

Part I

CHAPTER II: Marx and the Utopian Socialists

It was during this period of the turbulent forties, that Marx, as a young man, broke with bourgeois society. In his student days, he had mastered the Hegelian philosophy and, as a Young Hegelian, had tried to draw a sharp division between the revolutionary method of thought which analyzed objective development through inherent contradictions, and the reactionary conclusions which Hegel drew and which therefore made it possible for Prussian absolutism to adopt the Hegelian philosophy as the official state philosophy. But it was only now, when he broke from bourgeois society that he could see the full significance of the class struggle -- that the modern proletarian revolution was the motive force of modern history. It was first now, therefore, that he could rid the dialectic philosophy of its mystical trappings.

Where Hegel saw objective history as the successive manifestations of a world spirit, Marx placed the objective movement in the process of production. The core of the Hegelian method -- the self-movement which is so internally necessary because it is the way of the organism's own development -- he now saw in the self-activity of the proletariat. From the start, therefore, he began with the proletarian activity at the point of production. He separated labor from product and from property and looked for the contradiction in labor itself. It is through this contradiction that the laborer would develop, that is, would overcome the contradictions in the capitalist method of production. He now turned to the Ricardian school and said:

Your discovery was indeed epoch-making. But you yourselves are going with private property what the mercantilists did with precious metals -- treating it as a fact outside man. You thought your task was over with the discovery of labor as the source of value. In reality, it had just begun. If that theory means anything at all, it means that you must deal with man, the laborer, directly.

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Production is not a relationship of man to machine. It is a relationship of man to men through the instrumentality of the machine. The exchange of things, of commodities, not only reflects but also befuddles this relationship of men at the point of production. Your error lies in turning away from the laborer whose function you hailed to the skies.

That, of course, was no accident, since it is he who consistently, persistently and violently, develops all the contradictions in capitalistic private property by being subjected to its power. Only it turns out to be an alien power, not because it is something outside him, but because the method in which he created it was an alien (abstract) mode of labor, but it is still labor, materialized in products. The concrete labor is reduced to an abstract, congealed mass. Dead, accumulated, materialized labor now turns to oppress the living laborer. This mastery of dead over living labor is a class relationship. The previous feudal distinctions between the propertied and the property-less and the various estates, has now become a full-blown contradiction which is within the method of production itself, within labor itself. The relationship of capital to labor is sharper, therefore, than had been the relations of estates under feudalism. This method of production is then not a natural order nor an eternal one as you had visioned, but like other social orders, is historic, transitory.

Labor is first of all, the function of man. But labor under capitalism is the very specific function of man working at machines to which he becomes a mere appendage. His labor therefore is not the self-activity, the creative function it was under primitive communism where, in maturing nature, man had also developed his own natural capacities and talents. No, labor in the factory is alienated

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labor. Private property arises not because the products of labor are alienated from the laborer. That is only the consequence of the fact that his very activity is an alien activity. It is as much a product of the industrial revolution as is the machine itself.

When the division of labor characteristic of all class societies has reached the monstrous proportions where all the science, all the intellect, all the skill goes into the machine, while labor of man becomes a simple, monotonous task, then the labor of man can produce nothing but its opposite, capital. Where all the charm of work has gone ~~out~~ out of it, "simple labor" is by no means lightened. On the contrary. The burden and agony of toil has increased as witness the prolongation of the working day, the increase in the speed of work, the prison-like discipline. The factory then has turned the laborers into an industrial army under a hierarchy of officers and sergeants. That is why the technical revolution has meant not harmonious development as you had envisioned, but the accumulation of capital at one pole and the accumulation of misery at the other pole. Labor and capital are such absolute opposites that the class struggle is developing to a veritable civil war. All you have to do ~~to~~ to see in theory what is a truth in life is to include the wage laborer himself in the study of the production of capitalistic wealth.

That is what Marx set about doing. By placing this contradiction in labor in the very center of everything, by including the laborer himself in the science of economics, Marx transformed political economy from a study of things, such as wages, money, profits, to an analysis of social relations, the relation of wage labor and capital. At the same time, Marx made no division between his study of economics and the study of the class struggles on the historic scene. He was always watching what he called the "spontaneous class organizations."

of the proletariat." With these, he aligned himself while developing further the theory of the objective movement of capitalist production, and the subjective mode of its overthrow. From his early Philosophic-Economic Essays on "Alienated Labor, Private Property and Communism," as well as the "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic," through his "Wage-Labor and Capital," he kept up with the proletarian movement, anticipating its next stage. The Communist Manifesto was published on the eve of the 1848 revolutions.

It was in the Manifesto that he predicted that in a society such as capitalism, where personal worth is reduced to exchange-value and all the freedoms to free trade, and yet where the ruling class cannot live without constantly revolutionizing the method of production, and with it the relations of production, that society has forged its own grave-digger -- the revolutionary working class itself. That discovery -- that the objective movement itself produces the subjective force for its overthrow -- transformed utopian socialism into scientific socialism. It drew a sharp class line between the intellectuals (utopians) who would continue with their schema and the proletariat itself which has now separated itself from these sects and was creating movements of its own.

Chapter III:

From Robert Owen in England, through Karl Grun in Germany, to Pierre Froudhon in France, that is what characterized the radical intelligentsia of the day. They continued to evolve utopian plans for a perfect world to which they demanded the real world subordinate itself.

They stayed away from the actual movement of the working class. In England, there were the trade unions and the Chartist movement. But Robert Owen, who had done much in revealing the actual conditions in the factories of England, held himself apart from the real movement of the proletariat. Although it was the suffering of the masses that broke them from their own class and brought them near the proletariat, they believed not one iota in the creative initiative of the masses.

Nothing surprised him so much as when he returned to England, after having built the New Harmony colony in America, and found that the trades unions, one million strong, were ready to adopt his schema. Only, being proletarians, they knew the way to do that seriously, was through a revolutionary mass movement. They were ready to get rid of the employer class, prepared to call a general strike and reorganize industry on a cooperative basis. Although at first he appeared to be with them, Owen backed away and, while the real movement collapsed under the extreme persecution of the government, his own organization became more and more "ethical."

The utopian socialists had based themselves on the Ricardian theory of value which they claimed to be "socialist" and needed merely to be cleansed of its capitalistic "conclusions." If, went the argument,

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labor is the source of all value, it must therefore be the source of all surplus value and the "fruits of labor" "rightfully" belong to it. As Marx put it, if the utopian societies had had any significance at all, it was that they corresponded to the first instinctive desires of the masses to reorganize society. Their continued existence, when the masses moved in another direction, could mean nothing but a reactionary movement in opposition to the actual movement of the proletariat.

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The petty-bourgeois, Pierre Proudhon, the most important of these sects, opposed trade unions in England and strikes everywhere. At the very moment that Marx was predicting that Germany was on the eve of revolution, Proudhon "proved" that the masses had "outgrown" revolution. He no sooner wrote that, when the revolutions burst out in France and Germany. It was not a theoretical question. The question is not whether Proudhon did not predict correctly, or whether Marx did predict correctly. The question was: what to do? Where Marx was always with the revolutionary working class, these intellectuals, in action, always opposed. This they called the theoretic principle.

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