds, Polish democrats, Italian Mazzinists, Proudhonists, Blanquists and neo-Jacobins from France and Belgium: anyone indeed, who desire the fall of the existing order was at first freely welcomed.

The first meeting was held in St Martin's Hall, and was presided over by Edward Beesley, a charming and benevolent figure, then professor of ancient history in the University of London, a radical and a positivist, who belonged to the small but notable group which included Frederic Harrison and Compton, and had been deeply influenced by Comte and the early French socialists. Its members could be counted on to support every enlightened measure, and, for many years alone among the educated men of their time defended the highly unpopular cause of trade unionism, **as opposed to movements for co-operation and self-education among workers and supported every radical reform generally,** (130) at a period when it was being denounced in the House of Commons as an instrument deliberately invented to foment ill [197] will between the classes.<sup>106</sup> The meeting resolved

<sup>106</sup> **At a time when it was being publicly execrated in the House of Commons as the embodiment of social ill-will and attributed it to the malignity of a few disgruntled individuals; in this forestalling William Morris and Hyndman by a generation.** (130)

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to constitute an international federation of working men, pledged not to reform but to destroy the prevalent system of economic relations, and to substitute in its place one in which the workers would themselves acquire the ownership of the means of production, which would put an end to their economic exploitation and cause the fruit of their labour to be communally shared, an end which entailed the ultimate abolition of private property in all its forms.

**They also pledged to assist each other not merely in improving their common condition but in subverting, attacking, and whenever possible overthrowing the existing capitalist regime by open political action, whether by gaining representation in democratic parliaments or by creating conditions for a violent coup d'état.**

It recognised that although political freedom was unattainable without the emancipation of labour, yet as the chief obstacle towards such emancipation was the repression which the governing class exercised through political channels it could be removed only by political action: the enemy must necessarily be fought with his own weapons, weapons which must be forcibly torn from his grasp: The doctrine sponsored by both Bakunin and Proudhon by which political power corrupts all those who it touches, leaders of the working class even more deeply than the bourgeoisie, and must consequently not only not be sought but be destroyed beyond insurrection was formally rejected; although Bakunin and his followers and many French Proudhonist continued to be members of the International for many years, they did so in defiance of their own principles and were ultimately after an open struggle, compelled to leave it. The International did not long survive their expulsion, but after its death other factors and in particular, the Paris Commune and its public effect on Europe together with personal ambitions and rivalries were as much responsible as the war of ideas which broke out in its ranks soon after its foundations. (126-128)

The abolishment of private property was an end inherited by Babeuf and Weitling and beyond any advance by e.g. Proudhon who believed in the sanctity of the family and derived, like Fourier beyond him, all morality, all sense of

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right and justice from the possession of private property in a several limited quantity, tracing the chaos and injustice of the present to that growth of the power of men over one another by whose means the insidious financial system of credit, of the modern state by which independent owners of property tended to lose it to the large capitalists and with it his freedom, his power of action and his personality, a system of injustice necessarily disguised and legalised by the state which exists indeed in order to protect the possessing few against the righteous indignation of the mass of the dispossessed. Had the international been composed of peasant small-holders, even of skilled artisans, it might despite Marx have adopted the Proudhonian programme; and indeed Italy and Spain, the great bulk of whose pupils did belong to this class of Proudhonism, particularly in its revolutionary Bakuninist form, made immense strides in a short number of years. It did so also in Russia where the party of national freedom, a prototype of the later Socialist Revolutionary Party inherited from Herzen, an agrarian form of socialism, founded on the uncollectivised village commune and developed a programme similar to Proudhon's mutualism but entailing full state organisation. The meeting at St. Martin's Hall consisted largely of representatives of the industrial proletariat for the barrier dividing them from ownership of the means of their own production and distribution, machinery, raw materials, transport etc. was as an issue more alive than the indispensability of the state, the regulation of credit and the danger of over-centralisation. Centralised already, workers felt the need of adequate remuneration and the relief from unchecked exploitation from above, not of dispersion or reconstitution in smaller perhaps no less oppressive units. As for the rest of the International, entirely nationalised Radicals, Polish democrats and Russophobes, praying and plotting for a revolution to upset the tyrannies of the Emperor or the Tsar, paid little attention to economic issues provided it was made clear that a truly revolutionary purpose animated the new association as shown by the insertion of suitable compounded phrases in the statutes, which were to that

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### **extent wholly different from the moderately worded provincialisms of a trade union. (130-135)**

Marx, who had previously held himself coldly aloof from other gatherings of democrats, perceived the solid character of this latest attempt at combination, organised as it was by genuine workers' representatives and advertising definite and concrete purposes in which his own influence was clearly traceable. He rarely took part in any movement which he had not initiated himself. This was to be the exception. The German artisans in London appointed him their representative on the executive committee, and by the time the second meeting was held to vote the constitution, he took entire charge of the proceedings. After the French and Italian delegates, to whom the task of drafting the statutes was entrusted, had failed to produce anything but the usual faded democratic commonplaces, Marx drew them up himself, adding an inaugural address which he composed for the occasion. The constitution which, as framed by the International Committee, was vague, humanitarian, and tinged with liberalism, emerged from his hands a tightly drawn, militant document constituting a rigorously disciplined body whose members were pledged to assist each other not merely in improving their common condition, but in systematically subverting, and whenever possible overthrowing, the existing capitalist regime by open political action, and in particular by gaining representation in democratic parliaments, as the followers of Lassalle were beginning to attempt to do in German [198] countries. A formal request was thereupon made to include some expressions of respect for 'right and duty, truth, justice and freedom'. The words were inserted, but in a context in which Marx declared that 'they could do no possible harm.' The new constitution was passed, and Marx began to work with his customary feverish rapidity, emerging into the limelight of international activity after fifteen years, if not of obscurity, of intermittent light and darkness.

The Inaugural Address of the International is, after *The Communist Manifesto* the most remarkable document of the Socialist Movement. It occupies little over a dozen pages, **possesses strength, dignity and a monumental Basaltic quality which belongs in some measure to all political programmes composed by Marx himself lifting them far above the general mass of radical propaganda of this time (136-137)**, and opens

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with the declaration ‘... *that the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class themselves ... that the economic subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour ... lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms of social misery, mental degradation and political dependence. That the economic emancipation of the working class is therefore the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means. That all efforts aiming at this great end have hitherto failed from want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries ... for these means the undersigned ... have taken the steps necessary for founding the International Workings Men’s Association.*’

It contains a survey of the economic and social conditions of the working class from 1848, and contrasts the rapidly growing prosperity of the propertied classes with the depressed conditions of the workers. **Figures are quoted from official blue books published by the Government to substantiate the case and it is pointed out that what holds England then in the van of industrial progress holds all other countries in proportion to the pace of their industrial and mercantile development. (137)** 1848 is recognised as a crushing defeat for their class, yet even so it was not wholly without benefit: as a result of it, the feeling of international solidarity among workers had awoken. Its existence had made agitation for the [199] legal limitation of the working day not entirely unsuccessful, this being the first definite victory over a policy of extreme *laissez-faire*. The co-operative movement had proved that high industrial efficiency was compatible with, and even increased by, the elimination of the capitalist slave-driver: wage labour had thus been demonstrated to be not a necessary but a transient and eradicable evil. The workers were at last beginning to grasp that they had nothing to gain and everything to lose by listening to their capitalist advisers who, whenever they could not use force, sought to play on national and religious prejudices, on personal or local interests, on the profound political ignorance of the masses. Whoever might gain by national or dynastic wars, it was the workers on both sides who always lost. Yet their strength was such that by common action they could prevent this exploitation in peace as in war: as indeed, their success in intervening in England against the sending of help to the Southern States in the American civil war had proved. Against the

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formidable and in appearance overwhelming power of their enemy they had only one weapon – their numbers, ‘but numbers weigh in the scales only when they are united and organised and led consciously towards a single aim’; it was in the political field that their slavery was most manifest. To hold aloof from politics in the name of economic organisation, *as Proudhon and Bakunin taught*, was criminal short-sightedness; they would obtain justice only if they could uphold it, if necessary by force, wherever they saw it trampled upon. Even if they could not intervene with armed force, **as in the case of the fearful slaughter of Poles or Caucasians by Russia**, they could at least protest and demonstrate and harass their governments, until the supreme standards of morality and justice, by which relations between individuals were conventionally judged, became the laws governing relations between nations. But this could not be done without altering the existing economic structure of society which, in spite of minor improvements, necessarily worked for the degradation and enslavement of the working class. There was only one class in whose real interest it was to arrest this downward trend and remove the possibility of its occurrence: that was the class which, possessing nothing, was bound by no ties of interest or sentiment to the old world of injustice or misery – the class which was as much the invention of the new age as machinery itself. The Address ended like *The Communist Manifesto* with the words, ‘Workers of the world unite!’

The tasks of the new organisation as embodied in this document were: to establish close relations between the workers of various countries and trades; to collect relevant statistics; to inform the workers of one country of the conditions, needs and the plans of the workers of another; to discuss questions of common interest; to secure co-ordinated simultaneous action in all countries in the event of international crises; to publish regular reports on the work of the associations, and the like. It was to meet in annual congresses and would be convened by a democratically elected general council in which all affiliated countries would be represented. Marx left the constitution as elastic as possible in order to be able to include as many active workers’ organisations as possible, however disparate their methods and character. At first he resolved to act cautiously and with moderation, to bind and unify, and eliminate dissidents gradually, as a greater measure of agreement was progressively reached. He carried out his policy

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precisely as he had planned it. The consequences were ruinous, although it is difficult to see what other tactics Marx could have adopted consistently with his principles.

The International grew rapidly. Union after union of workers in the principal countries of Europe was converted by the prospect of united warfare for [201] higher wages, shorter hours and political representation: it was far better organised than either Chartism or the earlier communist leagues had ever been, partly because tactical lessons had been learnt. Independent activity on the part of individuals was suppressed, popular oratory was discounted and rigid discipline in all departments was introduced, mainly because it was led and dominated by a single personality. The only man who might have attempted to rival Marx in the early years was Lassalle, and he was dead; even so, the spell of his legend was strong enough to insulate the Germans against full support of the London centre. Liebknecht, a man of mediocre talent, boundlessly devoted to Marx, preached the new creed with enthusiasm and skill, but the continuation of Bismarck's anti-socialist policy, and the tradition of nationalism derived from Lassalle, **and the personal hostility to Marx on the part of his political heirs, (129)** kept the German workers' activity within the frontier of their country, preoccupied with problems of internal organisation. As for Bakunin, that great disturber of men's spirits, he had lately returned to Western Europe after a romantic escape from Siberia, but while his personal prestige, both in the International and outside it, was immense, he had no organised following: he had drifted away from Herzen and the liberal agrarian party among the Russian émigrés and no one knew whither he was tending, least of all he himself. *In common with the great majority of Proudhonists he and his followers became members of the International, but since it was openly committed to political action, they did so in defiance of their principles.* The most enthusiastic members at this time were English and French trade unionists, who were temporarily under the spell of the new experiment with its vast promise of prosperity and power; they were no theorists, nor wished to be, and left all such questions to the General Council of the International. While this mood lasted, Marx had no [202] serious rivals in the organisation, being altogether superior in intellect, revolutionary experience and strength of will, to the odd amalgam of professional men, factory workers and stray

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ideologists who, with the addition of one or two dubious adventurers, composed the First International Working Men's Association.

*Marx was now forty-six years of age and in appearance and habits prematurely old. Of his six children three were dead, largely as a result of the material conditions of the life led by the family in their rooms in Soho: they had contrived to move to a more spacious house in Kentish Town, although they were still almost destitute.* The great economic crisis, the severest yet experienced in Europe, which began in 1857, was warmly welcomed both by him and by Engels as likely to breed discontent and rebellion, but it also curtailed Engels' income, and so struck a blow at Marx himself at a moment when he could least afford it. The *New York Tribune* and occasional contributions to radical German newspapers saved him from literal starvation; but the margin by which the family survived was for twenty years perilously thin. By 1860 even the American source began to fail; the editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley, a fervent supporter of democratic nationalism, found himself in growing disagreement with his European correspondent's sharply worded views. The economic crisis, and the added effect of the civil war, led to the dismissal of many of the *tribune's* European correspondents: Dana pleaded to be allowed to retain Marx, but in vain. He was gradually edged out of his post during the beginning of 1861; the association finally ceased a year later. As for the International, it added to his duties and enlivened his existence, but did not increase his income. In despair he applied for a post of booking clerk in a railway office, but **his foreign accent, (142),** his tattered clothes and his menacing [203] appearance were unlikely to produce a favourable impression on a potential employer of clerical labour, and his application was finally rejected on account of his illegible handwriting. It is difficult to see how, without the support of Engels, he and his family could have survived at all during those fearful years. **Few among the publicists who drew dramatic portraits of him in newspaper articles and pamphlets as the inspirer and chief of a powerful and unscrupulous international conspiracy can have suspected the sordid details of his daily life. It reads like a particularly unrelieved page of a novel by Dickens: the gloomy and undernourished children, the squalor and the frequent visits to the pawn shop, the flights from creditors,**

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**the intolerable humiliation of being forced to beg and to borrow from friends and acquaintances, succeeded by bursts of violent resentment, and overwhelming passion of hatred for the whole world and his own part in it, and then when he recovered, endless ingenuity with which those thin threads were kept in being which connected him precariously but did nevertheless connect him with the outer edge of a social respectable existence. (142-144)**

Meanwhile branches of the International had been established in **France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Hungary, Poland**, and even as far as backward Spain; nuclei were formed in swift succession, some under the influence of Proudhon or Bakunin, but nevertheless technically affiliated to the London centre. Germany held aloof hampered by anti-combination laws and became occupied with international organisation, but it was plain that as soon as this process was over the Germans would enter in a body as the largest and best disciplined of all the sections giving the whole an immense access of strength. (144-145) By 1865 governments began to grow frightened; there was talk of arrests and proscriptions; the French Emperor made a half-hearted attempt to suppress it. This only served to heighten the fame and the prestige of the new body among the workers. For Marx, after the dark tunnel of the fifties, this was once more life and activity. The work of the International consumed his nights and days. With the customary devoted help of Engels he took personal possession of the central office, and acted not only as its semi-dictatorial adviser, but as the central drafting office and clearing-house of all correspondence. Everything passed through his hands and moved in the direction which he gave it. The Swiss, Italian and Belgian sections, bred on the anti-authoritarianism of Proudhon and Bakunin made vague but unavailing protests. Marx, who enjoyed complete ascendancy over the Council, tightened his hold still further: he insisted on rigid conformity to every point of the original programme **and on the elimination of all phrases in the resolutions, proclamations and general literature of the International which carried the faintest suggestion of liberal or humanitarian or nationalist ends. (146)**. His old energy seemed to return. He wrote spirited, almost gay letters to Engels; even his theoretical works bear the imprint of this newly found

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vigour, and as often happens, intense work in one field stimulated dormant activity in another. A sketch of his economic theory had appeared in 1859: but his major work, which poverty and ill-health had interrupted, now at last began to near its end.

Marx made few personal appearances at the meetings of the congress of the International: he preferred to control its activities from London, where he regularly [204] attended the meetings of the General Council and issued detailed instructions to his followers on it. As always he trusted and relied almost entirely on Germans: he found a faithful mouthpiece in an elderly tailor named Eccarius, long resident in England, a man not burdened with excess of intelligence or imagination, but dependable and thorough. Eccarius, like the majority of Marx's underlings, eventually revolted, and joined the secessionists, but for eight years, as secretary to the Council of the International, he carried out Marx's instructions to the letter. Annual congresses were held in London, Geneva, Lausanne, Brussels, Basle, at which general problems were discussed and definite measures voted upon; common decisions were adopted with regard to hours and wages; such questions as the position of women and children, the type of political and economic pressure most suitable to differing conditions in various European countries, the possibility of collaboration with other bodies, were considered. Marx's chief concern was to arrive at a clear formulation of a concrete international policy in terms of specific demands co-ordinated with each other, and the creation of a rigorous discipline which guaranteed undeviating adherence to this policy. He therefore successfully resisted all offers of alliance with such purely humanitarian bodies as the League of Peace and Freedom, then newly founded under the aegis of Mazzini, Bakunin and John Stuart Mill.

**Machinery was created under his own direct inspiration to support strikes wherever the International approved of their declaration, both by direct means and by preventing the importation of cheap foreign labour to replace the strikers, a threat which employers had long used as effective blackmail against their workers; he applied himself at first to the study of oppressed nationalities in Europe: with exception of the Poles whose martyrdom provided a point of union between liberals and revolutionaries of all brands which was unique in**

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its day, excited his contempt and suspicion as a mass dark and brutish peasantry, the natural alliance of barbarism and reaction as their behaviour in 1848 had shown: he came to a different conclusion with regard to the Irish Fenians, who with the memory of Bronterre O'Brien still fresh in their memories, after a period of smouldering exploded into a fury of conspiracies and assassinations. He regarded them as a possible nucleus of genuinely lower class movement directed against landlords and official representatives of the English bourgeoisie; the threat to import cheap Irish labour was a powerful weapon in the hands of the English employers against their men: the freeing of Ireland would therefore fatally undermine the economic strength of the landowners; consequently, the liberal agitation for home rule was a typical attempt to cure the symptoms without eliminating the cause since the economic and social security of English workers put them in the position of being themselves the slave exploiting class and so inevitably drove them into an unnatural alliance with their own oppressors: this was plainly a colossal impediment to their own social and moral emancipation, creating an artificial stimulus towards imperialism within the ranks of the proletariat itself. He admired, too, the resolute revolutionary temper of the Irish representatives in the trade unions, comparing them favourably with the temporising attitude of the English leaders, Odger, Lucraft, even the relatively radical Applegarth, whom he suspected of petit bourgeois ideals and a desire to compromise at the earliest possible moment due to a horror of revolutionary change and a secret ambition to respectabilise themselves by joining the liberals, sacrificing the final ends for some measure of immediate satisfaction. It is odd that Bakunin with his taste for the chaotic and violent, for guerilla warfare, for generous revolutionary passion untrammelled by precision of method and direction, for sudden storms of political indignation culminating in some terrifying act of popular vengeance should never have attempted to proselytise Ireland, a country in many respects so similar to Spain, which all the countries of Europe proved to be much the most responsive to his ideas and his tactics. But Ireland, both then and later remained isolated from the

**main streams of European thought and feeling and the effect upon it of either Marxism and Bakuninism, if it occurred at all, was indirect and negligible. (148-154)**

*This dictatorial policy was bound, sooner or later, to lead to discontent and rebellion; it crystallised around Bakunin whose conception of a loose federation of semi-independent local bodies began to gain adherents in the Swiss and Italian sections of the International, and to a lesser extent in France. Finally they resolved to constitute themselves, under Bakunin's leadership, into a body to be called the Democratic Alliance, affiliated to the International, but with an internal organisation of its own, pledged to resist centralisation and to support [205] federal autonomy. This was a heresy which even a more tolerant man than Marx could not afford to overlook: the International was not intended to be a mere correspondence society between a loose association of radical committees, but a unified political party pressing for a single end in all the centres of its dispersion. He believed firmly that any connection with Bakunin – or indeed any Russian – was bound to end by badly betraying the working class, a view which he had acquired after his brief and enjoyable flirtation, and subsequent disillusionment, with the aristocratic Russian radicals of the forties. As for Bakunin, while he professed sincerely enough to admire Marx's personal genius, **while calling himself his pupil and declaring his readiness to throw over Herzen and Proudhon and all his old associates for his sake, (155)** he never concealed either his personal antipathy for him, or his rooted loathing of the belief in authoritarian methods, expressed both in his theories and in his practical organisation of the revolutionary party.*

*'We, revolutionary anarchists,' he declared, 'are the enemies of all forms of State and State organisation ... we think that all State rule, all governments, being by their very nature placed outside the mass of the people, must necessarily seek to subject it to customs and purposes entirely foreign to it. We therefore declare ourselves to be foes ... of all State organisations as such, and believe that the people can only be happy and free, when, organised from below by means of its own autonomous and completely free associations, without the supervision of any guardians, it will create its own life.*

*We believe power corrupts those who wield it as much as those who are forced to obey it. Under its corrosive influence, some become greedy and ambitious tyrants, exploiting society in their own interest, or in that of their class, while others are turned into abject slaves. Intellectuals, positivists, doctrinaires, all those who put science before life ... defend the idea of the State and its authority as being the only possible salva[206]tion of society – quite*

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*logically, since from their false premiss that thought comes before life, that only abstract theory can form the starting-point of social practice ... they draw the inevitable conclusion that since such theoretical knowledge is at present possessed by very few, these few must be put in control of social life, not only to inspire, but to direct all popular movements, and that no sooner is the revolution over than a new social organisation must at once be set up; not a free association of popular bodies ... working in accordance with the needs and instincts of the people, but a centralised dictatorial power concentrated in the hands of this academic minority, as if they really expressed the popular will.... The difference between such revolutionary dictatorship and the modern State is only one of external trappings. In substance both are a tyranny of the minority over the majority in the name of the people – in the name of the stupidity of the many and the superior wisdom of the few – and so they are equally reactionary, devising to secure political and economic privilege to the ruling minority, and the ... enslavement of the masses, to destroy the present order only to erect their own rigid dictatorship on its ruins.'*

Bakunin's attacks on Marx and Lassalle could not pass unnoticed, the more so because they were tinged by anti-Semitism, for which his friend Herzen more than once had occasion to reproach him. And yet, when in 1869 Herzen begged him to leave the International, he wrote, with a characteristic burst of magnanimity, that he could not join the opponents of a man 'who has served [the cause of socialism] for twenty-five years with insight, energy, and disinterestedness in which he undoubtedly excelled us all.

**Specialism, whether as Lassalle or as Marx had preached it, was in his view a form of state despotism which instead of liberating men from the degrading rule of governments which curb and pervert all their natural faculties merely impose a yoke even heavier, a yoke of people organised as its own oppressor, made helpless by its own instruments of government, undone by its own insane desire to substitute one prison for another, due to a fear of the light which it has never seen, faced with the possibility of freedom and crying for heavier and stronger chains. Bakunin attributed this attitude to a passion of absolutism and hierarchical organisation which Marx and Lassalle had in their blood, both as Germans and Jews: he recognised the uniqueness of their service to the cause of the working class but predicted that if they and their followers were allowed to control it, they**

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would inevitably destroy the cause of freedom with the same energy and skill as that which they now devoted to its conquest. Marx, who discounted Bakunin's activities as the irresponsible rebellion-mongering of a mad eccentric, began to alter his view when branch after branch of the International entered the Democratic Alliance- and thereby pledged themselves to resist centralisation and support federal autonomy. This was heresy that even a more tolerant founder of a movement could not afford to overlook since it openly struck at the roots of the movement and threatened, if successful to frustrate the main purpose of unification for which the International was created. Marx did not intend the International to be a mere correspondence society or a loose association of radical committees modelled on the leagues and councils into which European liberals were continually being organised: he wished to create a new strongly disciplined political party acting as a single international force with a rigidly defined purpose, pressing for a single end in all the centres of its dispersion. (155-158)

Marx's dislike of Bakunin did not blind him to the need for conceding a certain measure of regional independence for motives of sheer expediency. Thus he successfully foiled the plan to create international trade [207] unions because he believed that this was premature and would lead to an immediate rift with the existing, nationally organised, trade unions from which, at any rate in England, the chief support of the International was drawn, **and so would, quite needlessly, sacrifice present strength to an attempt to attain absolute internationalism without proceeding through the intermediate stages of gradual expansion. (158)** But if he made this concession, he did so not for love of federalism<sup>107</sup> as such, but solely not to endanger what had already been built up, without which he could not create a body, the existence of which would make the workers conscious that there were behind their demands, not, as in 1848, merely sympathisers here and there, prepared to offer moral support or at best occasional contributions – but a well-disciplined, militant force pledged to resist, and, when necessary, intimidate and coerce

<sup>107</sup> gradualism

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their own governments, unless justice were done to their brothers everywhere.

In order to create the permanent possibility of such active solidarity in theory and in practice, a central body in undisputed authority, a kind of general staff responsible for strategy and tactics, seemed to him indispensable. Bakunin, by his attempts to loosen the structure of the International and to encourage varieties of opinion in the local sections, appeared to him to be deliberately aiming to destroy this possibility. If he were successful, it would mean the loss of what had been won, a return to utopianism, the disappearance of the new sober outlook, of the realisation that the sole strength of the workers lay in unity, that what delivered them into the hands of their enemies in 1848 was the fact that they were engaged in scattered risings, sporadic emotional outbursts of violence, instead of a single carefully concerted revolution, organised to begin at a moment chosen for its historical appropriateness, directed from a common source and to a common end, by men who had accurately studied the situation and their own and their enemy's strength. Bakuninism led to the dissipation of the revolutionary impulse, to the old romantic, noble, futile heroism, rich in saints [208] and martyrs, but crushed only too easily by the more realistic enemy, and necessarily followed by a period of weakness and disillusionment likely to set the movement back for many decades. **This belief alone can explain Marx's savage vendetta against Bakunin and his followers, which cannot be explain on the grounds of personal antipathy: he disliked French Proudhonists and German Lassalleans just as bitterly and the English trade unionists hardly less, yet nothing similar was ever attempted against them (160)**

Marx did not under-estimate Bakunin's revolutionary energy and power to stir men's imaginations: indeed, it was for this reason that he regarded him as a dangerously disruptive force likely to breed chaos wherever he went. The workers' cause would rest on volcanic soil if he and his followers were allowed to irrupt into the ranks of its defenders. Hence after some years of desultory skirmishing, he decided upon an open attack. It ended with the excommunication of Bakunin and his followers from the ranks of the International.

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‘THE RED TERRORIST DOCTOR’

We are what we are because of him: without him we should still be sunk in a slough of confusion.

FRIEDRICH ENGELS, 1883

The first volume of *Das Kapital* was finally published in 1867. The appearance of this book was an epoch-making event in the history of international socialism and in Marx's own life. It was conceived as a comprehensive treatise on the laws and morphology of the economic organisation of modern society, seeking to describe the processes of production, exchange and distribution as they actually occur, to explain their present state as a particular stage in the development constituted by the movement of the class struggle, in Marx's own words, ‘to discover the economic law of motion of modern society’ by establishing the system natural laws which govern the history of classes. *The result was a curious amalgam of economic theory, history, sociology and propaganda which fits none of the accepted categories. Marx certainly regarded it as primarily a treatise on economic science. The earlier economists, according to Marx, misunderstood the nature of economic laws when they compared them with the laws of physics and chemistry, and assumed that, although social conditions may change, the laws which govern them do not; with the result that their systems either apply to imaginary worlds, people by idealised economic men, modelled upon the writer's own contemporaries, but compounded of characteristics which came into prominence only as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; or else describe [210] societies which if they were ever real, have long since vanished.* He therefore conceived it as his task to create a new system of concepts and definitions **such as bourgeoisie and proletariat, the value of wages, capital, rent, interest, profit, which are not formulated a priori in the sense that instances of them may or may not occur, but directly drawn from life. (219)** which should have definite application to the contemporary world, and be so constructed as to reflect and emphasise the existing structure of economic life in relation not only to its past, but also to its future. In the first volume Marx made an attempt at once to provide a systematic exposition of certain basic theorems of economic science, and more specifically to describe the rise of the

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new industrial system, as a consequence of the new relations between employers and labour created by the effect of technological progress on the methods of production, **isolating an describing the causes which have led to its spectacular expansion in our own time and must no less inevitably lead to its downfall in the near future.**

**The search for the evidence for his vast generalisations drove him to accumulated a mass of concrete example drawn particularly from English sources, which he found in the British Museum, not only the richest and most accessible storehouse of information, but which provided the most vivid illustrations of development of productive forces in the country, which had been the prototype and symbol of economic progress for more than two centuries. (220-221)**

The first volume therefore deals with the productive process; that is, on the one hand, the relation between machinery and labour, and on the other between the actual producers, that is, the workers and those who employ and direct them. The remaining volumes, published after his death by his executors, deal with the methods in use of marketing the finished product, that is, the system of exchange and the financial machinery which it involves, and with relations between producers and consumers, which determine the rate of interest and profit.

The general thesis which runs through the entire work is that adumbrated in *The Communist Manifesto* and Marx's earlier economic writings.<sup>108</sup> It traces the rise of the modern proletariat by correlating it with the general development of the technical means of production. When, in the course of their gradual evolution, these means become too costly and elaborate to be capable of being made by each man for his own use **and for the satisfaction of his own material needs (221)**, certain individuals, owing to their superior skill, power and [211] enterprise, or to accident of fortune, acquire sole control of such instruments and tools, and thus find themselves in a position in which they can hire the labour of others by offering them more in the form of a regular

<sup>108</sup> For a more detailed account of Marxist economic doctrine, together with the best-known criticisms of it, the reader is referred to the chapter on 'Communist Economics' in Professor H. J. Laski's *Communism* published in this series.

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remuneration than they would receive as independent producers vainly attempting to achieve the same results with the old and obsolete tools which alone they have in their possession. As a result of selling their labour to others, these men themselves become so many commodities in the economic market, and their labour power acquires a definite price which fluctuates precisely like that of other commodities.

A commodity is any object embodying human labour for which there is a social demand. *It is thus a concept which, he is careful to point out, can be applied only at a relatively late stage of social development: and is no more eternal than any other economic category.* The commercial value of a commodity is assumed to be directly constituted by the number of hours of human labour which it takes an average producer to create an average specimen of its kind (a view derived from a somewhat similar doctrine held by Ricardo and the classical economists). A day's work by a labourer may well produce an object possessing a value greater than the value of the minimum quantity of commodities which he needs for his own support; he thus produces something more valuable than he consumes; indeed, unless he did so, his master would have no economic reason for employing him. As a commodity in the market, his labour power may itself be acquired for £x, which represents the minimum sum needed to maintain him in sufficient health to enable him to do his work efficiently; the goods he produces will sell for £y; £y-x represents the extent by which he has increased the total wealth of society, and this is the residue which his employer pockets. Even after the reasonable reward of the employer's own work in his capacity as the [212] organiser and manager of the processes of production and distribution is deducted, a definite residue of the social income remains, which in the form of rent, interest on investments, or commercial profit, is shared, according to Marx, not by society as a whole, but solely by those members of it who are called the capitalist or bourgeois class, distinguished from the rest by the fact that they alone in their capacity as sole owners of the means of production, obtain and accumulate such unearned increment.

Whether Marx's concept of value be interpreted as meaning the actual market price of commodities or, an average norm, round which the actual prices oscillate, or an ideal limit towards which they tend, or that which in a rationally organised society prices

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ought to be, or something more metaphysical and Hegelian, an impalpable essence, infused into brute matter by the creativeness of human labour, or, as unsympathetic critics have maintained, a confusion of all these; and again whether the notion of a uniform entity called undifferentiated human labour (which according to the theory constitutes economic value), different manifestations of which can be compared in respect of quantity alone, is, or is not, valid –**and both seem difficult to advocate- (225)** the theory of exploitation based on them remains comparatively unaffected. The central thesis which made so powerful an appeal to workers, who did not for the most part begin to comprehend the intricacies of Marx's general argument about the relation of exchange value and actual prices, is that there is only one social class, their own, which produces more wealth than it enjoys, and that this residue is appropriated by other men simply by virtue of their strategical position as the sole possessors of the means of production, that is, natural resources, machinery, means of transport, financial credit, and so forth; for without these the workers cannot create; while control [213] over them gives those who have it the power of starving the rest of mankind into capitulation on their own terms.

Political, social, religious and legal institutions are represented as being so many moral and intellectual weapons designed to organise the world in the interest of the employers. These last employ, over and above the producers of commodities, that is, the proletariat, a whole army of ideologists: propagandists, interpreters, and apologists, who, **in the guise of artists, professors and journalists (226)**, defend the capitalist system, embellish it, and create literary and artistic monuments to it, designed to increase the confidence and optimism of those who benefit under it, and make it appear more palatable to its victims. But if the development of technology, as Saint-Simon correctly discovered, has for a period given this unique power to landowners, industrialists and financiers – every type of middleman, its uncontrollable advance will no less inevitably destroy them.

Already Fourier, and after him Proudhon, had declaimed against the processes by which the great bankers and manufacturers, by means of their superior resources, tend to eliminate small traders and craftsmen from the economic market, creating a mass of discontented, *déclassé* individuals, who are

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automatically forced into the ranks of the proletariat. Ruthless competition between individual capitalists, seeking to increase the quantity of surplus value, and the natural necessity arising from this of lowering the cost of production and finding new markets, is bound to lead to greater and greater fusion of rival firms, *that is to a ceaseless process of amalgamation*, until only the largest and most powerful groups are left in existence, all others being forced into a position of dependence or semi-dependence, in the new centralised industrial hierarchy, which grows, and will continue to grow, faster and faster. Centralisation is a direct product of rationalisation<sup>109</sup>: of increased efficiency in production [214] and transport secured by the pooling of resources, of the formation of great monopolistic trusts and combines which are capable of planned co-ordination. The workers previously scattered among many small enterprises, reinforced by continual influx of the sons and daughters of the ruined small traders and manufacturers<sup>110</sup>, automatically become united into a single self-conscious proletarian army by the very processes of integration at work among their masters. Their power as a political and economic force grows correspondingly greater. Already trade unions, developing in the shadow of the factory system, represent a far more powerful weapon in the hands of the proletariat than any that existed before. The process of industrial expansion will tend to organise society more and more into the shape of an immense pyramid, with fewer and increasingly powerful capitalists at its summit and a vast, **brutalised (228)**, discontented mass of exploited workers and colonial slaves forming its base. The more machinery replaces human labour the lower the rate of profit is bound to fall, since 'surplus value' is determined solely by the quantity of the latter. The struggle between competing capitalists and their countries, which are in effect controlled by them, will grow bitterer and more deadly, being wedded to a system of unhampered competition, under which each can only survive by overreaching and destroying his rivals.

Within the framework of capitalism and unchecked private enterprise, these processes cannot be controlled, since the vested interests on which capitalist society rests, depend for their survival

**2 nationalisation (227)**

<sup>110</sup> **the de-graded petit bourgeois (228)**

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on absolute freedom of competition. Marx did not, however, clearly foresee the consequences of the competition between rival imperialisms,<sup>111</sup> and, in particular, the development of political nationalism as a force cutting across and transforming the development of capitalism itself, and offering a bulwark to the gradually impoverished section of [215] the *bourgeoisie*, which forms an alliance with the reaction in its desperate anxiety to avoid its Marxist destiny of falling into the proletariat below it.

His classification of social strata into the obsolescent military-feudal aristocracy, the industrial *bourgeoisie*, the *petite bourgeoisie*, the proletariat, and that casual riff-raff on the edge of society which he called the *Lumpenproletariat* – a remarkably original classification for its time – over simplifies issues when it is too mechanically applied to the twentieth century. A more elaborate instrument is required, if only to deal with the independent behaviour of classes, like the semi-ruined *petite bourgeoisie*, the growing salaried lower middle class, and above all the vast agricultural population, classes which Marx regarded as naturally reactionary, but forced by their growing pauperisation either to sink to the level of the proletariat, or to offer their services as mercenaries to its protagonist, the industrial *bourgeoisie*.<sup>112</sup> The history of post-war Europe requires to be considerably distorted before it can be made to fit this hypothesis.

Marx prophesied that the periodic crises due to the absence of planned economies, and unchecked industrial strife, would necessarily grow more frequent and acute. Wars, on a hitherto unprecedented scale, would ravage the civilised world, until finally the Hegelian contradictions of a system, whose continuance depends upon more and more destructive conflicts between its constituent parts, would obtain a violent solution<sup>113</sup>. The ever-decreasing group of capitalists in power would be overthrown by the workers whom they themselves would have so efficiently drilled into a compact, disciplined body. With the disappearance of the last possessing class, the final end would be reached of the war

<sup>111</sup> liberalisms (229)

<sup>112</sup> and above all the farmers and peasants on the land, were noted by him, but were regarded as too un-political to have a part of their own to play, being fated to march with one of the two great protagonists, the proletariat and the industrial bourgeoisie. (230)

<sup>113</sup> will reach the foreign end (230)

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between the classes, which is the sole and sufficient cause of economic scarcity and social strife.

*In a celebrated passage in the twenty-second chapter [216] of the first volume he declared: 'While there is a progressive diminution in the number of capitalist magnates, there is of course a corresponding increase in the mass poverty, enslavement, degeneration and exploitation, but at the same time there is a steady intensification of the role of the working class – a class which grows ever more numerous, and is disciplined, unified and organised by the very mechanism of the capitalist method of production which has flourished with it and under it. The centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour reach a point where they prove incompatible with their capitalist husk. This bursts asunder. The knell of private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.'* The State, the instrument whereby the authority of the ruling class is artificially enforced, having lost its function, will disappear. **Society possesses no function, and despairing (231)**, the ideal community, painted in colours at once too simple and too fantastic by the Utopians of the past, will at last be reached – a community in which there will be neither master nor slave, neither rich nor poor, in which the world's goods, being produced in accordance with social demand unhampered by the caprice of individuals, will be distributed not indeed equally, **not in the form of 'just remuneration' (231)**- a notion so lamely borrowed by the workers from the liberal ideologists with their *utilitarian concept of justice as arithmetical equality* – but rationally, that is unequally<sup>114</sup>: for, as a man's capacities and needs are unequal, his reward, if it is to be just, must, in the formula of *The Communist Manifesto*, accrue 'to every one according to his need, from every one according to his capacity.' Men, emancipated at last from the tyranny both of nature and of their own ill-adapted and ill-controlled, and therefore oppressive institutions, will begin to develop their capacities to the fullest extent. True freedom, so obscurely adumbrated by Hegel, will be realised. Human history in the true sense will only then begin.

[217]The publication of *Das Kapital* had at last provided a definite intellectual foundation for international socialism in the place of a scattered mass of vaguely defined and conflicting ideas. The interdependence of the historical economic and political theses preached by Marx and Engels was revealed in this

<sup>114</sup> that is, in equal sense (230)

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monumental compilation.<sup>115</sup> It became the central objective of attack and defence. All subsequent forms of socialism hereafter defined themselves in terms of their attitude to the position taken in it, and were understood and classified by their resemblance to it. After a brief period of obscurity, its fame began to grow and reached an extraordinary height. It acquired a symbolic significance beyond anything written since the age of faith. It has been blindly worshipped, and blindly hated, by millions who have not read a line of it, or have read without understanding its obscure and tortuous prose. In its name revolutions were made; the counter revolutions which followed concentrated upon its suppression as the most potent and insidious of the enemy's weapons. *A new social order has been established which professes its principles and sees in it the final and unalterable expression of its faith.* It has called into existence an army of interpreters and casuists, whose unceasing labours for nearly three-quarters of a century have buried it beneath a mountain of commentary, which has outgrown in influence the sacred text itself; **numberless popularisms and propaganda have long made the world familiar with its central tenets, whose boldness and simplicity has greatly affected men's minds, and thus influenced history. (234)**

In Marx's own life it marked a decisive moment. He intended it to be his greatest contribution to the emancipation of humanity, and had sacrificed to it fifteen years of his life and much of his public ambition. **The rest was either day to day journalism to keep him alive or else so much preliminary work, designed for this which was to be his masterpiece. (234)** The labour which had gone towards it was truly prodigious. For its sake he endured poverty, illness and persecution both public and personal suffering these not gladly indeed, but with a single-minded stoicism whose strength and harshness both moved and frightened those who came in contact with it.

[218]He wished to dedicate his book to Darwin, for whom he had a greater intellectual admiration than for any other of his contemporaries, regarding him as having, by his theory of evolution and natural selection, done for the morphology of the natural sciences, what he himself was striving to do for human history. Darwin declined the honour in a polite, cautiously phrased

<sup>115</sup> lapidary treatise (232)

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letter, say that he was unhappily ignorant of economic science, but offered the author his good wishes in what he assumed to be their common end – the advancement of human knowledge. **Herbert Spencer to whom the book was later sent, exhibited some interest, and there was a polite exchange of letters which ultimately ended in nothing. (235)** It was dedicated to the memory of Wilhelm Wolff, a Silesian communist, who had been his devoted follower since 1848, and had recently died in Manchester. The published volume was the first part of the projected work, the rest was still a confused mass of notes, references and sketches. *He sent copies of it to his old associates, to Freiligrath who congratulated him on having produced a good work of reference, and to Feuerbach who said that he found it 'rich in undeniable facts of the most interesting, but at the same time most horrible nature.'* Ruge had given it more discriminating praise; it obtained at least one critical notice in England, in the *Saturday Review*, which quaintly observed that 'the presentation of the subject invests the driest economic questions with certain peculiar charm.' It was more widely noticed in Germany where Marx's friends Liebknecht and Kugelmann, a Hanover physician who had conceived an immense admiration for him, made vigorous propaganda for it. In particular Joseph Dietzgen, a self-taught German cobbler in St Petersburg, who became one of his most ardent disciples, did much to popularise it with the German masses.

**Marx suffered from a nervous fear, common to all sensitive and self-critical writers, anxious to reveal a measure discovered which has altered the course of their thought and life, terrified lest for some trivial cause, for want of sufficient armour, sufficiently massive, sufficiently well-scrutinised co-ordination, crushing all refutable effect, the attack should fail, the truth be misunderstood, its importance under-rated, smothered by the enemy. (236)**

Marx's scientific appetite had not diminished since his Paris days. He believed in exact scholarship and sternly drove his reluctant followers into the reading-room of the British Museum. Liebknecht, in his memoirs, describes how day after day the 'scum of [219] international communism' might be seen meekly seated at the desks in the reading-room under the eye of Marx himself. Indeed no social or political movement has laid such emphasis on research and erudition. The extent of his own reading is to some degree indicated by the references in his works alone, which explore exceedingly obscure byways in

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ancient, medieval, and modern literature. The text is liberally sprinkled with footnotes, long, mordant and annihilating, which recall Gibbon's classical employment of this weapon. The adversaries at whom they are directed are for the most part forgotten names to-day, but occasionally his shafts are aimed at well-known **liberal (237)** figures; Macaulay, Gladstone, and one or two notorious academic economists of the time, are attacked with a savage concentration which has inaugurated a new epoch in the technique of public vituperation, and created the school of socialist polemical writing which has entirely altered the general character of political controversy. There is conspicuously little praise in it. **Among his predecessors, he praises very few. Among his contemporaries (238)**, the warmest tribute is earned by the British factory inspectors, whose fearless and unbiased reports both of the appalling conditions which they witnessed, and of the means adopted by factory owners to circumvent the law, is declared to be a uniquely honourable phenomenon in the history of bourgeois society; **indeed, the greater part of his detailed indictment on modern industrialism is based upon them. The qualities which rouse the greatest indignation are ignorance, stupidity, smugness and cynicism. Against them he created a new and more deadly form of polemic technique, one which was made only too familiar by his later imitators. (238)** The technique of social research was revolutionised by the example set by him in the use of Blue Books and official reports: the greater part of his detailed indictment of modern industrialism is based almost wholly upon them.

**The total effect of the book itself and its content, upon his followers and his opponents is incalculably great. The methods and the tone of warfare were already altered by it. Its consequences are present with us everywhere.**

**The relief after fifteen years of torment was immense: although there was still manuscript material for further volumes looming in the distance, the effort seems to have exhausted him physically and, to a certain extent, mentally; bad food, bad lodgings, lack of sleep and perpetual personal and political anxiety, the illness of his family, thoroughly undermined his health. He lived for sixteen years more, in the course of which he was active in the International and published the celebrated addresses on the Civil War in**

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**France, but his capacity for writing had notably diminished. Apart from letters in the preface of fresh editions of his books, he published hardly anything. He revised, corrected, added to his manuscripts, learnt new languages, but began nothing new. (238-239)**

After his death, Engels, who edited the second and third volumes of *Das Kapital*, found the manuscript in a far more chaotic condition than he expected. The year in which the first volume appeared marks not a turning but a breaking-point in Marx's life. His views during the remaining sixteen years of his life altered little; he added, revised, corrected, wrote pamphlets [220] and letters, but published nothing that was new; he reiterated the old position tirelessly, but the tone is milder, a faint note of querulous self-pity, totally absent before, is now discernible. *And his belief in the proximity, even in the ultimate inevitability of a world revolution diminished. His prophecies had been disappointed too often; he had confidently predicted a great upheaval in 1842, during a weavers' rising in Silesia, and even inspired Heine to write the famous poem upon it which he published in his Paris journal; and in 1851, 1857 and 1872 he expected revolutionary outbreaks which failed to materialise. His long-term predictions were far more successful, not only with regard to the general development of capitalism – concerning which he has proved a singularly true prophet, erring only in supposing that centralisation of control necessarily entailed centralisation of ownership of economic resources, a hypothesis not borne out by the growth in the number of small investors, and the increasing tendency to divide the land into small holdings – but also more specifically, as when, after the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Prussia he foretold that this would throw France into the arms of Russia and so bring about the first great world war.* He allowed that the revolution may be longer in arriving than he and Engels had once estimated, and in some countries, notably in England, where in his day there was no real army and no real bureaucracy, it may actually not occur at all, 'although,' he enigmatically added, 'history indicates otherwise.' He was not fifty when he began to subside into conscious old age. The heroic period was over.

*Das Kapital* created a new reputation for its author. His previous books had been passed over in silence even in German-speaking countries: his new work was revised and discussed as far afield as Russia and Spain. In the next ten years it was translated into [221] French, English, Russian, Italian: indeed, Bakunin himself gallantly offered to translate it into Russian. But this project if it was ever

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begun, collapsed in circumstances of sordid personal and financial scandal which were partly responsible for the demise of the International five years later. Its sudden rise to fame was due to a major event which two years earlier altered the history of Europe and completely changed the direction in which the working class movement had hitherto developed.

If Marx and Engels sometimes predicted events which failed to happen, they more than once failed to foresee events which did.<sup>116</sup> **Their exhaustive studies of political and social conditions in various European lands which Marx used to contribute to the New York Tribune before the American Civil War put an end to this activity, brilliant as they were themselves, were the product of reading, observation and elaborate reasoning, and lacked wholly that capacity for intuitive feeling of the direction in which events were trending, the power of prevision which appears to end with un-analysable quality of political sensibility, a state of sensitive antennae which responds to every change in the political atmosphere such as seems to belong to the successful politicians and political journalists and are not necessarily united with any profounder and political journalists and are not necessarily united with any profounder perception of the character of their surroundings. (162)**

Thus Marx denied that the Crimean War would occur, and backed the wrong side in the Austro-Prussian War. **Like all German democrats, they desired a united and centralised German state, but unlike Lassalle, they expected little good to results from the hegemony of Prussia, which they correctly foresaw would more than any other phenomena, hamper the growth of free institutions among the Germans: this was still the chief point of disagreement between them and the Lassalleans, now led by the tactful Schweitzer, who inherited his masters' respect for Bismarck and the belief in the possibility of a useful compromise with the Prussian Chancellor. (164)** The Franco-Prussian War of 1870 came to them as something wholly unexpected. *For years they had*

<sup>116</sup> If many of the prophecies made by Marx and following him by Engels proved in the long run more accurate than those of their opponents this may be set off by their singular lack of success in foretelling the immediate future. (161-162)

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*underestimated Prussian strength; the true alliance of cynicism and brute force was in their eyes represented by the Emperor of the French. Bismarck was an able Junker, who served his King and his class; even his victory over Austria did not convince them of his real quality or aims.* Marx may have been genuinely deceived to some extent by Bismarck's representation of the war as being on his part purely defensive, and signed the protest which the Council of the International immediately published only after it had been altered to make this fact clear – a step for which many socialists in Latin countries never forgave him, insisting in later years that it was inspired by pure German patriotism, to which both he and Engels were always conspicuously prone. The International in general, and in particular its German members, behaved irreproachably throughout the brief campaign. The Council in its proclamation, issued in the middle of the war, **predicted the collapse of Bonapartist absolutism (165)**, warned the German workers against supporting the policy of annexation which Bismarck might well pursue; it explained in clear terms that the interests [222] of the French and German proletariat were identical, being menaced only by the common enemy, the capitalist bourgeoisie of both countries, which had brought about the war for its own ends, wasting for their sakes the lives and substance of the working class equally of Germany and of France. After the surrender of the Emperor it exhorted the French workers to support the formation of a republic on a broadly democratic basis. During the wild wave of war chauvinism which swept over Germany, and engulfed even the left wing of the Lassalleans, only the Marxists, Liebknecht and Bebel, preserved their sanity. To the indignation of the entire country they abstained from voting for war credits and spoke vigorously in the Reichstag against the war, and in particular against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. For this they were charged with treason and imprisoned. In a celebrated letter to Engels, Marx pointed out that the defeat of Germany, which would have strengthened Bonapartism and crippled the German workers for many years to come, might have been even more disastrous than Germany victory. By transferring the centre of gravity from Paris to Berlin, Bismarck was doing their work for them, however unconsciously; for the German workers, being

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better organised and better disciplined than the French, were consequently a stronger<sup>117</sup> citadel of social democracy than the French could have been; while the defeat of Bonapartism would remove a nightmare from Europe.

In the autumn the French army was defeated at Sédan, the Emperor taken prisoner, and Paris besieged. The King of Prussia, who had solemnly sworn that the war was defensive and directed not against France but against Napoleon, changed his tactics, and armed with an enthusiastic plebiscite from his people, demanded the cession of Alsace-Lorraine and the payment of an indemnity of five billion francs. The tide of English opinion, hitherto anti-Bonapartist [223] and pro-German, under the influence of continual reports of Prussian atrocities in France, veered round sharply. The International issued a second Manifesto violently protesting against the annexation, denouncing the dynastic ambitions of the Prussian King, and calling upon the French workers to unite with all defenders of democracy against the common Prussian foe. *'If limits are to be fixed by military interests,' wrote Marx in 1870, 'there will be no end of claims, because every military line is necessarily faulty and may be improved by annexing some more outlying territory: they can never be fixed fairly or finally because they always must be improved by the conqueror or the conquered, and consequently carry within them the seeds of fresh wars. History will measure its retribution, not by the extent of square miles conquered from France, but by the intensity of the crime of reviving, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the policy of conquest.'* This time war credits were voted against, not by Liebknecht and Bebel alone, but also by the Lassalleans, shamed out of their recent patriotism. Marx jubilantly wrote to Engels that for the first time the principles and policy of the International had obtained public expression in a European legislative assembly: the International had become a force to be officially reckoned with: the dream of a united proletarian party with identical ends in all countries was beginning to be realised. Paris was presently starved into submission and capitulated; a **reactionary (167)** national assembly was elected, Thiers was made President of the new Republic, and appointed a provisional government of conservative views. In April the government made an attempt to disarm the Paris National Guard, a volunteer citizen force which showed signs of

<sup>117</sup> safer (166)

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radical sympathies. It refused to give up its arms, declared its autonomy, deposed the officials of the provisional government, and elected a revolutionary committee of the people as the true government of France. The regular troops were brought to Versailles and invested the rebellious city. It was the first campaign of what both sides immediately recognised to be an open class war.

The Commune, as the new government described itself, was neither created nor inspired by the International: it was not even, in a strict sense, socialist in its doctrines, unless a dictatorship of any popularly elected committee in itself constitutes a socialist phenomenon. It consisted of a highly heterogeneous collection of individuals, for the most part followers of Blanqui, Proudhon, and Bakunin, with an admixture of pure rhetoricians, like Félix Pyat, who knew only that they were fighting for France, the people, and the revolution and proclaimed death to all tyrants, priests and Prussians. Workmen, soldiers, writers, painters like Courbet, scholars like the geographer Réclus and the critic Vallès, ambiguous figures like Rochefort, foreign exiles of mildly liberal views, bohemians and adventurers of every description were swept up in a common revolutionary wave. It rose at a moment of national hysteria after the moral and material misery of a siege and a capitulation, at a moment when the national revolution which promised to do away finally with the last relics of Bonapartist and Orleanist reaction, betrayed by Thiers and his ministers, abandoned by the middle classes, uncertain of support among the peasantry, seemed suddenly threatened with the return of all that it most feared and loathed, the generals, the financiers, the priests, **by the most repulsive of the intriguers of the old regime, the ablest most ubiquitous, longest lived of all its servants, that shift, corrupt, unsightly figure- Adolphe Thiers. (169)** By a great effort the people had shaken off the nightmare first of the Empire then of the siege; they had hardly awoken yet when the spectres seemed to advance upon them once again: terrified, they revolted. This common sense of horror before the resurgence of the past was almost the sole bond which united the Communards. Their views on political organisation were vague to a degree: they announced [225] that the State in its old form was abolished, and called upon the people in arms to govern itself.

**The Commune is sometimes regarded as an outbreak of wild terrorism organised by blood thirsty desperados with**

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nothing to lose, who successfully played upon the over-fraught feelings of the Parisians in the most difficult moment of their existence. Against this view it has been maintained that it was the rising of an oppressed people against the sinister alliance of the army, the capitalists and the priests, prepared to betray the people to the Prussians rather than defend France with their help. The truth doubtless the two. Its defenders argued that a number of highly necessary social reforms were passed by it, notably by such men of conspicuous personal integrity as Fraenkel and Vaillant who defended moral municipal autonomy and whose measures were subsequently largely preserved; education was reformed in accordance with the principles of 1879, a reform which was subsequently ratified. A typical manifestation of the new regime was the Artists' Federation organised by Courbet himself and which included among its members both Manet and Daumier. A remarkable manifesto was issued explaining the relations between the artist and the state; it is a model of its kind and has never been superseded. Among the mob of adventurers and Jacobins, out-and-out terrorists and social incendiaries were to be found such austere and saintly figures as Varlin, a working class member of the International whose heroic life and death is still one of the principal glories of French socialism; responsible tasks were assigned to distinguished intellectuals like Valles, the critic, and Reculs, the geographer, and even 'The Extremists' turned out sometimes to be such reputable and solid moderates as Lissagray and Camelinat, Lafargue and Longuet, the last two, destined to marry Marx's daughters and who irritated their father-in law by what seemed to him characteristically French petit bourgeois passion for political compromise. (169–172)

Presently, as supplies began to give out, and the condition of the besieged grew more desperate, terror developed: proscriptions began, men and women were condemned and executed, many of them certainly guiltless, and few deserving death. Among those executed was the Archbishop of Paris who had been held as a hostage against the army at Versailles. The rest of Europe watched the monstrous events with growing indignation and disgust. The Communards seemed even to enlightened opinion, even, to old

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and tried friends of the people like Louis Blanc and Mazzini, to be a band of criminal lunatics dead to the appeal of humanity, social incendiaries pledged to destroy all religion and all morality, men driven out of their minds by real and imaginary wrongs, scarcely responsible for their enormities. Practically the entire European Press, reactionary and liberal alike, combined to give the same impression. Here and there a radical journal condemned less roundly than the others, and timidly pleaded extenuating circumstances.<sup>118</sup> The crimes of the Commune did not long remain unavenged. The retribution which the victorious army exacted took the form of mass executions; the white terror, as is common in such cases, far outdid in acts of bestial cruelty the worst excesses of the regime the misdeeds of which it had come to end.

The International vacillated; composed as it largely was of enemies of the Blanquists and neo-Jacobins who formed the majority of the Commune, opposed to the Commune programme of **semi-Bakunist anarchism (173)**, and in particular to acts of terrorism, *it had, moreover, formally advised against the revolt declaring that 'any attempt at upsetting the new government in the present crisis,... would be desperate folly.'* The English members were particularly anxious not to compromise themselves by open association with a body which, in the opinion of the majority of their countrymen, was little better than a gang of common murderers. Marx solved their doubts by a very characteristic act. In the name of the International he published an address in which he proclaimed that the moment for analysis and criticism had passed. After giving a swift and vivid account of the events which led to the creation of the Commune, of its rise and fall, he acclaimed it as the first open and defiant manifestation in history of the strength and idealism of the working class – the first pitched battle which it had fought against its oppressors before the eyes of the whole world, and an act forcing all its false friends, the radical bourgeoisie, the democrats and humanitarians to show themselves in their true colours, as enemies to the ultimate ends for which it was prepared to live and die. He went further than this: **in spite of its strongly anarchistic character, (174)**, he recognised the Commune as that transitional form of social structure by passing

<sup>118</sup> The former condemned without qualification, the latter referred to the prison-house of Bonapartism by way of explaining what all were agreed to treat as a revolting phenomenon. (173)

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through which alone the workers could gain their ultimate emancipation **and achieve their full development as human beings. (194)** To this extent he once more, as in 1850 and 1852, retracted the doctrine of *The Communist Manifesto*, which had asserted, as against the French utopians and early anarchists, that the immediate end of the revolution was not to destroy, but to seize the State and make use of it to liquidate the enemy. **On the strength of this, Bakunin, not without reason, later claimed that events themselves had forced Marx to revise his views, and to adopt what he had long and so violently attacked. (174)**

The pamphlet, later entitled *The Civil War in France*, was not primarily intended as a historical study: it was a tactical move, and one of typical audacity and intransigence. Marx was sometimes blamed by his own followers for allowing the International to be linked in the popular mind with a band of law-breakers and assassins, an association which earned for it an unnecessarily sinister reputation. This was not the kind of consideration which could have influenced him in the slightest degree. He was, all his life, a convinced and uncompromising believer in a violent working class [227] revolution. The Commune was the first spontaneous rising of the workers in their capacity as workers: the July *émeute* of 1848, was, in his view, an attack on, and not by, them. The Commune was not directly inspired by Marx, **nor did it follow his conception of how a proletarian revolution should be made. (175)** He regarded it, indeed, as a political blunder: his adversaries the Blanquists and Proudhonists predominated in it to the end; and yet its significance in his eyes was immense. Before it there had indeed been many scattered streams of socialist thought and action; but this rising, with its world repercussions, the great effect which it was bound to have upon the workers of all lands, was the first event of the new era. The men who had died in it and for it, were the first martyrs of international socialism, their blood would be the seed of the new proletarian<sup>119</sup> faith; whatever the tragic faults and shortcomings of the Communards, they were as nothing before the magnitude of the historical role which these men had played, the position which they were destined to occupy in the tradition of proletarian revolution.

<sup>119</sup> universal. (175)

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By coming forward to pay them open homage he achieved what he intended to achieve: he helped to create a heroic legend of socialism. **Every revolutionary movement is strengthened by the possession of a calendar of saints and martyrs. (176)** More than thirty years later Lenin, **whose tactical ability was if anything superior to that of Marx (176)**, defended the Moscow rising, which occurred during the abortive Russian revolution of 1905, against the highly damaging criticisms of Plekhanov by quoting the attitude of Marx towards the Commune: by pointing out that the emotional and symbolic value of the memory of a great heroic outburst, however ill conceived, however harmful in its immediate results, is an infinitely greater and more permanent asset to a revolutionary movement than **anything that can be gained by drawing public attention to errors which might have been avoided, (177)** the realisation of its futility at a moment when what matters most is not to write accurate history, or even to learn its lessons, but to make it.

The publication of the address embarrassed and shocked many members of the International and [228] hastened its ultimate dissolution. Marx attempted to forestall all reproaches by revealing his name as the sole author of the work. 'The Red Terrorist Doctor,' as he was now popularly known<sup>120</sup>, became overnight the object of public odium: anonymous letters began to arrive, his life was several times threatened. *Jubilantly he wrote to Engels: 'It is doing me good after twenty long and boring years of idyllic isolation like a frog in a swamp. The government organ – the Observer – is even threatening me with prosecution. Let them try it! I snap my fingers at the canaille!'* The hubbub died down, but the damage done to the International was permanent: it became indissolubly connected in the minds both of the police and of the general public with the outrages of the Commune. A blow was dealt to the alliance of the English trade-union leaders with the International, which was, in any case, from their point of view entirely opportunist, based on its usefulness in promoting specific union interests, **such as the regulation of hours and the demand for universal franchise (178)**. The unions were at this time being strongly wooed by the Liberal party with promises of support upon these very issues. The prospect of

<sup>120</sup> 'Le grand chef' of the international conspiracy, as he had long been known to the French police (177)

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a peaceful and respectable conquest of power made them less than ever anxious to be associated with a notorious revolutionary conspiracy; their sole end was to raise the standard of life and the social and political status of the skilled workers whom they represented. They did not look upon themselves as a political party, and if they subscribed to the programme of the International, this was due partly to the elasticity of its statutes, which skilfully avoided committing its members to definitely revolutionary ends, and most of all to their haziness on political issues<sup>121</sup>. **They recognised that the International had performed valuable services for them in bringing their grievances to public attentions, but they quite candidly admitted that the relations between the unions and the employers, at any rate in England, were of infinitely greater importance to them than the general prosecution of class war.** This fact was well appreciated by the government which, in reply to a circular from the Spanish Government demanding the suppression of the International, replied in the person of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Granville, that in England they felt no danger of armed insurrection: the English [229] members were peaceful men, solely occupied in labour negotiations, and gave the Government no ground for apprehension. Marx himself was bitterly aware of the truth of this: even Harney and Jones were in his eyes preferable to the men he now had to deal with, solid trade-union officials like Odger, or Cremer or Applegarth, who distrusted foreigners, cared little for events outside their country, and took little interest in ideas.

No meetings of the International having been held in 1870-1, a meeting was convened in London in 1872. **It was enlivened by the presence of French Communard refugees whom Marx, as a justification to their past, induced the International to invite. The war between the factions momentarily sealed by the Commune broke out in London with peculiar violence.** (180) The most important proposal brought up by this Congress, that the working class henceforth cease to rely in the political struggle upon the assistance of bourgeois parties, and form a party of their own, was, after a stormy debate, carried by the votes of the English delegates. **As a compensation to that, they were to be**

<sup>121</sup> their haziness in matters of ideology. (178)

**permitted to form a separate federal council in England: hitherto Marx and the General Council, since they were situated in London, had combined this function with the English representative of the local English members. (180)**

The new political party was not set up during Marx's lifetime, but, in idea at least, the Labour party was born at this meeting, and may be regarded as Marx's greatest single contribution to the internal history of his adopted land. At the same congress the English delegates insisted on, and won, the right to form a separate local organisation instead of, as before, being represented by the General Council. This displeased and frightened Marx: it was a gesture of distrust, almost of rebellion; at once he suspected the machinations of Bakunin, whom the recent events in France had put in a proud and ecstatic mood, since he felt that they were overwhelmingly due to his personal influence. A large part of Paris was destroyed by fire during the Commune: this fire seemed to him a symbol of his own life, and a magnificent realisation of his favourite paradox: 'Destruction, too, is a kind of creation.'

*Marx neither understood nor wished to understand the emotional basis of Bakunin's acts and declarations: his influence was a menace to the movement, and must consequently be destroyed.*

*'The International was founded,' he wrote in 1871, [230] 'in order to replace the socialist and semi-socialist sects with a genuine organisation of the working class for its struggle.... Socialist sectarianism and a real working-class movement are in inverse ratio to each other. Sects have a right to exist only so long as the working class is not mature enough to have an independent movement of its own: as soon as that moment arrives sectarianism becomes reactionary.... The history of the International is a ceaseless battle of the General Council against dilettantist experiments and sects.... Towards the end of 1868 the International was joined by Bakunin whose purpose it was to create an International within the International, and to place himself at its head. For M. Bakunin, his doctrine (an absurd patchwork composed of bits and pieces of views taken from Proudhon, Saint-Simon, etc.) was, and still is, something of secondary importance, serving him only as a means of acquiring personal influence and power. But if Bakunin, as a theorist, is nothing, Bakunin the intriguer, has attained to the highest peak of his profession.... As for his political non-participation, every movement in which the working class as such is opposed to the ruling classes, and exercises pressure upon it from without, is eo ipso a political movement ... but when the workers' organisation is not so highly developed that it can afford to risk decisive*

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*engagement with the dominant political power – then it must be prepared for this by ceaseless agitation against the crimes and follies of the ruling class. Otherwise it becomes a plaything in its hands, as was demonstrated by the September revolution in France, and to some extent, by the recent successes in England of Gladstone & Co.’*

Bakunin at this period had entered upon the last and strangest phase of his bizarre existence. He had completely fallen under the spell of a young Russian terrorist called Nechaev, whose audacity and freedom from [231] scruple he found irresistible. Nechaev **declared himself opposed to all moral principle as such, and devoted himself to involving his acquaintances in compromising situations of every kind in order to discredit them with society so irretrievably, as to force them into anti-social, i.e. revolutionary activity against their will.** (182) He believed in blackmail and intimidation as essential revolutionary weapons justified by their end, had written an anonymous letter to the agent of the prospective publisher of Bakunin’s Russian version of *Capital*, threatening him in general but violent terms, if he should continue to force his wretched hackwork upon men of genius, or pester Bakunin for the return of the advance which had been paid him. The frightened and infuriated agent sent the letter to Marx. It is doubtful whether the evidence of the intrigues conducted by Bakunin’s organisation, the Democratic Alliance, would in itself have been sufficient to secure his expulsion, sine he had numbered many personal supporters at the Congress; but the report of the committee instructed to look into this scandal, and the dramatic production of the Nechaev letter, turned the scale. After long and stormy sessions, in the course of which even the Proudhonist had finally been persuaded that no party could preserve its unity while Bakunin was in its ranks, he and his closest associates were expelled by a small majority.

Marx’s next proposal also came as a bombshell to the uninitiated members of the Congress: it was to transfer the seat of the Council to the United States. Everyone realised that this was tantamount to the dissolution of the International. America was not merely infinitely distant from European affairs, but insignificant in the affairs of the International. The French delegates declared that one might as well remove it to the moon. Marx gave no explicit reason for this proposal, which was formally moved by Engels, but its purpose must have been clear enough to

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all those present. He could not operate without the loyal and unquestioned obedience of at least some sections of the body over which he ruled: England had seceded; he had thought of moving the Council to Belgium, but there, too, the anti-Marxist element was [232] becoming formidable; in Germany the government would suppress it, France, Switzerland and Holland were far from reliable; Italy and Spain were definitely Bakuninist strongholds. Sooner than face a bitter struggle which could end at best in a Pyrrhic victory and destroy all hope of a proletarian unity for many generations, Marx decided, after ensuring that it did not fall into Bakuninists' hands, to allow the International to disappear from view.

**It is unlikely that he actually wished to extinguish it altogether, although he later made no attempt to revive it, perhaps he hoped that it would remain dormant but not dead, he prepared to be recalled to life at some more favourable moment: if so, his hope was not realised in his own lifetime. (187)**

His enemies' claim that he judged the merit of all socialist assemblies solely by the degree to which he was himself permitted to control them: this equation was certainly made both by him and by Engels and made quite automatically; neither ever showed any sign of understanding the bewildered indignation which this attitude excited among broad sections of their followers. Marx attended the Hague congress in person, and his prestige was such that, in spite of violent opposition, **particularly by the Blanquists, who realised that it was through them that the international was being rescued, (186)** the Congress finally by a narrow majority voted its own virtual extinction. Its later meetings were sordid travesties: it finally expired in Philadelphia in 1876. The International was, indeed, reconstituted thirty years later, but by that time – a period of rapidly increasing Socialist activity in all countries – its character was very different. Despite its explicitly revolutionary aims, it was more parliamentary, more respectable, more optimistic, essentially conciliatory in temper, more than half committed to the belief in the inevitability of the gradual evolution of capitalist society into moderate socialism under persistent but peaceful pressure from below.

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LAST YEARS

I remarked [to Marx] that as I grew older I became more tolerant. 'Do you,' he said, 'do you?'

H. M. Hyndman, *Record of an Adventurous Life*

The duel with Bakunin is the last public episode in Marx's life. After it, he returned almost wholly into private life, emerging at rare intervals to denounce some error in party tactics or to re-emphasise the strict party doctrine to the benefit of a new and inexperienced section of the party recently founded in Spain or Italy. (187) The revolution seemed dead everywhere, although its embers glowed faintly in Russia and Spain. There were occasional outbreaks of terrorism but they were too sporadic and ill-organised to seem likely to develop into a general conflagration. (190) The reaction was once more triumphant, in a milder form, indeed, than in the days of his youth, prepared to make definite concessions to its adversary, but appearing to possess all the more stability for that reason. The peaceful conquest of political and economic control seemed the workers' best hope of emancipation. The prestige of Lassalle's followers in Germany rose steadily, and Liebknecht, who represented the Marxist opposition, now that the International was dead, was inclined to come to terms with them, in order to form a single united party. The common attack upon their deputies in the Reichstag which increased in violence from month to month finally brought them together. (193) He was persuaded that placed as he was inside Germany, he had a better grasp of the tactical exigencies than Marx and Engels, who continued to live in England and would not listen to any suggestion of compromise. The two parties finally held a conference at Gotha in 1875 and formed an alliance, issuing a common programme composed by the leaders of both factions. It was naturally submitted to Marx for approval. He left no doubt as to the impression which it made on him.

A violently worded attack was instantly dispatched to Liebknecht in Berlin and Engels was commanded to write in a similar strain. Marx accused his disciples of straying into the use of the misleading, half-meaning[234]less terminology inherited from

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Lassalle and the True Socialists, interspersed with vague liberal phrases which he had spent half his life in exposing and eliminating. The programme itself seemed to him to be permeated by the spirit of compromise and to rest on a belief in the possibility of attaining social justice by peacefully agitating for such trivial ends as a 'just' remuneration for labour, and the abolition of the law of inheritance – Proudhonist and Saint-Simonian remedies for this or that abuse, calculated to prop up the capitalist system rather than hasten its collapse. **Moreover, it seemed to him filled with inaccuracies of formulation and vague radical phrases which he had spent so many years of his life ruthlessly eliminating, as likely to prove dangerous snares which liberals might like to deceive the working classes into giving them their support.** (195) In the form of angry marginal notes he conveyed for the last time his own conception of what the programme of a militant socialist party ought to be. The loyal Liebknecht received this, as everything else which came from London, meekly, and even reverently, but made no use of it. The alliance continued and grew in strength. Two years later Liebknecht was again sharply criticised by Engels, who took an even lower view than Marx of his political capacity. On this occasion the cause was the appearance in the pages of the official organ of the German Social Democratic party of articles by, and in support of, a certain Eugen Dühring, a radical lecturer on economics in the University of Berlin, a man of violently anti-capitalist but hardly socialist views, who was acquiring growing influence in the ranks of the German party. Against him, Engels published his longest and most comprehensive work, the last written in collaboration with Marx; it contained an authoritative version of the materialist view of history, expounded in the blunt, vigorous, lucid prose which Engels wrote with great facility. *The Anti-Dühring*, as it came to be called, is an attack on the un-dialectical, positivistic materialism, then increasingly popular among scientific writers and journalists, *which maintained that all natural phenomena could be interpreted in terms of the motion of matter in space*, and advances against it the principle of the universal working [235] of the dialectical principle far beyond the categories of human history, in the realms of biology, physics and mathematics. Engels was a versatile and well-read man, and had, by sheer industry, acquired some rudimentary knowledge of these subjects,

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but his discussions of them are exceedingly unfortunate. In particular the over-ambitious attempt to discover the working of the triad of the Hegelian dialectic in the mathematical rule by which the product of two negative quantities is positive, has proved a source of much embarrassment to later Marxists, who have found themselves saddled with the impossible task of defending an eccentric view which is not entailed by anything that Marx himself had ever asserted, at any rate in his published writings. Marxist mathematics of our own day is a subject which, like Cartesian physics, forms a peculiar and isolated enclave in the development of a great intellectual movement, of antiquarian rather than scientific interest. **The metaphysical and mathematical views of Engels did indeed have a certain obsolete influence on Lenin whose 'materialism and Empirico-Criticism' is a vigorous and crude application of his doctrine to the aberrations of certain Russian Marxists in the beginning of the twentieth century. As such it has a certain interest as having effected the history of the Communist party and led to disciplinary measures in its treatment of scientists and intellectuals. But its theoretical value remains purely negative. (197–8)** Perhaps when Marx, towards the end of his life, declared that whatever else he might be, he was certainly not a Marxist, he had such extravagances in view. Very different are the chapters later reprinted as a pamphlet under the title *The Evolution from Utopian to Scientific Socialism*. That is written in Engels's best vein, and gives an account of the growth of Marxism from its origins in German idealism, French political theory and English economic science.<sup>122</sup> It is still the best brief statement of the Marxist view of its own historical and political significance, hardly surpassed even in the works of the most brilliant and many sided of all later writers on Marxism, the Russian publicist Plekhanov.

The attack on the Gotha Programme was Marx's last violent intervention in the affairs of the party. No similar crisis occurred again in his lifetime, and he was left free to devote his remaining years to theoretical studies and vain attempts to restore his failing health. [236] He had moved from Kentish Town first to one, then

<sup>122</sup> **Origins in German idealism, Saint-Simonism, French Communism and English Owenism (198)**

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to another home on Haverstock Hill, nor far from Engels, who had sold his share in the family business to his partner, and had established himself in London in a large, commodious house in St John's Wood. A year or two before this he had settled a permanent annuity on Marx, which, modest though it was, enabled him to pursue his work in peace. They saw each other nearly every day, and together carried on an immense correspondence with socialists in every land, by many of whom they had come to be regarded with increasing respect and veneration. Marx was now without question the supreme moral and intellectual authority of international socialism; Lassalle and Proudhon had died in the sixties, Bakunin, in poverty and neglect, in 1876. The death of his great enemy evoked no public comment from Marx: perhaps because his harsh obituary notice of Proudhon in a German newspaper had caused a wave of indignation among French socialists, and he thought it more tactful to remain silent. His sentiments towards his adversaries, living and dead, had not altered, but he was physically less capable of the active campaigns of his youth and middle years; overwork and a life of poverty had finally undermined his strength; he was tired, and often ill, and began to be preoccupied by his health. Every year, generally accompanied by his younger daughter Eleanor, he would visit the English seaside, or a German or Bohemian spa, where he would occasionally meet old friends and followers, who sometimes brought with them young historians or economists anxious to meet the celebrated revolutionary.

*He rarely spoke of himself or of his life, and never about his origin. The fact that he was a Jew neither he nor Engels ever mention. His references to individual Jews, particularly in his letters to Engels, are virulent to a degree: his origin had become a personal stigma [237] which he was unable to avoid pointing out in others; his denial of the importance of racial or political categories, his emphasis upon the international character of the proletariat, takes on a peculiar sharpness of tone, directed as it is against misconceptions of which he himself was a conspicuous victim. His impatience and irritability increased with old age, and he took care to avoid the society of men who bored him or disagreed with his views. He became more and more difficult in his personal relations; he broke off all connection with one of his oldest friends, the poet Freiligrath, after his patriotic odes in 1870; he deliberately insulted his devoted adherent Kugelmann to whom some of his most interesting letters*

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were written, because the latter insisted on joining him in Karlsbad after he had made it clear that he wished for no company. On the other hand, when he was tactfully approached, his behaviour could be friendly and even gracious, particularly to the young revolutionaries and radical journalists who came to London in growing numbers to pay homage to the two old men. Such pilgrims were agreeably received at his house, and through them he established contacts with his followers in countries with which he had had no previous relations, notably with Russia, where a vigorous and well-disciplined revolutionary movement had at last taken root. His economic writings, and in particular *Das Kapital*, had had a greater success in Russia than in any other country: *the censorship – ironically enough – permitted its publication on the ground that ‘although the book has a pronounced socialist tendency ... it is not written in a popular style ... and is unlikely to find many readers among the general public.’ the reviews of it in the Russian press were more favourable and more intelligent than any others, a fact which surprised and pleased him, and did much to change his contemptuous attitude to ‘the Russian [238] clodhoppers’ into admiration for the new generation of austere and fearless revolutionaries whom his own writings had done so much to educate.*

The history of Marxism in Russia is unlike its history in any other country. Whereas in Germany and in France, unlike others forms of positivism and materialism, it was primarily a proletarian movement, marking a sharp revulsion of feeling against the ineffectiveness of the liberal idealism of the bourgeoisie in the first half of the century, and represented a mood of disillusionment and realism, in Russia, where the proletariat was growing fast, but was still weak and insignificant by Western standards, not only the apostles of Marxism but the majority of its converts were middle-class intellectuals for whom it itself became a kind of romanticism, a belated form of democratic idealism. It grew during the height of the populist movement, which, affecting all classes, preached the need for personal self-identification with the people and their material needs and interests, in order to understand them, educate them, and raise their intellectual and social level, and was thus equally directed against the reactionary anti-Western party with its mystical faith in autocracy, the Orthodox Church, and the Slav genius in the one hand, and the mild agrarian liberalism of the pro-Westerners, such as Turgenev and Herzen, on the other.

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Well-to-do young men in Moscow and St Petersburg threw away career and position in order to immerse themselves in the study of the condition of peasants and factory workers, and went to live amongst them with the same noble fervour with which their fathers and grandfathers had followed Bakunin or the Decembrists. Historical and political materialism – emphasis on concrete, tangible, economic reality as the basis of social and individual life, criticism of institutions and of individual actions in terms of their relation to, and influence upon, the material welfare of the popular [239] masses, hatred and scorn of art or life pursued for their own sake, isolated from the sufferings of the world in an ivory tower, were preached with a self-forgetful passion: ‘A pair of boots *is* something more important than all the plays of Shakespeare,’ said Chernyshevsky, and expressed a general mood. In these men Marxism produced a sense of liberation from doubts and confusions, by offering for the first time a systematic exposition of the nature and laws of development of society in clear, material terms: its very flatness seemed sane and lucid after the romantic nationalism of the Slavophiles and the mystery and grandeur of Hegelian idealism. This general effect resembled the feeling induced in Marx himself after reading Feuerbach forty years before: it aroused the same sense of the finality of its solution and of the limitless possibility of action on its basis. Russia had not experienced the horrors of 1849, its development lagged far behind that of the West, its problems in the seventies and eighties in many respects resembled those which had faced the rest of Europe half a century before. The Russian radicals read *The Communist Manifesto* and the declamatory passages of *Das Kapital* with the sense of exhilaration with which men had read Rousseau in the previous century; *they found much which applied exceptionally well to their own condition: nowhere was it as true as in Russia that ‘in agriculture as in manufacture the capitalist transformation of the process of production signifies the martyrdom of the producer; the instrument of labour becomes the means of subjugating, exploiting and impoverishing the worker; the social combination and organisation of the labour process functions as an elaborate method for crushing the worker’s individual vitality, freedom and independence’*. Only in Russia the method, particularly after the liberation of the serfs had enormously enlarged the labour market, was not elaborate, but simple.

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[240]To his own surprise Marx found that the nation against which he had written and spoken for thirty years, provided him with the most fearless and intelligent of his disciples. He welcomed them in his home in London, and entered into a regular correspondence with Danielson, his translator, and Sieber, one of the ablest of Russian economists. *Marx's analyses were largely concerned with industrial societies; Russia was an agrarian state and any attempt at direct application of a doctrine designed for one set of conditions to another was bound to lead to errors in theory and practice.* Letters reached him from Danielson in Russia, and from the exiles Lavrov and Vera Zasulich, begging him to apply himself to the specific problems presented by the peculiar organisation of the Russian peasants into primitive communes, holding land in common, and in particular to state his view on propositions derived from Herzen and Bakunin and widely accepted by Russian radicals, which asserted that a direct transition was possible from such primitive communes to developed communism, without the necessity of passing through the intermediate stage of industrialism and urbanisation, as had happened in the West. Marx, who had previously treated this hypothesis with contempt as emanating from sentimental Slavophil idealisation of the peasants disguised as radicalism combined with the childish belief that it was 'possible to cheat the dialectic by an audacious leap, to avoid the natural stages of evolution or shuffle them out of the world by decrees,'<sup>123</sup> was by now sufficiently impressed by the intelligence, seriousness, and, above all, the fanatical and devoted socialism of the new generation of Russian revolutionaries to re-examine the issue. In order to do this he began to learn Russian; at the end of six months he had mastered it sufficiently to read scientific works and confidential government reports which his friends succeeded in smuggling to London. Engels viewed this new alliance with some [241] distaste: he had an incurable aversion to everything east of the Elbe, and he suspected Marx of inventing a new occupation, in order to conceal from himself his reluctance, due to sheer physical weariness, to complete the writing of *Das Kapital*. After duly tunnelling his way through an immense mass of statistical and historical material, Marx wrote two lengthy letters in which he

<sup>123</sup> combined with the puerile belief that it was possible to leap over stages of development inevitably prescribed by the dialectic of history (205)

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made considerable doctrinal concessions. He admitted that if a revolution in Russia should be the signal of a common rising of the entire European proletariat, it was conceivable, and even likely that communism in Russia could be based directly upon the semi-feudal communal ownership of land by the village as it existed at the time; but this could not occur if capitalism continued among its nearest neighbours, since this would inevitably force Russia in sheer economic self-defence along the path already traversed by the more advanced countries of the West.

The Russians were not alone, however, in paying homage to the London exiles. Young leaders of the new united German social democratic party, Bebel, Bernstein, Kautsky, visited him and consulted him on all important issues. His two eldest daughters had married French socialists and kept him in touch with Latin countries. The founder of French social democracy, Jules Guesde, submitted the programme of his party to him, and had it drastically revised. Marxism began to oust Bakuninist anarchism in Italy and Switzerland. Encouraging reports came from the United States. The best news of all came from Germany, where the socialist vote, in spite of Bismarck's anti-socialist laws, was mounting with prodigious speed. the only major European country which continued to stand aloof, virtually impervious to his teaching, was that in which he himself lived and of which he spoke as his second home. 'In England,' he wrote, 'prolonged prosperity has moralised the workers ... the ultimate aim of [242] this most bourgeois of lands would seem to be the establishment of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat side by side with the bourgeoisie ... the revolutionary energy of the British workers has oozed away ... it will take long before they can shake off their bourgeois infection ... they totally lack the mettle of the old Chartists.' He had no intimate English friends, and his relations with such sympathisers as Beesly or Belfort Bax had never been more than formal. He did indeed, in the last years of his life, allow himself to be wooed for a brief period by H. M. Hyndman, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation, who did much to popularise Marxism in England. Hyndman was an agreeable, easy-going, expansive individual, a genuine radical by temperament, an amusing and effective speaker, and a lively writer on political and economic subjects. A light-hearted amateur himself, he enjoyed meeting and talking to men of genius, and, being somewhat

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indiscriminate in his taste, presently abandoned Mazzini for Marx. He thus described him in his memoirs: 'The first impression of Marx as I saw him was that of a powerful, shaggy, untamed old man, ready, not to say eager, to enter into conflict, and rather suspicious himself of immediate attack; yet his greeting of us was cordial... When speaking with fierce indignation of the policy of the Liberal party, especially in regard to Ireland, the old warrior's brows wrinkled, the broad, strong nose and face were obviously moved by passion, and he poured out a stream of vigorous denunciation which displayed alike the heat of his temperament, and the marvellous command he possessed over our language. The contrast between his manner and utterance when thus deeply stirred by anger, and his attitude when giving his views on the economic events of the period, was very marked. He turned from the role of prophet and violent denunciator to that of the calm philosopher without any apparent [243] effort, and I felt that many a long year might pass before I ceased to be a student in the presence of a master.'

Hyndman's sincerity, his *naïveté*, his affable and disarming manner, and above all his whole-hearted and uncritical admiration for Marx, whom, with typical ineptitude, he called 'the Aristotle of the nineteenth century,' caused the latter to treat him for some years with marked friendliness and indulgence. The inevitable breach occurred over Hyndman's book *England for All*, which is still one of the best popular accounts of Marxism in English. The debt to Marx was not acknowledged by name, a fact which Hyndman lamely tried to explain on the ground 'that the English don't like being taught by foreigners, and your name is so much detested here ...' This was sufficient. Marx held violent opinions on plagiarism: Lassalle had been made to suffer for far less; he broke off the connection at once and with it his last remaining link with English socialism.

His mode of life had scarcely changed at all. He rose at seven, drank several cups of black coffee, and then retired to his study where he read and wrote until two in the afternoon. After hurrying through his meal he worked again till supper, which he ate with his family. After that he took an evening walk on Hampstead Heath, or returned to his study, where he worked until two or three in the morning. His son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, has left a description of this room:

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‘It was on the first floor and well lighted by a broad window looking on the park. The fireplace was opposite the window, and was flanked by bookshelves on the top of which packets of newspapers and manuscripts were piled up to the ceiling. On one side of the window stood two tables, likewise loaded with miscellaneous papers, newspapers and books. In the middle of the room was a small plain writing-table and a windsor chair. Between this chair and one of the [244] bookshelves was a leather-coloured sofa on which Marx would lie down and rest occasionally. On the mantelpiece were more books interspersed with cigars, boxes of matches, tobacco jars, paperweights and photographs – his daughters, his wife, Engels, Wilhelm Wolff ... He would never allow anyone to arrange his books and papers ... but he could put his hand on any book or manuscript he wanted. When conversing he would often stop for a moment to show the relevant passage in a book or to find a reference ... He disdained appearances when arranging his books. Quarto and octavo volumes and pamphlets were placed higgledy-piggledy so far as size and shape were concerned. He had scant respect for their form or binding, the beauty of page or of printing: he would turn down the corners of pages, underline freely and pencil the margins. He did not actually annotate his books, but he could not refrain from a question mark or note of exclamation when the author went too far. Every year he re-read his note-books and underlined passages to refresh his memory ... which was vigorous and accurate: he had trained it in accordance with Hegel’s plan of memorising verse in an unfamiliar tongue.’

Sundays he dedicated to his children: and when these grew up and married, to his grandchildren. The entire family had nicknames; his daughters were Qui-Qui, Quo-Quo and Tussy; his wife was Möhme; he himself was known as the Moor or Old Nick on account of his dark complexion and sinister appearance. His relations with his family remained easy and affectionate. The Russian sociologist Kovalevsky who used to visit him in his last years was pleasantly surprised by his urbanity. ‘Marx is usually described,’ he wrote many years later, ‘as a gloomy and arrogant man, who flatly rejected all bourgeois science and culture. In reality he was a well-educated, highly cultivated Anglo-German gentleman, a man [245] whose close association with Heine had developed in him a vein of cheerful satire, and one who was full of

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the joy of life, thanks to the fact that his personal position was extremely comfortable.' This vignette of Marx as a gay and genial host if not wholly convincing, at any rate conveys the contrast with the early years in Soho. His chief pleasures were reading and waling. He was fond of poetry and knew long passages of Dante, Aeschylus and Shakespeare by heart. His admiration for Shakespeare was limitless, and the whole household was brought up on him: he was read aloud, acted, discussed constantly. Whatever Marx did, he did methodically. Finding on arrival that his English was inadequate, he set himself to improve it by making a list of Shakespeare's turns of phrase: these he then learnt by heart. Similarly, having learnt Russian, he read through the works of Gogol and Pushkin, carefully underlining the words whose meaning he did not know. He had a sound German literary taste, acquired early in his youth, and developed by reading and re-reading his favourite works. To distract himself he read the elder Dumas or Scott, or light French novels of the day; Balzac he admired prodigiously: he looked upon him as having provided in his novels the acutest analysis of the bourgeois society of his day; many of his characters did not, he declared, come to full maturity until after the death of their creator, in the sixties and seventies. He had intended to write a study of Balzac as a social analyst, but never began it. In view of the quality of the only extant piece of literary criticism from his pen, that of Eugène Sue in the *German Ideology*, the loss may not be one to mourn. His taste in literature, for all his love of reading, was, on the whole, undistinguished and commonplace. There is nothing to indicate that he liked either painting or music; all was extruded by his passion for books.

He had always read enormously, but towards the [246] end of his life his appetite increased to a degree at which it interfered with his creative work. In his last ten years he began to acquire completely new languages, such as Russian and Turkish, with the ostensible purpose of studying agrarian conditions in those countries: as an old Urquhartite he laid his hopes on the Turkish peasantry which he expected to become a disruptive, democratising force in the Near East. As his bibliomania grew, Engels's worst fears became confirmed; he wrote less and less, and more crabbedly and obscurely. The second and third volumes of *Das Kapital*, edited by Engels, and the supplementary studies which formed the fourth volume, edited by Kautsky from posthumous

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material, are greatly inferior in mental power, lucidity and vigour to the first volume which has become a classic.

Physically he was declining fast. In 1881 Jenny Marx died of cancer after a long and painful illness. Each had come to conceive life impossible without the other. 'With her the Moor has died too,' Engels said to his daughter Eleanor. Marx lived for two more years, still carrying on an extensive correspondence with Italians, Spaniards, Russians, but his strength was virtually spent. In 1882, after a particularly severe winter, his doctor sent him to Algiers to recuperate. He arrived with acute pleurisy which he had caught on the journey. He spent a month in Northern Africa which was uncommonly cold and wet, and returned to Europe ill and exhausted. After some weeks of vain wandering from town to town on the French Riviera in search of the sun, he went to Paris, where he stayed for a time with his eldest daughter Jenny Longuet. Not long after his return to London, news came of her sudden death. He never recovered from this blow, and hardly wished to do so: he fell ill in the following year, developed an abscess in the lung, and on the 14 March 1883, died in his sleep, seated in [247] an armchair in his study. He was buried at Highgate cemetery and laid next to his wife. There were not many present: members of his family, a few personal friends, and workers' representatives from several lands. A dignified and moving funeral address was delivered by Engels, who spoke of his achievements and his character:

'his mission in life was to contribute in one way or another to the overthrow of capitalist society ... to contribute to the liberation of the present-day proletariat which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, of the conditions under which it could win its freedom. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity and a success which few could rival ... and consequently was the best-hated and most calumniated man of his time ... he died, beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers from the mines of Siberia to the coasts of California, in all points of Europe and America ... his name and his work will endure through the ages.'

His death passed largely unnoticed among the general public; *The Times* did, indeed, print a brief and inaccurate obituary notice, but this, although he died in London, appeared as a message from

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its Paris correspondent who reported what he had read in the French Socialist press. His fame increased steadily after his death as the revolutionary effects of his teaching became more and more apparent. As an individual he never captured the imagination either of the public or of professional biographers to such an extent as his more sensitive and more romantic contemporaries; and indeed Carlyle and Herzen were infinitely more tragic figures, tormented by intellectual and moral conflicts which Marx neither experienced nor understood, and far more profoundly affected by the *malaise* of their generation. They have left a bitter and minute account of it, better written and more vivid than anything to be found in Marx or in Engels. Marx fought against the mean [248] and cynical society into which he was born, which vulgarised and degraded every human relationship, with a hatred no less profound. But his mind was made of stronger and cruder texture; he was insensitive, self-confident, and strong willed; the causes of his unhappiness lay wholly outside him, being poverty, sickness, and the triumph of the enemy. His inner life was tranquil, uncomplicated and secure. He saw the world in simple terms of black and white; those who were not with him were against him. He knew upon whose side he was, his life was spent in fighting for it, he knew that it would ultimately win. Such crises of faith as occurred in the lives of the gentler spirits among his friends, the painful self-examination of such men as Hess or Heine, received from him no sympathy. He looked upon them as to many signs of bourgeois degeneracy which took the form of morbid attention to private emotional states, or still worse, the exploitation of social unrest for some personal or artistic end – frivolity and self-indulgence criminal in men before whose eyes the greatest battle in human history was being fought. This uncompromising sternness towards personal feeling and almost religious insistence on a self-sacrificing discipline, was inherited by his successors, and imitated by his enemies in every land. It distinguishes his true descendants among followers and adversaries alike from tolerant liberalism in every sphere.

Others before him had preached a war between classes, but it was he who conceived and successfully put into practice a plan designed to achieve the political organisation of a class fighting solely for its interests as a class – and in so doing transformed the entire character of political parties and political warfare. Yet in his

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own eyes, and in those of his contemporaries, he appeared as first and foremost a theoretical economist. The classical premisses on which his economic doctrines rest are to-day largely superseded; contemporary discussion [249] proceeds upon a different basis. The doctrine which has survived and grown, and which has had a greater and more lasting influence both on opinion and on action than any other view put forward in modern times, is his theory of the evolution and structures of capitalist society, of which he nowhere gave a detailed exposition. This theory, by asserting that the most important question to be asked with regard to any phenomenon is concerned with the relation which it bears to the economic structure, that is the balance of economic power in the social whole of which it is an expression, has created new tools of criticism and research, whose use has altered the direction and emphasis of the social sciences in our generation.

All whose work rests on social observation are necessarily affected. Not only the conflicting classes and their leaders in every country, but historians and sociologists, psychologists and political scientists, critics and creative artists, so far as they are aware of the changing quality of the life of their society, owe the form of their ideas in part to the work of Karl Marx. More than half a century has passed since its completion, and during those years it has received more than its due share of praise and blame. Exaggeration and over-simple application of its main principles have done much to obscure its meaning, and many blunders, both of theory and of practice, have been committed in its name. Nevertheless its effect was, and continues to be, revolutionary.

It set out to refute the proposition that ideas govern the course of history, but the very extent of its own influence on human affairs has weakened the force of its thesis. For in altering the hitherto prevailing view of the relation of the individual to his environment and to his fellows, it has palpably altered that relation itself; and in consequence remains the most powerful among the intellectual forces which are to-day permanently transforming the ways in which men think and act.

## LACUNA ON *CAPITAL*

### *A draft of the opening pages of chapter 10*

In form it is a treatise on the economic organisation of modern society, seeking to describe the processes of production and exchange as they actually occur; to explain their present state as a forward development, moving from stage to stage in the class struggle; to discover the definite laws which determine the history of classes; and to create a system of concepts and definitions such as bourgeoisie, proletariat, interest capital, value, wages, rent and profit, which are not formulated a priori, in the sense that instances of them may or may not occur, but being drawn from life are directly applicable to the actual world, constructed directly to reflect and emphasise the contemporary structure of economic life, and in particular of the nineteenth century. It is an attempt at once to be descriptive and analytic, and to provide a systematic exposition of economic theory, the basic theorems of which apply to any situation within historical memory, and to describe more specifically the rise of the new industrial system, isolating and describing the causes which, having led to its spectacular expansion in his own time, must inevitably lead to its downfall in the near future.

The search for evidence for his vast generalisations drove him to accumulate a mass of concrete examples, drawn from principally English sources in the British Museum, which were not only the richest and most accessible storehouse of information, but illustrated the economic development of the country which [had been] the prototype and symbol of economic progress for more than two centuries.

The general thesis which runs through the entire work<sup>124</sup> is that adumbrated in *The Communist Manifesto* and stated with some detail in the Lecture on Surplus Value in the Critique of Political Economy: it traces the rise of the modern

<sup>124</sup> For a specific discussion of Marxist economic doctrine the reader is referred to the excellent account of it, together with the most effective criticisms of it, in Mr H. J. Laski's volume *Communism* in this series.

proletariat from the elaboration in time of more and more effective technical means of production, which in the course of development became too costly and elaborate to be constructed by each individual for the satisfaction of his own material needs. As a natural consequence of this, certain individuals, partly through superior ability, power and enterprise, partly through fortunate natural circumstances, acquired the sole control of these instruments and tools, and thus found themselves in a position in which they could begin to employ others, by offering them more in the form of regular remuneration than they would receive as independent producers vainly competing with primitive tools, which alone they were able to afford. As a result of selling their labour to others, these men themselves became so many commodities in the economic market, and their labour acquired a definite price which fluctuated precisely like that of other commodities.

A commodity is an object for which there is social demand. Since the commercial value of a commodity of any kind is taken to be directly constituted by the number of hours of human labour which it takes an average labourer to produce an average specimen of its kind (a dogma derived from similar views held by Ricardo and the classical economists), a day's work by a labourer may well produce an object of value greater than the value of the commodities which he needs for his own support. He thus produces something more valuable than he consumes; indeed unless he did so there would be no reason for employing him. As a commodity in the market he may be acquired for £X, the sum needed to maintain him in existence and in sufficient health to enable him to do his work efficiently; the food he produces will sell for £Y; £Y-X represents the residue by which he increases the wealth of society – which his employer pockets. Even after the natural reward of the employer's own work as a 'captain of industry', reckoned in labour hours, as the organiser and manager of the processes of production and distribution, is deducted, a definite residue of general unearned increment remains, whether in the form of rent, interest or loans, or commercial profit: this, according to Marx, represents the productive worker's increment of

wealth, which is obtained not by society as a whole, but by the section of it called the bourgeoisie.

Whether Marx's concept of value be interpreted as merely the actual market price of commodities – or an average norm round which actual prices oscillate, towards which they tend as an ideal limit – or as that which, in a rational economy, prices *ought* to be – or some more metaphysical Hegelian quite impalpable inner essence infused by the creativeness of human labour – as his harshest critics have maintained – and again, whether the concept of a uniform entity called human labour, different manifestations of which can be compared in respect of quantity alone, is or is not valid – and both seem difficult to defend – the theory of exploitation which is based on them remains comparatively unaffected. The central thesis, which had so powerful an appeal to workers who did not begin to comprehend the intricacy of the Marxist vision of labour theory and its relation to actual price rates, is that there is only one class of men, namely the men who produce more wealth than they enjoy, and that this residue is appropriated by other men simply in virtue of their superior position as sole possessors of the means of production, such as material resources, machinery, means of transport, the machinery of financial credit etc., without which the workers cannot create; and the holders of such primary necessities can naturally starve the rest of mankind into capitulation on their own terms.

The political, social, religious, legal authority of Church and State is seen to be only a moral and intellectual weapon designed to preserve the interests of the employers: who employ, over and above the producers of commodities themselves, an army of ideologists, propagandists, interpreters, apologists, who by writing, talking, creating works of art or science, embellish and glorify the capitalist system, increasing the confidence and optimism of its beneficiaries, and making it appear more palatable to its victims. But if the development of technology, as Saint-Simon discovered, has given this unique power to the landowners, industrialists and middle-men of every kind, its advance will no less inevitably destroy them.

Fourier had declaimed against that process by which the great bankers and manufacturers, by their superior resources, tend to eliminate small traders and craftsmen from the economic market and create a mass of discontented, *déclassé* petit bourgeois who are forced automatically into the ranks of the proletariat. This process, which has grown considerably since his day, is bound to grow even wider and more pervasive: competition between individual capitalists, and the continual necessity of lowering prices and capturing new markets, are bound to lead to greater and greater amalgamation and integration, until only the larger, most powerful groups and individuals are left, all others having been forced into dependence or semi-dependence in the new centralised industrial feudalism, which is growing fast. Centralisation is the direct product of rationalisation, of the increased efficiency and productivity secured by the pooling of resources and the formation of great trusts and combines which can [ ] planned co-ordination. The workers previously scattered among many small firms will, reinforced by the children of the degraded *déclassé* [ ] petite bourgeoisie, automatically be unified into a single self-conscious army by the process of integration among their masters. Their power, as a political and economic force, will grow correspondingly. Already trade unions, the fruit of the factory system, represent a far more powerful proletarian league than any that existed before. The process will tend to organise society more and more in the shape of a pyramid, with fewer and fewer and more and more powerful capitalists at the top, and a vast, semi-brutalised, discontented mass of the exploited workers and colonial slaves below. The struggle between rival capitalists, and so rival countries which are in effect controlled by them, will grow bitterer and more deadly, since, wedded to a system of unhampered competition, each can only survive by overreaching the other.

Hence within the framework of capitalism and unchecked imperialism they cannot be controlled: the vested interests on which capitalist society rests depend for their survival on absolute freedom of competition. Marx certainly did not foresee the consequences of the growth of pure destructive competition between rival imperialisms (in the sense of Rosa

Luxemburg), the growth of political nationalism as a reactionary force hampering and transforming the growth of capitalism itself, and offering a bulwark to the impoverished petite bourgeoisie, desperate and anxious to avoid falling into the proletariat below.

His classification of social strata, reasonable for its time, oversimplifies the issues when mechanically applied to the twentieth century, for which a more elaborate instrument is required, to deal with the behaviour of classes like the Lumpenproletariat, the ruined bourgeoisie, and the salaried lower middle class, and above all the farmers [and] peasants on the land, whose existence he [noted?], but which he regarded as too unpolished to have a destiny of their own, and likely to merge with one of the two protagonists, the proletariat and the industrial bourgeoisie. The history of our time requires to be a good deal tortured to fit this hypothesis.

He declared that the periodic crises due to the absence of planned economics and unchecked warfare between capitalist groups will necessarily increase in frequency and in acuteness; wars on a hitherto unprecedented scale will ravage the civilised world, until finally the Hegelian contradiction of a system whose continuance depends upon the conflict of its constituent parts will reach a violent end. The continually decreasing group of capitalists in power will be dethroned without difficulty by the workers whom they themselves have organised so efficiently into a compact, disciplined body; and with the disappearance of the last possessing [class], a final end will be reached of that warfare which is the sole source of economic scarcity and social strife. The State, an instrument whereby the authority of the ruling class is enforced, will – in this classless society – possess no function and disappear. The ideal community, painted in colours at once too simple and too fantastic by the eighteenth century, will be reached, in which there will be neither master nor slave, neither rich nor poor, in which the world's goods will be distributed not indeed equally, not as 'just remuneration', but *rationally*, i.e. unequally, since man's capacities are unequal: to everyone according to his need, from everyone according to his capacity. Then mankind, emancipated at last from the tyranny both of nature and of their own ill-adapted, ill-

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controlled and therefore oppressive institutions, will for the first time begin to develop their capacity to the fullest extent. Freedom, obscurely adumbrated by Hegel, will be realised. Then only will human history begin.