

MIKHAIL BAKUNIN'S CRITIQUE OF "AUTHORITARIAN COMMUNISM":
THE PROBLEM OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY BUREAUCRACY IN
THE WRITINGS OF KARL MARX

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INTRODUCTION

Mikhail Bakunin, the shaggy, toothless Russian immigrant who once won a wide following in Europe with his anarchist ideas and challenged Karl Marx for control of the First International Working Men's Association, has experienced a revival in recent years. For decades, he lay in the dust-bin of history: condemned by the victorious communists in Russia for infecting the labor movement with the "childhood disease" of anarchism, and shunned by generations of respectable reformers in the West, his legacy survived almost exclusively in the anarchist movements of southern Europe, particularly in Spain, where it flowered in a "short summer of anarchy" during the Spanish civil war.

In the 1960's, a new generation of rebels "rediscovered" Bakunin and enthusiastically revived the anarchist tradition. The movements and organizations which resulted often reflected the unresolved contradictions of Bakunin's own personality. Paul Avrich has described him aptly:

[He] was a man of paradox, possessed of an ambivalent nature. A nobleman who yearned for a peasant revolt, a libertarian with an irresistible urge to dominate others, an intellectual with a powerful anti-intellectual streak, he could preach unrestrained liberty while spinning from his brain a whole network of secret organizations and demanding from his followers unconditional obedience to his will. ¹

Bakunin has been claimed by organizations ranging from the most open and libertarian to the most clandestine and terrorist.

In the 1860's, Bakunin was the champion of the "backward" countries of Europe against the domination of the industrial nations. One century later, revolutionaries of the Third World, such as Regis Debray, Eldridge Cleaver, and Franz Fanon, have continued his tradition;

many passages of The Wretched of the Earth--which calls for an uprising of the wretched masses against their colonial masters--read as though they were taken directly from Bakunin's writings.

Walter Benjamin is supposed to have remarked somewhere, "There has not been a radical conception of freedom in Europe since Bakunin."² Indeed, Bakunin was a professed enemy of oppression in any form and asserted the rights of individuals and communities against oppression by a monolithic state apparatus.

In 1968, when tanks of the Warsaw pact crushed all hopes for a regeneration of the system in Czechoslovakia, the ideological bankruptcy of the Soviet Union became obvious; it became clear to many that the nineteenth-century practice was in need of revision "in a libertarian direction."

A new generation of theorists looked back to the First International and recognized that the Marxists and Bakuninists had already quarreled over these very issues. They discovered that Bakunin had accused Marx of being the prophet incarnate of state socialism. They discovered that Bakunin, in an almost-forgotten book called Statism and Anarchy, had accused Marx of wanting to found a centralized, technocratic state managed by a minority of "learned socialists," of wanting to found a regime which would "concentrate all administrative power in its own strong hands, because the ignorant people are in need of a strong guardianship," "create a central state bank, which [would] also control all the commerce, industry, agriculture, and even science," and that "the mass of the people [would] be divided into two armies, the agricultural and the industrial, under the direct command of the state engineers, who [would] constitute

the new privileged political-scientific class." ³ Bakunin had accused Marx of wanting to found a new despotism--the subjugation of the rural areas to the urban proletariat constituted as a ruling class. Classes and oppression would not disappear under such a system, he had written: "[The Marxists] insist that only dictatorship (of course their own) can create freedom for the people. We reply that all dictatorship has no objective other than self-perpetuation, and that slavery is all it can generate and instill in the people who suffer it." ⁴

In the 1960's, Bakunin could be depicted as the ultimate victor in this famous confrontation.

He had placed his trust in the revolutionary potential of the backward nations. The great revolutions of the twentieth century had occurred and were occurring not in highly industrialized countries, but in the agricultural societies of Russia, China, Spain, and the Third World. At the same time, Bakunin had predicted the rise of a new despotism in the name of the proletariat. The deadening, oppressive bureaucracy of the Soviet Union confirmed his prophecy.

Could anything be said in defense of Marx? Was this despotism actually what Marx envisioned? If we are to evaluate the validity of Bakunin's critique, we must place his debate with Marx in its proper historical perspective and scrutinize closely Marx's revolutionary vision.

The body of the thesis is divided into three parts.

In the first, we shall depict Marx as he was seen by his contemporaries--Bakunin included. Our point of departure will be the "Communist Manifesto," the document with which Marx announced his revolu-

tionary goals to the world, and which explains his revolutionary strategy, a strategy which led him to devote so much of his energy to the First International. In our discussion of the International, we shall focus on the issues involved in the growing conflict between the Marxists and the Bakuninists. Then the Paris Commune will be described in some detail because, historically, it represented a turning point for the International and for the European labor movement as a whole, and because Marx saw in the Commune a living model of that dictatorship of the proletariat which, he envisioned, would lead ultimately to the elimination of class rule and the transformation of society.

In the second part, we turn to Marx's interpretation of the Commune. In order to understand this interpretation, however, we must have a sense of the theoretical framework into which the Commune fits--i.e., its place in Marx's interpretation of general historical movement. Moreover, we must have a sense of the emancipatory role of this revolution in Marx's thought. We shall describe briefly the development of the philosophical categories with which Marx analyzes history; then we shall enumerate the features of the Communal model as Marx saw it--how the nation was to be organized after a revolution, the role of the peasantry, and the new structures of representation.

With this model of post-revolutionary society in mind, we shall discuss in the third part the years immediately following the fall of the Commune in 1871. The First International was torn apart by dissenting factions; Marx and Bakunin retired to study and contemplate. A fascinating document emerged from this period. Soon after Bakunin published Statism and Anarchy--an analysis of contemporary history, a programmatic statement

of anarchism, and a polemic against Karl Marx and the German Social Democrats--Marx obtained a copy and translated long excerpts in his notes, interjecting critical comments at crucial points. The conspectus allows us to look over Marx's shoulder as he reads Bakunin's attack on "authoritarian communism." The rebuttals he inserts here--sometimes after every sentence--give this passage the flavor of a heated debate. Indeed, it is among the most dramatic passages in Marx's entire opus. When Bakunin confronts him with this prophetic critique, he forces Marx to defend and clarify his conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Unresolved tensions in his system come to the surface--tensions between representative democracy and authoritarian dictatorship, and deficiencies in his analysis stand out in bold relief.

The skeptical reader may claim that such an exercise is purely academic. Does it matter what Marx really intended? he may ask. To convince the reader of its relevance, we shall discuss briefly in the conclusion the implications of such a theoretical debate for the prospects of social change in Eastern Europe.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

¹Paul Avrich, preface to Bakunin on Anarchy (New York: Random House, 1971) p. xxiv.

²Quoted in: Justus F. Wittkop, Michael A. Bakunin in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten (Beinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1974), p. 139.

³Mikhail Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy (New York: Revisionist Press, 1976), p. 333.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 332.

PART I

KARL MARX AND THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Manifesto of the Communist Party

Karl Marx seized the opportunity actively to participate in the nascent labor movement in 1847, when the League of the Just, a small, semiclandestine organization of German émigré artisans in London, invited him to participate in its theoretical debates. After winning the League over to his views, Marx was charged with the task of composing a public declaration of the League's doctrine. The organization was renamed "The Communist League," and Marx's declaration appeared early in 1848 under the title "Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei." ¹

The Manifesto is divided into four sections. In the last two sections, which do not concern us here, Marx criticizes various "reactionary," "bourgeois," and "utopian" elements in the labor movement, and describes the position of the communists in relation to the various existing opposition parties in Europe.

Marx opens the first section with the general observation, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," ² and proceeds to trace the rise of modern bourgeois society out of the ruins of feudal society. This epoch of the bourgeoisie is characterized by the simplification of class antagonisms, he writes: "Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat." ³

The industrial millionaires, the leaders of whole industrial armies--the modern bourgeois--have, he writes, played a most revolutionary part in history. In place of earlier forms of exploitation "veiled by religious and political illusions," it has substituted "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation." ⁴ It constantly must revolutionize the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and with them all social relations. All that was sacred in the old society is drowned in the "icy water of egotistical calculation." ⁵

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind. ⁶

The bourgeoisie expands over the whole surface of the globe in its constant search for new markets, drawing even the most "barbarian" nations into "civilization" and creating a mutual interdependence of nations. It compels backward nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production, to become bourgeois themselves. The bourgeoisie subordinates the entire world to itself.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all the preceding generations together. To achieve this, Marx explains, it has centralized the means of production, agglomerated population, concentrated property in a few hands, and conquered for itself, in the modern representative state, exclusive political sway. "The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie." ⁷

The bourgeoisie, however, has conjured up such gigantic means of production and exchange, that it is "like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells." ⁸ It is caught up in a vicious cycle of economic crises which can be solved only temporarily by economic expansion and intensified exploitation--measures which merely pave the way for more extensive and more destructive crises. "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to yield these weapons--the modern working class--the proletarians." ⁹

Laborers in this new class, "who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital," ¹⁰ develop in proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e. capital, develops. Because the proletarian must sell himself as a commodity, he finds himself at the mercy of fluctuations in the labor market. Due to the extending use of machinery and the corresponding division of labor, the workman becomes increasingly the mere appendage of a machine. He is at the mercy of the bourgeoisie, which forces down wages and increases the burden of toil for the workman. Masses of laborers are crowded into factories and submitted to military organization; they become slaves of this organization, of the machine, of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state.

At first, the proletariat reacts to the situation by seeking to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages, but with the development of industry, Marx continues, "the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in

greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more." ¹¹
As machinery obliterates all distinctions between workers and wages hit the same low level everywhere, the conditions of life become more and more equalized within the ranks of the proletariat. Class solidarity develops. As commercial crises make the livelihood of workers more precarious, they begin to see the value of forming combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeoisie in order to defend their interests; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for their scattered revolts. At this stage of development, Marx explains, workers' revolts are sporadic and ineffective; "The real fruit of their battles lies not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of workers." ¹²

Technological improvements speed up this unification of the working class by placing workers of different localities in contact with one another and centralizing the numerous local struggles into one national class struggle. "This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier." ¹³ Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, a small section of the bourgeoisie "cuts itself adrift" and goes over to the proletariat, "in particular a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole." ¹⁴

"Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today," Marx explains, "the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary

class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product." ¹⁵ The lower-middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, and the peasant are essentially reactionary, for they try to "roll back the wheel of history;" ¹⁶ the lumpenproletariat, "the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lower layers of the old society," is prepared by its conditions of life for the part of a "bribed tool of reactionary intrigue." ¹⁷

The industrial proletariat, however, finds itself in a unique position, for "in the conditions of the proletariat those of old society at large are already virtually swamped." ¹⁸ The proletarian has no property, his family has nothing in common with the bourgeois family; subjection to capital has stripped him of every trace of national character; "Law, morality, religion are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests." ¹⁹

Because the proletarian lives in a world so radically different from that of the bourgeois and develops radically different values, Marx reasons that the proletariat cannot revolt without radically changing society:

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority,

in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

At a certain point in the development of the proletariat, the class war breaks out into open revolution and "the violent overthrow of the bourgeoisie lays the foundation for the sway of the proletariat." ²⁰ The bourgeoisie itself sets the stage for this "inevitable" drama by involuntarily producing its own gravediggers. The advance of industry replaces the isolation of the laborers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association, and thus undermines that all-important condition for the formation and augmentation of capital--wage labor, which rests on competition between the workers.

In the second part of the Manifesto, Marx elaborates on the role of the communist party within the proletarian class and the nature of post-revolutionary society.

The communists do not represent their own interests, Marx writes, but those of the proletariat as a whole. Like all other proletarian parties, they work for the formation of the proletariat into a class, the overthrow of bourgeoisie society supremacy, and the conquest of political power by the proletariat, but they distinguish themselves from other parties by stressing the internationally common aspects of the class struggle and the interests of the movement as a whole. The communists, moreover, who represent the most advanced section of the working class, assume a leadership role by virtue of their theoretical insights into the dynamics of the proletarian movement. These theoretical conclusions "are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented or discovered, by this or that

would-be reformer," but "merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes." ²¹

Marx explains that the communists demand the abolition of bourgeois property: i.e., of that final expression of the system of producing and appropriating products based on the antagonism of capital and wage labor. The communists propose to convert capital into common property. "When...capital is converted...into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character." ²² Under the present bourgeois society, living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor, whereas in a communist society "accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer." ²³

Marx rejects one after another the bourgeois objections that "upon abolition of private property all work will cease and universal laziness will overtake us," and that "culture" will disappear: the bourgeois family will vanish, just as the proletarian family has already vanished, when capital has vanished and education is socialized. In response to the reproach that communists desire to abolish countries and nationality, Marx observes:

The workingmen have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto. The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to

vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put to an end, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put to an end. In proportion as the antagonisms between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end. ²⁴

As for the charges against communism made from an ideological standpoint, Marx has only this to say:

Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, change with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations, and in his social life? What else does the history of ideas prove than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class. ²⁵

Marx describes the revolution of the working class, the first step of which is "to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy." ²⁶ Once the proletariat has come to power it must expropriate the capital of the bourgeoisie, centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state, and increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.

In order entirely to revolutionize the mode of production, the proletariat must make "despotic inroads" on the conditions of bourgeois production. Marx lists ten measures which will be "pretty generally applicable" in the most advanced countries; among which are abolition of property in land and all right of inheritance, a graduated income tax, centralization of credit in the hands of the state by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly, centralization of the means of communication and transport, extended state con-

trol over industry and agriculture, gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country by a more equal distribution of the population over the country, and free education. Marx concludes with the following remarks about the nature of the post-revolutionary society:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class. In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. 27

Marx wrote these words on the eve of revolution in Europe, but, although its publication corresponded with the erection of barricades in the streets of Paris in February, 1848, the "Manifesto," contrary to popular belief, had almost no effect on the revolutionary movement or its outcome. It was the bourgeoisie that triumphed briefly in the revolutions of 1848, and not the proletariat, which still comprised only a small sector of the population in the industrializing countries of Europe. The opening line of the Manifesto-- "A specter is haunting Europe-- the specter of communism"--was not so much an observation as a prophecy, for the communist specter of which he wrote was still in its infancy. Marx based his analysis on the economic trends that were constantly swelling the ranks of the proletariat.

The Manifesto provided concrete strategic guidelines for the establishment of a proletarian political party: the most advanced and

resolute section of the working-class was to form itself into a political party, the policy of which must not contradict the general movement of history of the ultimate general interests of the proletarian movement. This party was to point out and bring to the fore the issues common to the proletarian struggle of different countries, thereby emphasizing the international aspect of the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The proletariat was to coordinate its efforts as a class on an international scale, for "United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat."²⁸ The immediate aims of this party were to be the overthrow of bourgeois supremacy and the conquest of political power--the proletariat was to raise itself to the position of ruling class in order to "win the battle of democracy."

After rising to political power, the proletariat was to make some unavoidable, despotic inroads on the rights of property and the conditions of bourgeois production in order to revolutionize society. Marx was later to use the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" to describe this first phase of the revolution.²⁹

Moreover, the proletariat was destined to be the class to end all classes, in a literal sense, for the proletarian revolution was to sweep away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally. Public power was to lose its political character with the disappearance of class distinctions.

The Manifesto thus presents, in abbreviated form, the classic foundation of Marx's vision of proletarian revolution; it is this vision which Bakunin later attacks in Statism and Anarchy. His writing style conveys a sense of urgency, of imminency, but the revolutions proved

only a bitter disappointment. The London-based "Communist League" played almost no role in the continental revolutions, and Marx was not to realize his hopes of an international working-class organization until 1864. Until then, he lived through the period of reaction that followed the defeat of revolution in Europe.

The International Working Men's Association

Of the 1848 revolutions, the British historian Eric Hobsbawm writes:

But for their occurrence, and for the fear of their recurrence, the history of Europe in the next twenty-five years would have been very different. Eighteen forty-eight was far from being "the turning point when Europe failed to turn." What Europe failed to do was turn in a revolutionary manner. Because it did not, the year of the revolution stands by itself, an overture but not the main opera, a gateway whose architectural style does not quite lead one to expect the character of what we shall find when we go through it. ³⁰

Rapid industrial expansion in an atmosphere of relative stability characterized the years immediately following the "re-establishment of order." Because the armies of reaction had so effectively defused popular movements, the national leaders of this period could formulate policy and manage their affairs without reference to the masses, which afforded them an unprecedented scope in decision-making. Warfare, which had taken on a revolutionary character with the general mobilization of the French populace after the 1789 revolutions, was now conducted by small armies of professional soldiers, so military commitment ceased to imply a serious threat to the basic structure of society. Statesmen were well aware of this, and frequently resorted to the sword

in order to defend their interests. ³¹

The political opposition went into hibernation for almost a decade; Marx gave up any hopes for an immediate revival of the labor movement and settled down to a period of study and contemplation. After hoping--in vain--that the economic crisis of 1857 would revive the revolutionary spirit of 1848, he resigned himself to the necessity of protracted war against an entrenched bourgeoisie. As for the government leaders, they had learned that single most important lesson of 1848: that the forces of opposition--from moderate middle-class democrats to the more radical representatives of the labor movement--would henceforth have to be "managed" if general revolution were to be avoided. In France, Napoleon effectively repressed labor organization and free speech but at the same time succeeded in keeping the workers happy with a unique brand of "imperial socialism." Even after the economic crisis of 1857-58 sharpened labor unrest, European statesmen were able to sustain their initiative and avoid direct confrontation by making concessions to the opposition; the 1860's were thus a decade of political liberalization and reform.

When Napoleon allowed delegates of the French workers to visit the London Exhibition in 1862, contact was established for the first time between labor representatives of the two countries. ³² Moreover, Napoleon was forced to consent to the formation of trade unions when he sensed that he might need the cooperation of the urban working class in his struggle against the bourgeoisie.

Representatives of the British and French trade unions met in London in 1864 to found the International Working Men's Association and invited a select group of exiles--among them Karl Marx--to participate. ³³

Although the International was founded as a loose federation of reformist trade unions, and not as a political party, Karl Marx saw the inherent possibilities; he seized the opportunity to participate in the building of a potentially revolutionary organization, set aside his research and writing, and rose to a dominant position on the General Council. In this capacity, Marx reasoned, he could give to the International the ideological guidance it needed to become a militantly class-conscious leader of the proletariat.

In the beginning, the International was a mixed bag representatives from Great Britain, France, Belgium, and Switzerland, but with no representatives from Germany. As one might expect from such a diverse group, the early years of the International were marked by tactical and ideological disputes between rival groups. The most serious threat to the International, looking at it from Marx's point of view, was the powerful French contingent.³⁴

During the turbulent 1860's, Paris became once again the center of revolutionary activity in Europe. Labor leaders reacted to Napoleon's concessions in two different ways: some refused the concessions and chose to organize in secret along definitely revolutionary lines, such as the Jacobins, who wished to revive the glories of the Jacobin Republic of the Year II, and the Blanquists, whose tight cells of dedicated revolutionaries anticipated the Leninist "vanguard of the proletariat"; others chose to make the most of the concessions and organize openly, while retaining their oppositional stance.³⁵ The Paris Office of the International adopted this latter tactic, and quickly became the International's most active branch and the most serious challenge to Marx's influence. During its early years, debate in the International centered

on the differences between Marx and the followers of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

One can trace the conflict between Marx and Proudhon back to the early 1840s, when they were both among the European radicals exiled in Paris. At that time, Marx came into contact with Proudhon and even tried to enlist him as the Paris representative of an organization that was to link European socialists together by correspondence, but Proudhon sent him the annoying reply:

Let us seek together, if you wish, the laws of society, the way in which they are realized, the process according to which we succeed in discovering them; but, for God's sake, after demolishing all a priori dogmatisms, do not let us dream of indoctrinating the people in our turn; do not let us fall into the contradiction of your compatriot Luther, who, after overthrowing the Catholic theology, at once began, armed with excommunications and anathemas, to found Protestant theology... Let us gather together and encourage all dissent, let us outlaw all exclusiveness, all mysticism... On these conditions, I will gladly enter into your association. Otherwise--no! ³⁶

This passage betrays fundamental differences of approach between the two, for Proudhon championed the absolute autonomy of the individual producer and rejected all centralization--economic or ideological--on principle. The German Social Democratic Marx-biographer, Franz Mehring, notes that "Proudhon wished to maintain that pleasant confusion whose abolition Marx considered the preliminary condition for any real communist propaganda." ³⁷

Proudhon was of provincial, petit bourgeois origin. In James Joll's analysis:

Proudhon's view of the world remained rural and his ideal society one of sturdy, independent, self-supporting peasants. Throughout his writing, as in that of many later anarchists, runs a nostalgia for the vanished--and often imaginary--virtues of a simple agricultural society as it existed before it was corrupted by machines and by the false virtues of manufacturers and financiers. ³⁸

Due to Proudhon's influence, "socialism" thus meant, for many in the French labor movement, the organization of independent owner-producer--or, where industrialization was more advanced, of cooperative workshops--into free associations, upon which a governmental superstructure of parliament and high finance would be a superfluous accretion. Proudhon abandoned the idea of revolution in favor of gradual reform: "I prefer to burn property in a slow fire rather than in a St. Bartholemew's Night of property owners."³⁹ Various "mutualist" societies shunned political activity in favor of more direct means and asked only to be left in peace to seek their own salvation in alternative forms of economic organization, apart from any interference from the state.

It was precisely this insistence on direct economic action that so annoyed the politically-minded Karl Marx. This fundamental difference of approach between the French, who wished to work directly for a decentralized society of federated communes, and Marx--later, by association, the Germans--who wanted to found a unified workers' party in order to work politically for the emancipation of the proletariat was reflected later in the debate between Marx and Bakunin, and in the resulting schism in the European labor movement.

Although we recognize, in hindsight, the significance of the ideological debates within the International, we must resist the temptation to exaggerate the impact it had on the general course of events in the 1860's. It probably stimulated the growth of Trade Unionism and was certainly blamed by much of the bourgeoisie for all that was wrong with society, but the International's influences were actually very limited in most of the member countries, and almost non-existent in Germany.⁴⁰

Marx's struggle with the Proudhonists dominated the agendas at Congresses of the International throughout the 1860s. At Geneva in 1866, and in Lausanne the following year, issues such as the role of the state in education and the question of whether the working class should work within the system for improvement of its condition were hotly debated. The Brussels Congress of 1868, where the International committed itself for the first time to a collectivist policy, marked an important victory for Marx. After this congress the influence of the Proudhonists waned, and at the Basle Congress of 1869 the Proudhonists had ceased to exercise any considerable influence.⁴¹ In Basle, however, a new figure appeared on the scene--Mikhail Bakunin.⁴²

Bakunin had already become somewhat of a legend. Born the son of a Russian landowner, he travelled to Europe in his youth to study and came into contact with exiled radicals in Paris in the 1840s. He was arrested after participating in a revolt in Dresden and sent back to Russia for sentencing; after spending several years in prison, he was exiled to Siberia, whence he escaped in 1861. He spent three years in London before travelling to Italy, where he gathered around himself a loose band of followers in a secret society. In the late 1860's, Bakunin moved to Switzerland, formed an Alliance of Social Democracy, and applied for admission to the International; the Alliance was admitted only after it agreed to dissolve itself as a central organization and urge its sections to join the International separately.

Bakunin had a magnetic, explosive, dominating personality. Under the conditions, the clash with Marx was probably inevitable. Engels summed up the theoretical differences between Marx and Bakunin

in a letter to Theodor Cuno, a German Social Democrat in the International:

Bakunin has a peculiar theory of his own, a medley of Proudhonism and communism, the chief point of which is in the first place that he does not regard capital, and therefore the class contradiction between capitalists and wage earners which has arisen through social development, as the main evil to be abolished--instead he regards the state as the main evil...As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to hell of itself. We, on the contrary, say: do away with capital, the appropriation of the whole means of production in the hands of the few, and the state will fall away of itself. The difference is an essential one. Without a previous social revolution the abolition of the state is nonsense; the abolition of capital is in itself the social revolution and involves a change in the whole method of production. Further, however, as for Bakunin the state is the main evil, nothing must be done which can maintain the existence of any state, whether it be a republic, a monarchy or whatever it may be. Hence therefore complete abstention from all politics. To perpetrate a political action, and especially to take part in an election, would be a betrayal of principle. The thing to do is to conduct propaganda, abuse the state, organize, and when all the workers are won over; i.e., the majority, depose the authorities, abolish the state and replace it by the organization of the International. This great act, with which the millennium begins, is called social liquidation. All this sounds extremely radical, and is so simple that it can be learned by heart in five minutes... 43

At the Basle Congress, Bakunin threw a wrench into Marx's plans by diverting the discussion to a relatively minor point--whether or not the abolition of inheritance rights should be in the immediate program of the International. Bakunin argued that hereditary property was the basis upon which the modern state rested, and that hereditary wealth was the only thing standing in the way of social equity. If one were to knock out this key prop, he claimed, then the entire system would come tumbling down. Marx pointed out the absurdity of this line of reasoning by showing that the inheritance of property was but a minor aspect of a greater problem, and that the International must direct its attention to the abolition of the more fundamental institution of private property. Neither side was able to obtain a majority for the

vote, so the question remained undecided.⁴⁴

Marx was, understandably, annoyed at the unexpected appearance of a rival, but he had reason to feel confident about the future of the International. The Proudhonist opposition had been decisively defeated, the International had ridden on the crest of a wave of strikes and expanded its influence, and in Germany the Social Democratic Worker's Party, a potential ally, had been formed.

On the other hand, Marx's control over the International was tenuous at best. The German labor parties were developing independently, along national lines; Spain and Italy were falling under Bakunin's influence; Marx found little support in France. Moreover, the British trade unionists, who had allowed Marx to achieve his dominating position, were becoming increasingly wrapped up in the struggle for parliamentary reform and less interested in Marx's revolutionary rhetoric.⁴⁵

The outbreak of war between France and Prussia in 1870 brought these internal conflicts to a head.

The Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune

Paris was the unquestioned center of revolutionary agitation in Europe in the 1860s. In 1867, an economic crisis intensified strike activity throughout France and provoked a severe reaction from Napoleon III; who called out his troops regularly to break strikes; the secret police came down particularly hard on the highly visible Paris Federation of the International and arrested most of its leaders. In this atmosphere of repression, the Blanquist commitment to conspiracy attracted

growing numbers of followers.

As revolutionary forces gathered in his cities, Napoleon expanded his economic influence overseas, bringing France into conflict with other European nations. At the same time, the European balance of power shifted threateningly with the unifications of Italy and Germany. A Germany united under Prussian leadership now enclosed a population larger than that of any other European nation with the exception of Russia and was building a formidable army on its highly-developed industrial-technological base.

At the beginning of 1870, the growing political opposition compelled Napoleon to grant more extensive constitutional liberties to his subjects. Although intended to pacify the elements of discontent, the measures he passed served only to aggravate both the Right and the Left. Radical republicans aired their discontent in public discussion groups that more often than not turned into revolutionary clubs, while the privileged classes, on the other hand, railed against what they deemed to be excessive concessions to the "vile multitude." These monarchists reasoned that they could best counter the growing influence of the republican opposition by boosting the prestige of the Emperor on the international scene.⁴⁶ When an increasingly confident and belligerent Bismarck insulted the French with the "Ems" telegram of July, 1870, they pressed Napoleon into declaring war on Prussia.

Marx, following these developments with approval, immediately sensed the consequences this war was to have on the labor movement in Europe and wrote the following observations in a letter to Engels:

The French need a thrashing. If the Prussians win, the centralization of state power will be useful for the centralization of the German working class. German predominance would also transfer the

centre of gravity of the workers' movement in Western Europe from France to Germany, and one has only to compare the movement in the two countries from 1866 till now to see that the German working class is superior to the French both theoretically and organizationally. Their predominance over the French on the world stage would also mean the predominance of our theory over Proudhon's, etc. ⁴⁷

In light of the phenomenal success of German social democracy after the war, this observation was prophetic. However, Marx underestimated the implications this would have for his "international" labor strategy.

In a letter to his daughter and son-in-law, Paul and Laura LaFargue, Marx optimistically predicted that no war between nations would be able to turn back the wheel of history, for the international class consciousness of the workers would override nationalist urges. ⁴⁸

The Brussels Congress had, it is true, adopted the policy that the working class hold a general strike in the event of war, but this internationalism ran against the current of the times.

When the Prussian army defeated the French at Sedan several weeks later, and captured Napoleon III, crowds gathered in Paris to demand that the Empire be overthrown. In response, the deputies in Paris declared the Republic on 4 September and constituted a provisional "Government of National Defense," which was to govern until fresh national elections could be held. Some urban revolutionaries, who had hoped that Napoleon's fall would usher in a more radical government, regarded the new republic with suspicion and disappointment, but the prevailing atmosphere was optimistic. Although Marx later wrote of the glorious day when the "working men" of Paris proclaimed the republic, this new government was actually a coalition of the working class with much of the bourgeoisie--based on the common cause of

republicanism and, more importantly, of patriotism.

The Prussian invasion and the subsequent siege of Paris intensified these emotions. In the working class districts of French cities, a patriotic desire for victory led to the formation of popular clubs to further the war effort. This ardent patriotism proved to be an embarrassment to the provisional government, which, while giving the appearance to conducting a war, actually wanted to conclude peace with the Prussians. The workers who turned out to demonstrate against the half-hearted national defense efforts throughout the autumn and winter months constituted a very real threat to the provisional government, which reasoned that national elections would establish its legitimacy and allow it to escape from the constant threat of being held captive by the popular forces in Paris. ⁴⁹

The provisional government found itself in an impossible situation. To expel the Prussians from French territory, it would essentially have had to "revolutionize" the war in the style of the old Jacobin Republic--i.e., by mobilizing the resources of the entire nation against the invaders. In contrast to 1792, however, the French peasantry was no longer revolutionary; the propertied middle class of the countryside feared revolutionary agitation. Because the provisional government relied heavily on this class for support, it felt compelled to yield to their interests and resist the discontented urban workers. This drove the urban patriots into even more open opposition; the popular clubs which had sprung up during the invasion turned into centers of organized political disaffection and elected a common central committee in order to apply pressure for democratic

reforms and a more vigorous war effort.

The inadequate resistance to the Prussians soon crumbled. On 28 January 1871, when the besieged Paris seemed to be in a desperate position both economically and militarily, the government announced an armistice.⁵⁰ Bismarck's harsh terms called for the resignation of the provisional government, which was to be replaced by an elected national assembly, and the surrender of Paris. The entire Left in France regarded the capitulation as high treason and attempted to form a coalition for the February elections, but votes from the countryside brought an overwhelming majority of monarchists into the National Assembly, with Adolf Thiers at the head and Jules Favre as Foreign Secretary. The new assembly escaped from the explosive situation in Paris and moved to Versailles, leaving behind outraged, frustrated patriots and a discontented bourgeoisie that was becoming more amenable to the idea of revolt. Moreover, Paris had the military means to defy the "legitimate" government--the "revolution armed" in the form of the Paris National Guard.

Originally a creation of the French Revolution, the National Guard had become essentially a quasi-honorific institution of the middle class.⁵¹ However, when the army left to fight the Prussian invaders in 1870 and the bourgeois National Guard was mobilized to defend the fortifications around the city, the citizens of Paris demanded that they be universally armed. The National Guard was thus forced to expand by opening its ranks to the lower classes--to less "reliable" elements--and Thiers quickly lost control over the only armed body in the capital.

Thiers realized that he had to control Paris if he were to establish order in France. The peace agreement called for the occupation

of Northern France until the payment of an indemnity, but if Thiers were to raise the necessary loans, he had to restore confidence in the government.

Under this pressure, Thiers blundered: he dispatched army attachments in a naive attempt to deprive the National Guard of its cannons. The workers of Paris rose spontaneously in rebellion, and Thiers immediately fled to Versailles, taking with him virtually the entire apparatus of the central and local government.⁵² Under the circumstances, the Central Committee of the National Guard was compelled to fill the political vacuum and assume control.

The new leaders immediately called for elections, and the sharp swing to the Left in the March 26 elections reflected the fact that many of the rich and propertied middle classes had either fled the city or abstained from participating, and that the remaining republican majority was willing to cast defensive votes against the monarchists in Versailles. The new local government assumed on May 28 the title of "Commune de Paris," a title symbolic in the French revolutionary tradition of revolt against centralized power in favor of the local communities.⁵³

The only document resembling an official program of the Commune, the "Declaration to the French People," was issued on 19 April 1871, to inform the whole nation of "the character, the reason and the aim of the Revolution that is taking place."⁵⁴ The declaration claimed to be the Communards' mission to accomplish the modern revolution against the clergy, military, bureaucracy, exploitation, jobbing in monopolies, privileges--against everything, in short, "to which the proletariat [owes] its slavery and the country its misfortune and disasters."⁵⁵

Contrary to what its enemies claimed, the document continues, the Commune did not want to destroy French unity per se but rather the particular political form of this unity:

Unity, such has been imposed upon us up to the present by the empire, the monarchy, and parliamentary government, is nothing but centralization, despotic, unintelligent, arbitrary, and onerous. Political unity, as desired by Paris, is a voluntary association of all local initiative, the free and spontaneous cooperation of all individual energies with the common object of wellbeing, liberty and security of all. ⁵⁶

This clearly reflects the anarchist mentality of the Parisian Communards. However, although the rhetoric of this declaration is radical in tone, one can hardly claim that the decrees passed by the Commune were radical. None of its policy aimed, for example, at the destruction of private property. Its most radical innovations were a revised wage scale that gave public servants a worker's salary and a policy of transferring to cooperative associations all businesses abandoned by their owners. Most measures, insofar as one is able to ascribe to them any coherent ideology, were social-reformist, such as the prohibition of night work in bakeries and the separation of church and state. Indeed, Marx admitted ten years later in a letter that the Paris Commune "was in no wise socialist, nor could it be." ⁵⁷

The Paris Commune was thus the result of a situation in which necessity dictated that new governmental institutions be founded to insure the survival of a beleaguered city, and was not the result of any preconceived plan or conspiracy. Under the circumstances, only a government elected by the Parisians themselves would have been acceptable, and the petit bourgeois origins of two thirds of the elected officials reflected their political preferences.

The International Working Men's Association played a very limited role in the Commune. In Paris, the organization had been too severely crippled by Napoleon's secret police to have any significant impact on the course of events, and, needless to say, the General Council in London was reduced to the role of a passive spectator. Marx wrote many letters and assembled newspaper accounts of the Commune, but, surprisingly, the General Council remained silent throughout the entire two months of the Commune's short existence, neither issuing public statements nor attempting to claim any credit for the rebellion. Indeed, Marx's correspondence from this period suggests that he was somewhat ambivalent towards the Commune. ⁵⁸

Regardless of any doubts he may have entertained in private about its real nature, it is clear that he recognized the Commune's potential value as a symbol. With a little imagination, the Commune could be depicted as the long-awaited revolution of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. In the second half of April, when the Commune was in full swing, Marx began to prepare an interpretation of the Commune in light of the theory of revolution which he had first put forth in the 1840's. His rough drafts from this period have been preserved; they show him rewriting theoretical passages of his "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon" (1852) and working out a polemical narrative of the chain of events, based on his growing collection of letters and newspaper accounts. His second draft was completed in the middle of May, as Paris' defenses crumbled.

In retrospect, we recognize that the Commune was doomed to defeat: the National Guard was equipped only for the defense of Paris, and if they had attacked Versailles, the Prussians might have inter-

vened on Thiers' behalf. Furthermore, Paris was isolated physically-- an island of radicalism (or, at least, republicanism) in a sea of conservatism.

With some aid from Bismarck, Thiers attacked Paris in May with overwhelming forces. After a week-long battle at the barricades, the largest urban insurrection of the nineteenth century fell in one of that century's bloodiest slaughters. The Communards were martyred. Blanquists and anarchists claimed responsibility for the short-lived revolt, and the Commune thus became firmly established in the French working class tradition, but it was Marx who made of it a legend that was later to assume such symbolic importance in the Russian and Chinese revolutions of the twentieth century. As Thiers slaughtered the Communards by the thousands, Marx drafted its obituary:

Workingmen's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priests will not avail to redeem them. ⁵⁹

The address, which appeared in pamphlet form as an official address of the General Council under the title "The Civil War in France," had profound political consequences for the International, which we shall examine below, in Part III. First we must consider "The Civil War in France" and the theoretical approach which Marx brought to his analysis.

NOTES: I

¹David McLellan, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 167f.

²Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, ed. Lewis Feuer (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 7.

³Ibid., p. 8.

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

²¹Ibid., p. 20.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

¹³Ibid., p. 16.

²²Ibid., p. 22.

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 17.

²³Ibid., p. 22.

⁶Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 17.

²⁴Ibid., p. 26.

⁷Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 18.

²⁵Ibid., p. 26.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 18.

²⁶Ibid., p. 28.

⁹Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 18.

²⁷Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 18.

²⁸Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰Ibid., p. 19.

²⁹"Class Struggles in France," in: Feuer, p. 317.

³⁰Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital 1848-1875 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 9.

³¹Ibid., p. 69.

³²Julius Braunthal, History of the International (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967). Vol. 1, 1864-1914, p. 88.

³³G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1954) Vol. 2, Marxism and Anarchism 1850-1890, p. 90.

³⁴Braunthal, p. 120f.

³⁵Cole, p. 137.

³⁶James Joll, The Anarchists (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), p. 159.

³⁷Franz Mehring, Karl Marx. The Story of His Life (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), p. 147.

³⁸Joll, p. 62.

- ³⁹Mehring, p. 147.
- ⁴⁰Cole, pp. 102-3.
- ⁴¹Braunthal, p. 120f.
- ⁴²E.H. Carr, Michael Bakunin (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1937).
- ⁴³The Correspondence of Marx and Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 320.
- ⁴⁴Braunthal, p. 138.
- ⁴⁵Cole, p. 133.
- ⁴⁶Stewart Edwards, The Communards of Paris, 1871 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 16.
- ⁴⁷Selected Correspondence, p. 292.
- ⁴⁸Marx-Engels Werke (Berlin, GDR: Dietz Verlag, 1969), Vol. 33, p. 125.
- ⁴⁹Edwards, p. 17.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 22.
- ⁵¹Ibid., p. 21.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 25.
- ⁵³Braunthal, p. 151.
- ⁵⁴"Declaration to the French People," in: Edwards, p. 81.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 83.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 83.
- ⁵⁷"The Civil War in France," in: Feuer, p. 391.
- ⁵⁸McLellan, p. 394.
- ⁵⁹"The Civil War in France," p. 391.

PART II

THE PARIS COMMUNE AS A "REABSORPTION OF THE STATE POWER BY SOCIETY"

In the third section of "The Civil War in France," Marx sets out to answer the question, "What is the Commune, that sphinx so tantalizing to the bourgeois mind?"¹ He quotes a manifesto of the Commune which proclaimed it to be the "imperious duty and absolute right" of the proletarians of Paris "to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power." Marx adds: "But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."² In the rough drafts he is somewhat more specific: "The political instrument of their enslavement cannot serve as the political instrument of their emancipation,"³ and "The first condition for the hold[ing] of political power, is to transform working machinery and destroy it--an instrument of class rule."⁴

Bakunin, we recall, thought that he saw here a fundamental flaw in Marxism--in the idea that the proletariat, once constituted as a ruling class, could wield political power in such a way that it would cease to be a tool of class rule: "anarchism or freedom is the aim, while state and dictatorship is the means, and so, in order to free the masses of people they have first to be enslaved!"⁵

In "The Civil War in France," Marx points to concrete measures in an attempt to show how the Paris Commune had begun this transformation. Engels writes in the introduction to the address:

Of late the social-democratic Philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: dictatorship of the proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen; do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁶

Instead of launching directly into a description of the Commune, however, Marx prefaces his analysis with a theoretical account of the rise of the modern centralized state--in order then to depict the Commune as the negation of that state. Marx wishes to provide a sense of dialectical movement, but, at the same time, he does not want theory to interrupt the flow of polemic too drastically.

The account he inserts here is highly compressed and incomplete. In order fully to understand his polemic, however, we must first understand this theoretical underpinning.

The rough drafts to "The Civil War in France" fill in many of the gaps and show us that Marx takes much of his material almost verbatim from two articles he wrote in the early 1850's--"Class Struggles in France" and "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon."

These historical analyses are all based on a theoretical system which Marx had been developing since the early 1840's. We have discussed briefly the Paris Commune in historical terms and have come to the conclusion that the Commune was by no means a proletarian revolution; "The Civil War in France" is a polemic which systematically distorts the facts in order to depict it as such. Our next task is to describe the evolution of the theoretical framework into which Marx wanted to fit the Commune.

To trace the evolution of Marx's theory of revolution, however, is a task which goes far beyond the confines of this thesis. In order really to understand the humanistic motivation behind even "The Civil War in France," we would have to understand Marx's conception of "alienation." Volumes have been written on this subject. The brief account provided here intends simply to single out isolated passages from his

early writings which, we feel, shed light on his interpretation of the Paris Commune.

Marx as a Radical Democrat

The first text to which we turn is a manuscript from 1843, which Marx wrote in the months following the suppression of the Rheinische Zeitung, an organ of the radical democratic opposition in the Ruhr area to which he had contributed several articles. Marx starts to work out his own theory of the state in the form of a detailed critique of passages from Hegel's Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts; this is the first manuscript in which he systematically develops the notion that civil society and the state are divided--that man has a dual identity as an homme and as a citoyen.

In his analysis, Marx accuses Hegel of treating governing power superficially, as "nothing but that administration which he develops as bureaucracy." ⁷ Hegel, he charges, has simply described the "formal" organization of bureaucracy, without realizing that "bureaucracy is only the 'formalism' of a content lying outside." ⁸ If one moves beyond mere description, it becomes clear that bureaucracy is "a web of practical illusions or the 'illusion of the state.'" ⁹ The result:

Bureaucracy is the imaginary state beside the real state, the spiritualism of the state. Hence everything has a double meaning, a real and a bureaucratic meaning, just as knowledge and also the will are something double, real, and bureaucratic. What is real is dealt with in its bureaucratic nature, in its otherworldly spiritual essence. ¹⁰

From a recognition of this diremption between the "imaginary" and the "real" state, Marx proceeds to the insight that civil society

and the state are divided:

[The individual] must deal with an essential diremption within himself. As a real citizen he finds himself in a doubled organization: in the bureaucratic--this is an external, formal determination of that state beyond it, the governmental power, which does not come into contact with him and his independent reality--and in the social, in the organization of civil society. 11

This division expresses itself in the observation that "The 'state' is asserted in opposition to civil society by its deputies as something alien and beyond the essence of civil society." 12 Marx learns from Hegel that civil society and the state face each other as "two hostile armies."

This "essential diremption" between homme and citoyen is but one aspect of the general theory of alienation which Marx was developing. We must limit ourselves here to the observation that man in his particular role as a member of civil society is "alienated" from man in his role as a citizen in the universal sphere of the state.

Marx asks himself how this state of alienation can be transcended and concludes: "The transcendence of bureaucracy can mean only that the universal interest becomes the particular interest in actuality and not, as with Hegel, merely in thought and abstraction. This is possible only when the particular (besonder) interest becomes universal (allgemein)." 13 The question becomes: How can the member of civil society accomplish this? Marx answers:

We have seen how the state exists only as a political state. The totality of the political state is the legislative power. To take part in this legislative power is therefore to take part in the political state, to prove and actualize one's existence as a member of the political state or as a member of the state. The fact that all as individuals wish to take part in legislative power is nothing but the will of all to be actual (active) members of the state, to give themselves a political existence, or to prove and effectuate their political existence. We have also seen that the element pertaining to the estates is civil society as legislative power, the political existence of civil society. The

invasion of civil society en masse, where possible totally, into legislative power and its will to substitute itself as actual for a fictitious legislative power--this is nothing but the drive of civil society to give itself political existence or to make its political existence actual. The drive of civil society to become political or to make political society actual is evident as a drive toward participation in legislative power as universal as possible. ¹⁴

We will recognize this same impulse below, in "The Civil War in France": that man must transcend his alienation from the state by breaking down this duality, and that this process requires the active participation of civil society.

If the impulse is the same, however, the actual process is much different; that Marx wrote this before conceiving of revolutionary praxis as the means to this end is evident from the conclusions he draws: It is not a question whether civil society should exercise legislative power through deputies or through all as individuals. Rather it is a question of the extent and greatest possible universalization of voting, of active as well as passive suffrage." ¹⁵ Marx notes that voting is "the immediate, direct relationship of civil society to the political state, not only in appearance but in existence," ¹⁶ and concludes, optimistically, that the duality would be transcended through universal suffrage:

Only in unlimited voting, active as well as passive, does civil society actually rise to an abstraction of itself to political existence as its true universal and essential existence (ihr wahres allgemeines wesentliches Dasein). But the realization of this abstraction is also the transcendence of the abstraction. By making its political existence actual as its true existence, civil society also makes its civil existence unessential in contrast to its political existence. And with the one thing separated, the other, its opposite, falls. Within the abstract political state the reform of voting is the dissolution of the state, but likewise the dissolution of civil society. ¹⁷

In 1844, Marx collaborated with Arnold Ruge on a new journal which was to provide a forum for French socialists and German philosophers--the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher. One of his essays for the journal--

"Zur Judenfrage"--develops further the critique which Marx had begun several months before. He retains the duality between civil society and the state, but borrows a term from Feurbach to express the universality of the political man--man is a species-being (Gattungswesen); it is this species-being from which man is alienated:

By its nature the perfected political state is man's species-life in opposition to his material life...Where the political state has achieved its full development, man leads a double life, a heavenly and an earthly life...In the political community he regards himself as a communal being; but in civil society he is active as a private individual, treats other men as means, reduces himself to a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. 18

As in his critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state, Marx is concerned here with the emancipation of man, only now he specifies that political emancipation is not "the final form of universal human emancipation,"¹⁹ but merely "the final form within the prevailing order of things."²⁰ He turns to the "rights of man" as promulgated in the French constitution, but concludes that none of the rights take into consideration man as a species-being:

None of the so-called rights of man goes beyond the egoistic man, the man withdrawn into himself, his private interest and his private choice, and separated from the community as a member of civil society. Far from viewing man here in his species-being, his species-life itself--society--rather appears to be an external framework for the individual, limiting his original independence. The only bond between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the maintenance of their property and egoistic persons. 21

In the days of feudalism, Marx explains, the old civil society had had a directly political character, but the French revolution destroyed all estates, corporations, guilds, and privileges--institutions which expressed the separation of the people from their community--thereby abolishing the political character of civil society; "Political emancipation was at the same time the emancipation of civil society from politics, from the appearance of a general content."²² This resulted in the division of man into homme and citoyen:

Finally, man as a member of civil society is regarded as authentic man, man as distinct from citizen, since he is man in his sensuous, individual, and most intimate existence while political man is only the abstract and artificial man, man as an allegorical, moral person. Actual (wirklich) man is recognized only in the form of an egoistic individual, authentic (wahr) man, only in the form of abstract citizen. 23

The emancipation of man appears in this context not as mere political emancipation, but as the "bringing back of the human world, of the relationships, to man himself" (Zurückführung der menschlichen Welt, der Verhältnisse, auf den Menschen selbst): 24

Only when the actual, individual man has taken back into himself the abstract citizen and in his everyday life, his individual work, and his individual relationships has become a species-being, only when he has recognized and organized his own powers as social powers so that social force is no longer separated from him as political power, only then is human emancipation complete. 25

How, we may ask, does this differ from Marx's position in the critique of Hegel: that civil society must rise to an abstraction of itself and thereby transcend the abstraction, dissolving the dualism? The fundamental idea remains the same, only now Marx is speaking in terms of man organizing his own powers as social powers. This implies a change in the infrastructure; indeed, some consider this conclusion to be the point at which Marx becomes a socialist. 26

In the essays that follow, Marx develops these same themes; only the categories change. From a highly abstract model, Marx makes increasingly more connections between his abstract categories and the "real world"; his analysis becomes progressively more "concrete" as he relates the dialectical movement of his thought to actual historical movement. Marx gradually develops the notion of a dialectical contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat: a dualism which can be transcended only by revolution. When we turn to Marx's historical analyses from the early 1850's, we will see that these historical categories, when used for

polemical purposes, practically obscure the underlying dialectical movement. But we shall see: this humanistic motivation--the "emancipation of man," the "taking back into himself" of the abstract citizen by the actual, individual man--stands behind even "The Civil War in France."

Marx as a Socialist

In another article for the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," Marx concludes that only the proletariat is in a position to emancipate humanity. He starts by noting that it is utopian to dream that a partial, exclusively political revolution, which "leaves the pillars of the house standing," will really revolutionize society. What is the basis of a partial and merely political revolution? he asks. In answer:

It is part of civil society emancipating itself and attaining universal supremacy, a particular class by virtue of its special situation undertaking the general emancipation of society. This class emancipates the whole of society but only on the condition that the whole of society is in the same position as this class...²⁷

For the emancipation of society, the emancipating class must stand in direct contradiction to the oppressing class:

If a popular revolution is to coincide with the emancipation of a particular class of civil society, if one class is to stand for the whole of society, all the defects of society must conversely be concentrated in another class...A particular social sphere must stand for the notorious crime of society as a whole so that emancipation for one class to be the class of emancipation par excellence, conversely another must be the obvious class of oppression.²⁸

Marx considers the German situation and asks himself the question: Where, then, lies the positive possibility of German emancipation?²⁹

The answer lies in the formation of a class in civil society which possesses a universal (universell) character by virtue of its "universal suffering," a class which claims no particular (besonder) right "because no particular

wrong but unqualified wrong is perpetrated on it," a class "which does not partially oppose the consequences but totally opposes the premises of the German political system":

...a sphere, finally, that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, thereby emancipating them: a sphere, in short, that is the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat...Heralding the dissolution of the existing order of things, the proletariat merely announces the secret of its own existence because it is the real dissolution of this order. Demanding the negation of private property, the proletariat merely raises to the principle of society what society has raised to the principle of the proletariat, what the proletariat already embodies as the negative result of society without its action. 30

The proletariat is the negation of the society of the oppressing class; as such it is destined to play an historic role: to dissolve the existing order of things.

One could trace this dialectic back to its origins in Hegel's thought, in Die Phänomenologie des Geistes, but that would be a thesis in itself. The opening paragraph of The Holy Family, a book which Marx wrote in 1845 as a critique of speculative idealism, serves our purposes.

In The Holy Family, Hegel's influence is evident on the first page, for the title of the first section is "The Dialectic Opposition of Proletariat and Wealth (Reichtum)."
Marx explains in this section that the two opposing entities of Reichtum and proletariat form a dialectic whole, but that these two elements play different roles in the relationship:

Private property as private property, as Reichtum, is forced to maintain itself and thus its opposite, the proletariat. It is the positive side of the opposition, private property satisfied in itself. The proletariat is, vice versa, forced as a proletariat to transcend (aufheben) itself and thus private property, the conditioning opposite which makes it into a proletariat in the first place. It is the negative side of the opposition, the unrest within it, private property dissolved and dissolving itself. 31

Both elements of this dialectic are subject to the same human self-alienation (menschliche Selbstentfremdung), but the propertied

class feels itself confirmed in this alienation, while the proletariat feels destroyed and perceives in this alienation the reality of an in-human existence.

Within this dialectic, the owners of private property are constantly striving to maintain the opposition, while the proletariat seeks to destroy it. However: "If the proletariat is victorious, then it has by no means become the absolute side of society, as it is only victorious in that it transcends itself and its opposite." ³²

Here we have--in abstract terms--a philosophical expression of the reason why Marx would never accept the possibility that a proletarian dictatorship would petrify into a permanent despotism.

In The German Ideology, a book written in collaboration with Engels, Marx analyzes division of labor in order to explain the contradiction between the interests of single individuals and those of society as a whole, and concludes, "Out of this very contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the community the latter takes an independent form as the State, separated from the real interests of individual and community..." ³³ It follows that all political struggles within this sphere of "illusory communality" are nothing but "the illusory forms in which the real struggles of different classes are carried out among one another." ³⁴ On the level of civil society, individuals seek only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their communal interests, with the result that "the practical struggle of these particular interests, which constantly really run counter to the communal and illusory communal interests, necessitates practical intervention and control through the illusory 'universal' interest in the form of the State." ³⁵ Under such conditions, individuals lose sight of the fact that the power of society

is actually their own united power:

The social power, that is, the multiplied productive force from the co-operation of different individuals determined by the division of labor, appears to these individuals not as their own united power but as a force alien and outside them because their co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally. They do not know the origin and the goal of this alien force, and they cannot control it. On the contrary, it passes through a peculiar series of phrases and stages independent of the will and the action of men, even directing their will. ³⁶

This state of affairs can be transcended only by that "propertyless" class which is "excluded from society and forced into extreme opposition to all other classes," a class "[which] constitutes the majority of all members of society," from which arises "a consciousness of the necessity of fundamental revolution, communist consciousness..." ³⁷

Marx generalizes that "every revolutionary struggle is directed against a class which until then has been in power." ³⁸ The communist revolution, however, will be like no other revolution in history:

In all revolutions up till now the mode of activity remained unchanged, and it was only a question of a different distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labor to other persons. But the communist revolution is directed against the preceding mode of activity, does away with labor, and abolishes the rule of all classes along with the classes themselves, because it is accomplished by the class which society no longer recognizes as a class and is itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. ³⁹

Marx realizes that an enormous alteration of men will be necessary for the creation of a communist consciousness on a mass scale, and concludes that this can occur only in a practical movement--in a revolution: "A revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way but also because the class overthrowing it can succeed only by revolution in getting rid of all the traditional muck and become capable of establishing society anew." ⁴⁰

Communism is not, according to Marx, an ideal or a state of affairs, but the actual movement which transcends the present state of affairs--the process by which the producers regain control over the social power that is ruling their lives.

Marx After the 1848 Revolutions

In Part I, we discussed the "Communist Manifesto" as an introduction to Marx's political involvement in the 1860's and early 1870's. The Manifesto, and the writings to which we now turn--especially "Class Struggles in France"--suggest that the first stage of revolution must be a "dictatorship of the proletariat." A passage from an article which Engels published under the title "Dell' Autorità" in 1874 sums up the images that come to mind when we read of "proletarian dictatorship":

A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets, and cannon--authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. 41

This image of revolution stands in curious contradiction to that humanistic vision we have just analyzed--of communism as a process by which man transcends alienation. But then, one cannot say that Marx's thought is free of curious contradictions.

Our next task, therefore, must be to comb through Marx's post-1848 political polemics--"Class Struggles in France," "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," and "The Civil War in France"--in an effort to determine whether or not the vision of authoritarian dictatorship completely overshadows the humanistic element.

We have already spoken of the political atmosphere in Europe immediately following the suppression of the 1848 revolutions. Defeated, disappointed revolutionaries retreated into their studies to ponder what went wrong. Marx produced a series of theoretical analyses of the failure, which he published in 1850 in the "Neue Rheinische Zeitung--Politisch-Oekonomisch Revue," a newspaper he hoped would become the theoretical organ for the fresh wave of revolts which he optimistically expected within the year. When Louis Napoleon seized power on 1 December 1851, dissolved the parliament, and declared himself Emperor, Marx published a series of further analyses of the French situation, which he entitled, "The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" in reference to the date of the first Napoleon's coup d'état in 1799. ⁴²

These theoretical essays show Marx interpreting contemporary history in terms of the growing conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat which we have outlined above, and provide at the same time the theoretical point of departure for "The Civil War in France." Although Marx moves towards an increasingly decentralized model between 1850 and 1871, his historical analysis remains fundamentally consistent throughout. Indeed, we can trace one crucial passage from the "Eighteenth Brumaire," through two rough drafts, to its final, slightly altered form in "The Civil War in France." We shall strive here to integrate these analyses into one coherent account.

The principle goal of his analysis is to show the development of the two contradictory forces--"Reichtum" (to use the categories of "The Holy Family") and its negation, the "Proletariat"--towards a showdown. Since the revolutions of 1848 had clearly been a serious setback for the labor movement, he had to integrate this into his theory. As we shall

see below, he resorted to dialectics in order to show that this setback was a necessary precondition of the inevitable future revolution.

The Rise of Centralized State Power

Marx's point of departure is the rise of the modern (French) centralized state power, "with its enormous bureaucracy and military organization, with its ingenious state machinery, embracing wide strata, with a host of officials numbering a half million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body, which emmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores..."⁴³

This centralized state power was created by the nascent middle class in its struggle for emancipation from feudalism. The regulated plan of a state power, with a systematic and hierarchic division of labor substituted for the "checkered (partycolored) anarchy of conflicting medieval powers."⁴⁴

The first French Revolution broke down all local powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation, and swept away all the "medieval rubbish"⁴⁵ which had been hindering the centralization of state power and the development of the superstructure of the modern state. This resulted in the expansion of the state's "supernaturalist sway [over] real society, which in fact took the place of the medieval supernaturalist heaven, with its saints."⁴⁶ The specific interests of civil society were "separated from society itself, fixed and made independent of it and opposed to it in the form of state interest, administered by state priests with exactly determined hierarchical functions":⁴⁷

Every common interest was straightaway severed from society counterpoised to it as a higher, general interest, snatched from the activity of society's members themselves, and made an object of governmental activity, from a bridge, a schoolhouse, and the communal property of a village community to the rail-ways, the national wealth, and the national university of France. 48

This "parasitical excrescence upon civil society, pretending to be its ideal counterpoint" ⁴⁹ was perfected under Napoleon Bonaparte, when it served first to tame the forces of revolution and then to attack feudalism in the rest of Europe.

During the subsequent regimes--the Restoration and the July Monarchy (1830)--various fractions of the propertied class and the financial bourgeoisie struggled for control of this immense state household. ⁵⁰ As the division of labor within civil society created new groups of interest, the governmental division of labor grew more complex, and, with the development of the modern class struggle between capital and an increasingly radical proletariat, the political character of state power changed. State power had always been the means by which the appropriating class kept the producing class in line, but now society had entered a phase in which the masses called the subordination to their "natural superiors" into question. ⁵¹ The state power "assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a political force organized to enforce social enslavement, of a mere engine of class despotism." ⁵² After every popular revolution, which served only to transfer the direction of the state machinery from one group of the ruling classes to another, "the repressive character of the state power was more fully developed and more mercilessly used, because the promises made, and seemingly assured by the Revolution, could only be broken by the employment of force." ⁵³ The revolutions served only to

transfer the state power more directly into the hands of the direct antagonists of the working class: "All revolutions thus only perfected the state machinery instead of throwing off this deadening incubus." ⁵⁴

Under the July Monarchy, the financial bourgeoisie ruled to the disadvantage of the industrial bourgeoisie; a potato blight, crop failures, and an industrial crisis combined to precipitate the revolution of 1848, which completed the rule of the bourgeoisie by allowing the entire bourgeoisie to enter the political sphere. However: "If Paris, as a result of political centralization, rules France, the workers, in moments of revolutionary earthquakes, rule Paris." ⁵⁵ The Paris proletariat forced the bourgeoisie to go beyond the limited aims and motives which had driven them to revolution and proclaim a "social republic" based on universal suffrage. As a result "all classes of French society were suddenly hurled into the orbit of political power, forced to leave the boxes, the stalls, and the gallery and to act in person upon the revolutionary stage!" ⁵⁶

By dictating the republic to the provisional government, and through the provisional government to the whole of France, the proletariat stepped into the foreground forthwith as an independent party, but at the same time challenged the whole of bourgeois France to enter the lists against it. What it won was the terrain for the fight for its revolutionary emancipation, but by no means this emancipation itself." ⁵⁷

In 1848, the French workers thought they would be able to emancipate themselves side by side with the bourgeoisie "instead of enforcing [their own interests] as the revolutionary interests of society itself." ⁵⁸

Marx interpreted:

As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own needs drive it on.

It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task. The French working class had not yet attained this level; it was still incapable of accomplishing its own revolution. 59

The working class had not yet attained a sufficient "degree of education," and was "still incapable of going beyond the bourgeois republic otherwise than in its fancy, in imagination." 60

While the Paris proletariat was lost in contemplation of the "wide prospects that had opened before it," 61 the old powers of society regrouped their forces. The proletariat failed to perceive that universal suffrage had not turned out to be "the miracle-working magic wand for which the republican worthies had taken it," but had merely served the purpose "of tossing all the sections of the exploiting classes at one throw to the apex of the state." 62 Furthermore, this republic encountered no resistance at home or abroad, unlike the republic which had resulted from the first Revolution: "This disarmed it. Its task was no longer the revolutionary transformation of the world, but consisted only in adapting itself to the relations of bourgeois society." 63 It quickly became clear to the bourgeoisie that, if they were to maintain themselves in power, then they must "consolidate the shaky bourgeois relationships in order to fulfill obligations which are only to be fulfilled within these relationships," 64 which meant that they had to "sever the republic from the socialist concessions" 65 and nullify the political power of the proletariat.

To this end, the government "goaded" the proletariat into open rebellion in June as an excuse for strengthening the centralization of the governmental power, moving in with troops, and annihilating all aspirations for "the emancipation of the popular masses." Conflicts of interest between the various factions of the bourgeoisie were removed

by their union; the bourgeois republicans used the state power for the June massacres "in order to convince the working class the 'social' republic meant the republic ensuring their social subjection, and in order to convince the royalist bulk of the bourgeois and landlord class that they might safely leave the cares and emoluments of government to the bourgeois 'Republicans.'" ⁶⁶

Marx, interpreting these events in 1850, sees this as a necessary stage in the general movement of society towards revolution. Although he no longer writes in explicitly Hegelian terms, it is clear that the industrial bourgeoisie and the industrial proletariat are closely related dialectically--i.e. the development of one is a precondition for the development of the other. Only under bourgeois rule can the proletariat attain "that extensive national existence which can raise its revolution to a national one" and "create the modern means of production, which become just so many means of its revolutionary emancipation." ⁶⁷

Bourgeois revolutions are fast and exciting, Marx writes, but they are short-lived: after attaining a zenith, they quickly lapse into "a long crapulent depression." Proletarian revolutions, on the other hand, are slow, but thorough and self-critical. Furthermore, they seem to throw down their adversary "only in order that he may draw more strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them." "The proletarians restrain themselves, recoil from the prodigiousness of their own aims," until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible..." ⁶⁸ The proletariat had therefore to suffer defeat in 1848 in order to prepare the ground for the final showdown. Marx concludes:

What succumbed in these defeats was not the revolution. It was the prerevolutionary traditional appendages, results of social relationships which had not yet come to the point of sharp class

antagonisms--persons, illusions, projects, conceptions from which the revolutionary party before the February revolution was not free, from which it could be freed not by the victory of February, but only by a series of defeats. In a word, the revolution made progress, forged ahead, not by its immediate tragicomic achievements, but, on the contrary, by the creation of a powerful, united counterrevolution, by the creation of an opponent in combat with whom, only, the party of revolt ripened into a really revolutionary party. ⁶⁹

The June insurrection was the "first great battle" to be fought between "the two great classes that split modern society." ⁷⁰ It was a battle for the overthrow of bourgeois society itself, and the bourgeoisie won. Defeat was necessary, however, to show the proletariat that emancipation within the bourgeois republic was a utopian dream; it was necessary to create the conditions under which France could seize the initiative in the coming European revolution. For the first time in history, the proletarian class as the "party of anarchy," of socialism, of communism, was pitted against the bourgeois royalists united in the "party of order," that "most odious of all political regimes...the terrorism of class rule," whose "pretence of being...the embodiment of the general interests of societies rising above and keeping in their respective spheres the warring private interests, is exploded, that its secret as an instrument of class despotism is laid open..." ⁷¹ Henceforth, the proletariat would rally more and more around revolutionary socialism, "the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class differences generally, to the abolition of all the production relations on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these production relations, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations..." ⁷²

In creating the party of order, however, the revolution had done only half of the job. The anonymous form of government was to be superceded:

First [the revolution] perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. ⁷³

Indeed, the party of order was doomed to be a transitional phase, for "all the weapons which [the bourgeoisie] had forged against feudalism turned their points against itself." ⁷⁴ All of the bourgeois liberties and organs of progress "attacked and menaced its class rule at its social foundation and its political summit simultaneously, and had therefore become 'socialistic.'" Under a parliamentary regime which "lives in struggle and by struggle," bourgeois freedoms pose a serious threat, for they invite dissent from the lower ranks and encourage feuds among the rulers--dissent which "paralyzes society, disgust and bewilders the masses of the middle-class and 'troubles' business, keeps them in a chronic state of disquietude." ⁷⁶ This leads naturally to the following conclusion:

...by now stigmatizing as "socialistic" what it had previously extolled as "liberal," the bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the danger of its own rule; that in order to restore tranquillity in the country its bourgeois Parliament must, first of all, be given its quietus; that in order to preserve its social power intact its political power must be broken; that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion, and order only on condition that his class be condemned along with the other classes to like political nullity; that in order to save its purse it must forfeit the crown, and the sword that is to safeguard it must at the same time be hung over its own head as a sword of Damocles. ⁷⁷

The hour has struck for the coup d'état which puts an end to

the anonymous form of class rule and makes it possible for a "grotesque mediocrity" like Louis Bonaparte to play a hero's part. However: "No Circe, by means of black magic, has distorted that work of art, the bourgeois republic, into a monstrous shape"--the empire is the natural result of social development. The bourgeoisie created the conditions for the empire by undermining its own parliamentary power, and "it required only a bayonet thrust for the bubble to burst and the monster to spring forth before our eyes." 78

State power thus received its "last and supreme expression" in the Second Empire; "Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent." Apparently the final victory of governmental power over society, it was at the same time "the orgy of all the corrupt elements of that society." 80

However, this empire was similarly doomed to be only a transient phase in the development towards a higher unity; it was "the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation." 81

Marx has traced the development of centralized state power from the days of absolute monarchy, when it served the nascent middle class as a means to break down feudalism and then to subject the working class to the rule of capital. All revolutions and reactions in the nineteenth century merely served to transfer governmental power from one faction of the ruling class to the other. The 1848 revolution brought the entire bourgeoisie to power and sharpened its dialectical contradiction to the proletariat, thus preparing the ground for the coming proletarian revolu-

revolution. The bourgeoisie, however, found that the parliamentary system, which thrives on conflict, was incompatible with their need for order, and accordingly they undermined their own political position in favor of the executive, thus preparing the ground for Louis Napoleon's coup d'etat. The supreme expression of centralized state power was reached in the Second Empire; the state appeared now as a force completely independent from, and superior to, society.

Historical movement does not stop here; this empire was also destined to be superceded.

The Paris Commune

To this parasitic growth degrading and fettering society, Marx opposes "the true antithesis to the Empire itself," "its definite negation, and, therefore, the initiation of the social revolution of the nineteenth century"--the Paris Commune:

[It was] the reabsorption of the state power by society as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression--the political form of their social emancipation, instead of the artificial force (appropriated by their oppressors) (their own force opposed to and organized against them) of society wielded for their oppression by their enemies. 82

The Commune was the positive form of the "social republic" which the triumphant bourgeoisie had betrayed after the February Revolution. It was a revolution not against "this or that" Legitimate, Constitutional, Republican, or Imperialist form of state power, but rather: "It was a revolution against the state itself, this supernatural abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life." It was not a revolution to transfer control of the state

from one fraction of the ruling classes to the other, "but a revolution to break down this horrid machinery of class domination itself." ⁸³

How did the Paris proletariat go about accomplishing this historic task? Marx points to several features of the Communal government which, he felt, demonstrated that the Commune was "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor." ⁸⁴

The Commune made "that catchword of bourgeois revolutions, 'cheap government,'" ⁸⁵ a reality by amputating the merely repressive organs of the old government and by wresting legitimate functions from that "authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself" ⁸⁶ and restoring them to the responsible agents of society. Paris was able to defend itself, Marx explains, only because it had gotten rid of the army and replaced it with a National Guard. The Commune transformed this fact into an institution by suppressing the standing army and substituting for it the "armed people." Thus, as Marx explains in the first draft, the Commune began with an "immense saving, with economic reform as well as political transformation." ⁸⁷

Not only was the standing army replaced, but the functions of the "army of state-parasites," the "richly paid sycophants and sinecurists" ⁸⁸ were restored to living society. The delusion "as if administration and political governing were mysteries, transcendent functions only to be trusted to the hands of a trained caste" ⁸⁹ was shattered. Mock responsibility was replaced by a real responsibility. Public functions ceased to be the private concern of a central government independent from society and the vested interests of high functionaries disappeared. The Commune achieved all this by paying public servants no more than a worker's wage.

The new administrators of society, furthermore, did not pretend to infallibility, "the invariable attribute of all governments of the old stamp,"⁹⁰ but were responsible for keeping the public informed of its proceedings and admitting to its inevitable shortcomings. The general population, in its turn, gained the right to recall any official who shirked these responsibilities. Universal suffrage was no longer abused as a tool for the "parliamentary sanction of the Holy State Power":⁹¹

Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers for his business. And it is well known that companies, like individuals, in matters of real business generally know how to put the right man in the right place, and if they for once make a mistake to redress it promptly.⁹²

Marx stresses here, we note, that "nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture."⁹³

The unnecessarily complex division of labor at the governmental level was to be simplified: "The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time."⁹⁴ Judicial functionaries were to be divested of that "sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments"⁹⁵ and made subject to recall; the police ceased to be the servants of the government and became the "responsible and at all times revocable" Communal agents. The Commune broke that spiritual force of repression--the "parson power"--by confiscating church properties and sending the priests back into the "recesses of private life." Purged of this ideological bias, the schools were to open their doors to all; science was to be "freed from [the] fetters imposed by class prejudice

and governmental force." ⁹⁶

The Commune had aimed, Marx claims, at the "expropriation of the expropriators": the abolition of "that class property which makes the labor of the many the wealth of the few" by "transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labor, into mere instruments of free and associated labor." ⁹⁷ However, Marx cannot support this assertion convincingly with reference to the Commune's financial policy. Indeed, he must admit that the financial measures taken by the Commune were remarkable for their "sagacity and moderation," but offers the excuse that they could be only such "as were compatible with the state of a besieged town." ⁹⁸ The social measures which Marx cites here include the prohibition of night-work in bakeries and the transfer of abandoned workshops and factories to cooperatives.

If the Commune was essentially a working-class government, however, it did not represent the interests of the proletariat exclusively. In the first draft, Marx refers to the Communal revolution as the "representative of all classes of society not living upon foreign* labor." ⁹⁹ This was the first revolution, Marx explains, in which the bulk of the Parisian middle class rallied around the workmen's revolution and acknowledged it as "the only means of [its] own salvation and that of France." ¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, he warns: "Whether the gratitude of this great body of the middle class will stand the present severe trial, time must show." ¹⁰¹

Marx considered the Commune to be "politically expansive" ¹⁰² and speculated both about Communal organization on the national level and about the status of the peasantry in this new society.

* Marx means "the labor of others."

The Paris Commune was to serve as a model for industrial centers all over France: once established in the nation's capital, "the old centralized government would, in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers." ¹⁰³ Even the smallest country hamlet was to adopt a communal form of government. A constant, rapid turnover in the ranks of the national militia was to insure against a resurrection of the army. The few functions remaining for central government were to be managed by the Communes, which would retain the power to levy taxes. ¹⁰⁴

Marx insisted that this decentralized system was a completely new historical creation, not a counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life: one must confuse it neither with the medieval commune, which first preceded, and afterwards became the substratum of modern society, nor with attempts to break up great nations into a federation of small states, nor with the ancient struggle against overcentralization.

Marx saw no contradiction between communal decentralization and general social unity; indeed, a "communal constitution" was to make this unity a reality by destroying state power. ¹⁰⁵ The constitution was designed to dissolve that "factitious unitarian system" so far as it was "the antagonist of the real living union of France and a mere means of class rule." ¹⁰⁶ Rural communes were to send delegates to central towns, which in turn were to send deputies to a national delegation in Paris. Marx was confident that the constant threat of recall and the mandat impératif would keep elected deputies in line and insure that they represented not their own interests, but those of their constituency.

He never denied the need for bureaucracy--certain essential governmental functions would remain, even after a revolution--but was confident that the people would be able to retain a truly democratic control over the system, that, under a decentralized, communal system, the state could never again turn into a power independent of, and superior to, living society.

By specifying that the Commune was to represent all classes which did not live off of foreign labor, Marx declared his intention to integrate the peasantry into this new society. Although he had often scorned "the idiocy of rural life" and the "clumsily cunning, knavishly naive, doltishly sublime" character of the "class that represents barbarism within civilization," ¹⁰⁷ Marx clearly recognized that the success of a proletarian revolution would depend on the cooperation of the peasantry. Marx addressed the "peasant question" in the first draft of "The Civil War in France":

There exists of course in France as in most continental countries a deep antagonism between the townish and rural producers, between the industrial proletariat and the peasantry. The aspirations of the Proletariat, the material basis of its movement is labor organized on a grand scale, although now despotically organized and the means of production centralized, although now centralized in the hands of the monopolist, not only as a means of production, but as a means of the exploitation and enslavement of the producteur. ¹⁰⁸

The proletariat must therefore transform the capitalist character of the centralized organization of production from the means of class rule into forms of "free associated labor."

The peasant, however, finds himself in a completely different situation due to the diffuseness and isolation of small-holdings; a whole world of different social and political views rests "superconstructed" on these economic differences. In the "Eighteenth Brumaire," Marx describes the peasant mentality that allowed Louis Bonaparte to come to power. The small-holding peasants, he explains, live under similar conditions, but in isolation from one another. Self-sufficient peasant families acquire

their means of life "more through exchange than in intercourse with society.":
 "In this way the great mass of the French nation is formed by simple addition
 of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes." 109

This small-holding property forms a suitable basis for an
 oppressive bureaucracy. By creating a "uniform level of relationships
 and persons over the whole surface of the land," it permits of "uniform
 action from a supreme center on all points of this uniform mass." 110
 By annihilating the aristocratic intermediate grades between the mass of
 the people and the state power, "it calls forth the direct interference
 of this state power and the interposition of its immediate organs." 111

Their social conditions thus dictate that peasants play a reactionary role:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions
 of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests,
 and their culture from those of the other classes and put them
 in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far
 as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding
 peasants and the identity of their interests begets no community,
 no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do
 not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their
 class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or
 through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be
 represented. Their representation must at the same time appear as
 their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited government
 power that protects them against the other classes and sends them
 rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-
 holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the
 executive power subordinating society to itself. 112

The peasants brought Louis Napoleon to power, Marx explains, "because the
 Great Revolution, with all its benefits to him, was, in his eyes, personi-
 fied in Napoleon." 113 This delusion, however, rapidly faded under the
 conditions of the Second Empire. Marx describes this process in the first
 draft:

...this peasant proprietorship...has entered its period of decay.
 On the one side a large proletariat foncier (rural proletariat) has
 grown out of it whose interests are identical with those of the
 townish wage laborers. The mode of production itself has become
 superannated by the modern progress of agronomy. Lastly--the peasant

proprietorship itself has become nominal, leaving to the peasant the delusion of proprietorship and expropriating him from the fruits of his own labor. The competition of the great farm producers, the bloodtax, the state tax, the usury of the townish mortgagee and the multitudinous pilfering of the judiciary system thrown around him, have degraded him to the position of a Hindoo Ryot, while expropriation...and his degradation into a rural proletarian is an everyday fact. 114

As small-holding property falls increasingly under the sway of capital, the bourgeoisie, which has previously set the state to stand guard over the small-holding, becomes "a vampire that sucks out its blood and brains and throws them into the alchemistic cauldron of capital," 115 with the result that "what separates the peasant from the proletarian is...no longer his real interest, but his delusive prejudice." 116

Marx concludes that "the parody of the empire [Imperialismus] was necessary to free the mass of the French nation from the weight of tradition and to work out in pure form the opposition between the state power and society." 117 Once the peasants would realize that their interests are no longer in accord with, but opposed to the bourgeoisie, then they would look to the proletariat as the "natural trustees of their interests."

The Paris Commune, by replacing the parasitic state apparatus with the communal system, would liberate all of society--i.e. all classes of society not living off of the labor of others, which includes the peasantry--from the oppressive state power. In a passage which he omitted from the second edition of the Eighteenth Brumaire in 1869, Marx explains that the peasants would help make the revolution, but that centralization would continue to be an important feature of the new society:

The demolition of the state machine will not endanger centralization. Bureaucracy is only the low and brutal form of a centralization that is still afflicted with its opposite, with feudalism. When he is disappointed in the Napoleonic Restoration, the French peasant will part with his belief in his small-holding, the entire state edifice

erected on this small-holding will fall to the ground and the proletarian revolution will obtain that chorus without which its solo song becomes a swan-song in all peasant countries. 118

Although Marx may have felt in 1869 that this passage overstated the need for centralization, it is clear that he retained the notion that urban areas would continue to provide intellectual leadership after the revolution.

Once the workers would establish communal organization on a natural scale, Marx was confident that no government would be able to suppress the movement by a sudden reaction, although the new society might still have to undergo "sporadic slaveholders insurrections, which, while for a moment interrupting the work of peaceful progress, would only accelerate the movement, by putting the sword into the hands of the Social Revolution." 119 The "regeneration" of society would be by no means instantaneous, but only "the progressive work of time," for progress would be impeded by the "resistance of veiled interests and class egotisms." 120

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce par decret du peuple. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances, and men. 121

Marx does not attempt to describe how the victorious proletariat would go about reshaping the systems of distribution and production after the revolution; he was convinced that the solutions to these problems would present themselves as the workers "set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society [was] pregnant." 122 In the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy of 1859, Marx explains:

No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve; since, on closer examination, it will always be found that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. 123

After the revolution, therefore, the "spontaneous action of the natural laws of capital and landed property" would be superseded by the "spontaneous action of the laws of the social economy of free and associated labor," 124 and the workers would free the social forms of production of their capitalist character and establish a harmonious national and international coordination of production under a common plan.

This transformation, Marx emphasizes, is not instantaneous. The new society must grow out of a "long process of development of new conditions." 125 The Commune is but the first stage of this great transformation: it was not the final solution, but part of a process; it was not the instant negation of capitalist society but a "lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule." 126 We recall the passage from The German Ideology cited above:

For the production of this communist consciousness on a mass scale and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is required. This can only take place in a practical movement, in a revolution. A revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way but also because the class overthrowing it can succeed only by revolution in getting rid of all the traditional muck and become capable of establishing society anew. 127

The greatest social measure of the Commune was therefore "its own working existence," "extemporized with the Foreign Enemy at one door, and the

class enemy at the other, proving by its life its vitality, confirming its thesis by its action." ¹²⁸ Marx becomes poetic when he wishes to convey the contrast between "living Paris" and the "putrescent cadaver" of the Empire:

Wonderful, indeed, was the change the Commune had wrought in Paris! No longer any trace of the meretricious Paris of the Second Empire. No longer was Paris the rendezvous of British landlords, Irish absentees, American ex-slaveholders and shoddy men, Russian ex-serf owners, and Wallachian boyars. No more corpses at the morgue, no nocturnal burglaries, scarcely any robberies; in fact, for the first time since the days of February, 1848, the streets of Paris were safe, and that without police of any kind... The cocottes had refound the scent of their protectors--the absconding men of family, religion, and, above all, of property. In their stead the real women of Paris showed again at the surface--heroic, noble, and devoted, like the women of antiquity. Working, thinking, fighting, bleeding Paris--almost forgetful, in its incubation of a new society, of the cannibals at its gates--radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative!

Such passages remind us of the humanist origins of Marx's thought; how is this to be reconciled with the idea of oppressive dictatorship?

Let us recapitulate the sequence of ideas which brings us to this point.

Early in the 1840's, Marx discovers, in the process of criticizing Hegel, that the particular interests of the members of civil society stand in contradiction to the universal interests of the state. How is one to transcend this? he asks himself. The answer: by making the particular interest universal, by the invasion of civil society en masse into the legislative power. Only in universal suffrage does civil society rise to political existence as its true universal existence.

In "On the Jewish Question," Marx introduces new terms--man is now alienated from his species-being; in order to actualize his existence as a species-being, man must go beyond politics and change the infra-

structure of society.

Marx becomes a socialist as he comes into contact with the French labor movement. He studies political economy, becomes increasingly aware of historical movement, and gradually relates his abstract, Hegelian categories to historical entities: he begins a class analysis of history. His conclusion: social classes with particular interests who make a revolution can emancipate only part of society; Marx looks for a class which possesses a universal character and seizes upon the nascent urban proletariat as the class destined to emancipate humanity. Marx inherits from Hegel a theoretical framework of conflicting, self-negating categories and sees an antagonism developing between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat--an antagonism which is developing towards a point at which revolution will become the possible and necessary means whereby society will regain control over the state apparatus which has turned into an alien, hostile force.

In the late 1840's, Marx develops a highly centralized vision of a dictatorship of the proletariat. Hegel has encouraged him to believe that the proletariat can transcend its own class rule--that a despotic dictatorship would be a necessary but transient stage on the way towards the abolition of classes.

In view of the failures of 1848, Marx resorts to dialectics in order to show that the defeats were necessary to prepare the stage for an ultimate showdown. He analyzes the rise of centralized state power in the nineteenth century and concludes that state power has reached its supreme expression in the Second Empire.

Throughout the 1860's, Marx's attitude towards the International shows that he is willing to tolerate a wide range of political views in

order to build a coalition of workers' organizations against a common class enemy, although he fights for the dominance of his own theory.

Two decades after his coup d'etat, Louis Napoleon is lured into declaring war on Germany, a nation which has in the meantime become much more powerful than France. Napoleon is captured, and the provisional government which takes over angers the patriotic Parisians by making it clear that it wishes to make peace with the Prussians. An armistice is announced and the provisional government attempts to regain control of Paris from the lower and middle classes, which were armed for defense during the Prussian invasion. A clumsy attempt to disarm the proletarian National Guard backfires and Paris rises in revolt, chasing out the provisional government. After two months of siege, the provisional government retakes Paris and martyrs the Communards.

Marx siezes upon this as an example of proletarian revolution and writes an essay in which he describes what he means by "dictatorship of the proletariat." The ideology of the Commune reflected the anarchistic sympathies of the French working class: Marx takes over much of this and develops a highly decentralized vision of proletarian revolution. The radically democratic system of representative assemblies, self-government of the producers, and direct election of government functionaries which he depicts reminds us of his conclusion of 1843--that civil society must invade the legislative power en masse--only in this model, universal suffrage is not enough; the proletariat can overcome the duality of living society versus state power only in the act of revolution.

The recognition that peasants are not simply a dying breed has led Marx to incorporate the peasantry into his revolutionary system. The peasant, he reasons, is daily being degraded to the status of a "rural proletariat," so that only prejudice separates his interests from those of the proletarian. The Communal revolution represents the interests of all classes exploited by the bourgeoisie--the peasantry included.

In his polemic, Marx writes that the "cannibals" of the old government are distinguished by the violence they inflict upon the Communards. In sharp contrast, the only trace we find of dictatorial violence on the part of the Communards is a reference to the repression of occasional "slaveholders' rebellions," which will accelerate the course of social transformation by putting the "sword" into the hands of the "Social Revolution."

It is with this sequence of thought--with all of its inherent contradictions and gray areas--in mind, that we turn to Bakunin's critique.

NOTES: II

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⁷"Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State," in: Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, eds. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 183.

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¹³"Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State," p. 187.

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¹⁵Ibid., p. 202.

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PART III

MARX FACES BAKUNIN'S CRITIQUE OF "AUTHORITARIAN COMMUNISM"

The Collapse of the International

When "The Civil War in France" appeared shortly after the fall of the Paris Commune, the force of its rhetoric shocked every respectable bourgeois to the core. London might well have ignored the appearance of yet another revolutionary polemic, however, had Marx not published it in the name of an international organization whose publicly expressed aim was the economic emancipation of the working class through the conquest of political power. In the conclusion to the pamphlet, Marx strongly suggested that the International was responsible for the catastrophe:

The police-tinged bourgeois mind naturally figures to itself the International Working Men's Association as acting in the manner of a secret conspiracy, its central body ordering, from time to time, explosions in different countries. Our association is, in fact, nothing but the international bond between the most advanced working men in various countries of the civilized world. Wherever, in whatever shape, and under whatever conditions the class struggle obtains any consistency, it is but natural that members of our association should stand in the foreground. The soil out of which it grows is modern society itself. It cannot be stamped out by any amount of carnage. To stamp it out, the governments would have to stamp out the despotism of capital over labor--the condition of their own parasitical existence. ¹

Although, as we have noted above, the International actually played a very limited role in the Paris Commune, its visibility made it a scapegoat in the eyes of bourgeois Europe. Jules Favre, Thiers' Foreign Minister, could convincingly depict the International as a threat to civilization itself. In the imagination of European statesman, the spectre of the International assumed mammoth proportions, until Bismarck even attempted to mobilize France, Austria, and the Papacy against it in a Holy Alliance. ²

In reality, the International was on the verge of collapse,

but the threat to its unity came not from the outside--from the forces of the European reaction--but from the inside: the International was rent with factional disputes.

When Thiers brutally slaughtered about 14,000 Communards and imprisoned another 10,000, he effectively defused the French labor movement for a generation and dashed the hopes of European revolutionaries for "another 1848."³ Moreover, France had been the real center of the International's revolutionary activity; with its unifying force gone, the remaining national federations were left to contend with each other for control of what was left.

Marx watched his own power base crumble. He had always relied heavily on the British for support, but, by associating the International with such an "atrocious" as the Paris Commune, he alienated the more "respectable" British Trade Unionists, who were content with working through Parliament for reforms and were becoming increasingly annoyed with his revolutionary rhetoric.

More importantly, however, Bakunin posed a growing threat to Marx's leadership. There were real differences of attitude between the Bakuninists and the Marxists. Although personal factors undoubtedly played an important role in the dispute, we shall avoid these problems and focus on the underlying theoretical issues, for, as the historian Julius Braunthal duly notes, "This rather unpleasant episode in the war of the Titans belongs to the biographies of the main protagonists rather than to a history of the International."⁴

Marx was convinced to the point of obsession that Bakunin was concocting a conspiracy against him and convened a private conference in September of 1871 to discuss the matter. The document that resulted from this conference--a revolution in favor of working-class political action--provoked an immediate response from the predominantly Bakunist French-Swiss Federation, which accused the General Council of trying "to introduce the principle of authority into the International," called on all federations to hold a congress in order to reduce the role of the General Council to that of a correspondence center, and demanded unification "by a free association of autonomous groups instead of by centralization and dictatorship."⁵ Marx and Engels drafted their rebuttal, a circular entitled "Les prétendues Scissions dans l'Internationale" in time for the Hague Congress of September, 1872.

At the Hague, the conflict between the Marxists and the Bakuninists dominated the agenda. Because the Bakuninists were under-represented, Marx was able to score several impressive victories: the powers of the General Council were increased--and the Bakuninists were expelled. Marx realized, however, that his position was tenuous at best. Determined to preserve the ideological integrity of the International at all costs, he pushed through a resolution to transfer the seat of the General Council from London to New York, reasoning, in private, that in America it would at least be safe from the influence of "the forces of dissolution"⁶--i.e., Blanquists and anarchists--who wanted to take over and use the International for their own conspiratorial purposes. For Marx it was a Pyrrhic victory: he had saved his International, but only at the cost of destroying its influence on the

European political scene.

The International Working Man's Association had attempted to imbue an increasingly nationalist age with a spirit of internationalism. The failure of this experiment in 1872 meant the fragmentation of the European labor movement into autonomous national parties.

Partly because it had already been developing independently, along national lines, German labor was best prepared to weather this crisis. As Marx had predicted at the outset of the Franco-Prussian war, Germany replaced France as the European labor movement's "center of gravity," and, in a broader, historical sense, this insured the predominance of his theory over Proudhon's. The unprecedented success which the two chief proletarian parties--the followers of Lassalle and the Marxist followers of Liebknecht--enjoyed at the polls brought the wrath of Bismarck upon them both and provided them with powerful incentives to iron out ideological differences and combine forces.

Contrary to popular belief, Marx did not control German Social Democracy from his base in London--he remained influential chiefly as a theoretician, as Engels explained in a letter to Bebel:

People imagine, indeed, that we issue our orders for the whole business from here, while you know as well as I that we hardly ever interfere in internal Party affairs in the smallest way, and even then only in order to make good, so far as is possible, blunders, and only theoretical blunders, which have in our opinion been committed. ⁷

Marx's life became much calmer in his last decade. Now that he was free from obligations to the International, he turned back to his neglected economic studies and plunged into a rigorous regime of study, as he had done in his youth--only now his constitution was too old to

withstand the strain. His obsessional reading led to nervous disorders, but he was determined to flesh out his sketches on ground-rent for the third volume of Capital with analyses of the Russian situation. He taught himself Russian in order to study original sources, which he obtained from a friend in Petersburg, and worked his way through countless books on agronomics and economic institutions, filling almost three thousand pages with his microscopic handwriting. Marx absorbed a lot during these years, but his physical infirmities prevented him from condensing his studies into a readable form.

It is not surprising that Marx turned to Russia at this time in history. Culturally and intellectually, Russia was blossoming, and the liberal atmosphere which followed the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 was encouraging the political opposition. To Marx's delight, the Tsarist censors admitted Capital into Russia, reasoning that "few would read it and fewer would understand it."⁸ As Marx had always regarded Russia as the most reactionary state in Europe, it must have astonished him when the first Russian edition sold out almost immediately. Indeed, Russia's increasingly revolutionary situation forced Marx to rethink his entire theory of proletarian revolution, for Russian populists were unwilling to wait for a bourgeois revolution and sought instead to instigate a peasant revolution in order to bypass the throes of Western-style industrialization.⁹

Statism and Anarchy

In Switzerland, Mikhail Bakunin followed these developments in Russia with growing interest, but old age and--increasingly--ill health prevented him from taking an active part in the activities of the

Russian exile community. He was exhausted from a lifetime of struggle and the collapse of the International had not produced anything that would give him grounds for optimism.

In response to the Hague Congress, the expelled libertarian elements had formed an alternative congress in St.-Imier, Switzerland. The resulting organization, optimistically referred to as a "free union of federations," declared "the destruction of all political power" to be the first duty of the proletariat. Bakunin could feel satisfied that his program was finally being adopted; however, nothing held these diverse groups together but a vaguely-defined "pact of friendship, solidarity, and mutual defense." The congress was conducted lifelessly, and the delegates scattered in all directions when it was over. When Bakunin retired quietly to the Italian-Swiss town of Locarno, his newly-founded "secret societies" evaporated into thin air; internal dissent broke up the small band of followers he left behind in Zurich. ¹⁰

Bakunin led a quiet life in Locarno. He received visitors and corresponded at length with his followers--although his influence was limited to Southern Europe. Only in Spain, where his anarchism harmonized admirably with the local belief that country townships could function just as well without governmental interference, did Bakunin's ideas really strike root. ¹¹

Bakunin formally retired from active politics. The arrest of an exiled Russian revolutionary in Zurich convinced him that he too was in danger of being arrested and deported to Russia, which frightened him into seeking Swiss citizenship and assuming a harmless, "respectable" bourgeois appearance. Upon retiring from the (dissident) International,

he wrote to his comrades in the Jura-Federation: "By birth and personal status, though not by sympathy or inclination, I am merely a bourgeois, and the only work I can do in your midst is, therefore, propaganda." ¹² For Bakunin it was a time to reflect and to write; it is the fruit of these final literary efforts to which we now turn.

In the space of three months in 1873, Bakunin prepared a manuscript which friends of his published in Geneva under the title, Gosudarstvennost i anarchija (Statism and Anarchy). This was the only book that Bakunin, who, like most cultured Russians, had grown up speaking French, ever wrote in Russian; it was also the last book he published before his death in 1876. ¹³ The work's unfinished, repetitious style betrays the fact that he wrote the book in a great hurry, and it is obvious in many passages that he is relying exclusively on his own faulty memory for citations. There are numerous references in the text to a second part, which he probably started to write, but which has since been lost.

Despite all of its shortcomings, the book is one of the most comprehensive statements of Bakunin's mature anarchist ideas. He wanted to win over a generation of Russian revolutionaries to anarchism, and we detect in the text little of the disappointment and defeat which he must have felt at the time, and which was increasingly to haunt him in his final years.

Statism and Anarchy is by no means systematic or consistent in its approach. Nevertheless, Bakunin demonstrates at least a superficial understanding of European history--the text is full of references to specific events--and provides us with enough material for a direct comparison of Marx and Bakunin's historical interpretations.

Bakunin, like Marx, acknowledges the importance of the French Revolution, which has created a new ideal--the ideal of "total human freedom." The revolution was limited in its goals, however, for it sought human freedom on an exclusively political plane. "Political freedom without economic equality," he writes, "and political freedom generally (i.e., freedom in a state), is a falsehood." ¹⁴

Bakunin calls for social revolution. As with Marx, the battle lines transcend national boundaries and we find the same sort of dialectical opposition between the proletariat and privileged classes. Where Marx stresses historical movement, however, Bakunin stresses the passions:

There is no doubt that it here appears with terrible clarity, that from now on there can be no conciliation between the savage, hungry proletariat and the enlightened and educated world of the privileged classes. The proletariat is possessed by social-revolutionary passions, is unhesitatingly striving towards the creation of another world on the basis of principles of human truth, justice, freedom, equality, and brotherhood--the lasting principles of an orderly society (if they are not to be viewed as the innocent topic of history lessons). The privileged classes, with desperate energy, defend the state, legal, metaphysical, theological, and military-police order as the last stronghold preserving the profitable privilege of economic exploitation at the present time. Between these two worlds, between the unskilled laborers and educated society (which unites in itself, is wellknown, all possible quality, beauty, and virtue), there can be no conciliation. This war, this life and death struggle, can only end in a decisive victory of one of the two sides, in a decisive destruction of the opposition; and not just in France, but in the whole of Europe. ¹⁵

Bakunin, like Marx, interpreted the June insurrection of 1848 as the first rumbling, and the Paris Commune as yet another manifestation of that strong, popular feeling which "unfolds before the frightened world as a bottomless chasm preparing to swallow the entire present structure of society," ¹⁶ but he does not relate this "unfolding" of revolutionary feeling to the broader economic development of society.

His outrage against the "better classes" is timeless.

Bakunin does not depict the state, which appears to have assumed an independent existence and oppresses living society, as the product of man's own activity. Unlike Marx, who writes that man originally created the state while, at the same time, progressively losing control over his own creation, Bakunin does not make this connection. To him, two worlds are engaged in a life and death struggle--"the savage, hungry proletariat" and "the enlightened and educated world of the privileged classes." Bakunin interprets this struggle in terms of "that simple truth, the explanation and confirmation of which [one can] read on any page of history, that to render harmless any kind of political power, to pacify or suppress it, there is but one means available-- to destroy it." ¹⁷ [emphasis mine]

This is not to say, however, that Bakunin does not have a somewhat consistent theoretical approach; on the contrary, the conceptual framework in light of which he interprets contemporary development can be perceived behind every page of his analysis. It is not difficult to enumerate the stages of his argument; the difficulty lies in extracting this theoretical outlook from the historical accounts in which it is so inextricably entangled. We have discussed Marx in this manner-- by moving from the abstract categories which he developed in his youth to the more concrete historical analysis of his maturity. We shall attempt to discriminate between these two levels of discourse in Statism and Anarchy.

The title betrays the thrust of his argument. Bakunin strives to show throughout the book that there are two poles towards which human society can develop--towards a condition of statehood, or towards

anarchy.

His point of departure is a "rebellious instinct" in the "people." The educated world of the bourgeoisie must control this instinct; they must "subdue and enslave the rebellious popular element so as to control it by means of bayonet, knout, and lash, blessed by some kind of deity..."¹⁸ To this end, the bourgeoisie maintains states, the single aim of which is "the most extensive exploitation of the people's labor by monopoly capitalism...which is the rule of the financial aristocracy under the powerful control of fiscal, bureaucratic, and police authority."¹⁹ This bureaucratic state "strives by the necessity of its inner being to seize, to subjugate, to stifle all that exists, lives, moves, and breathes around it."²⁰

Centralization is necessary in order to erect this exploitive state. Capitalist production and bank speculation are continually forced to expand their limits to the detriment of the small-scale production which they absorb as they strive to become "monopolistic, universal, and international."²¹

Similarly, the modern state is "in its essence" a military, hence a conquering state: "If it does not itself conquer, then it will be conquered, for the simple reason that where there is force then, without fail, it must be displayed or activated. From this again it follows that the state must certainly be a huge and mighty state, which is the necessary condition of its preservation."²²

Bakunin does not distinguish between different forms of the state--"no matter how gilded," each is "a bitter pill for freedom."²³ This is the most he can say:

A distinction does exist between monarchy and the most democratic republic. In the former the world of civil servants oppresses and robs the people for the greater benefit of the property-owning classes, and their own pockets, in the name of the monarch. In a republic it will oppress and rob the people, in exactly the same way, for those same pockets and classes, but now in the name of the people's will. In a republican imaginary "people," the people as defined by the laws and allegedly represented by the state, smothers the living and real people. In future, however, it will be no easier for the people if the lash with which it is beaten is called "the people's lash." ²⁴

When Bakunin wrote this, Bismarck was the head of the most powerful nation in the world (in military terms); Bakunin thus identifies the principles of statehood with a definite geographic area--the German Reich. He watches the growth of Germany with a sense of moral outrage:

That all the worst principles, all depravity, all the reasons for internal collapse, inescapably bound up with vast political centralization, will begin, and have already begun, to develop in Germany, can be doubted by no one. Even less is it possible to doubt the process of moral and intellectual decay that is happening before everybody's eyes. One has only to read the German journals, the most conservative or moderate, to find everywhere terrifying descriptions of the debauchery which has seized the German public, which is reputed to be the most honest in the world. ²⁵

In another passage, he states directly that Germany "presents and combines wholly within itself one of the two poles of the contemporary socio-political movement; namely, the pole of statism, of the state, of reaction. ²⁶

Bakunin devotes almost one half of Statism and Anarchy to a somewhat shoddy analysis of German history--in particular, of the rise and fall of German liberalism in the nineteenth century. We shall present here only his conclusions.

The Germans are characterized by two apparently contradictory, but in reality inseparable elements, Bakunin writes, a "slave-instinct of obedience at any price," and a "master-instinct of subjugating to oneself everything that is weaker." ²⁷ The Germans have never wanted freedom, he

explains:

Life without government is simply unthinkable for them (i.e., without a higher will, mind, and iron hand to order them around). The stronger the iron hand the prouder they are, and the happier life becomes for them. It is not the absence of a freedom for which they could never find use which bothers them, but the absence of a single, indivisible, national power above the many small tyrannies. Their subconscious passion and single goal is the creation of a huge, all-powerful, pan-Germanic state before which all other peoples will tremble. 28

In another passage, Bakunin seems to think that the Germans originally had natural social-revolutionary instincts, but that the bourgeois labor leaders have "confused" the proletariat and diverted their passions into nationalism. It is this nationalism which dominates even churches and universities, which makes Germany "the ultimate word of bourgeois-statist centralization, of bourgeois civilization." 29 The working-class leader Lassalle cooperates with Bismarck for nationalist ends, and "the basis of the union is provided by Marx's theory: namely, a single, vast, strongly-centralized state." 30

At the other extreme, Bakunin sees in the masses of "unskilled workers" of the "backward" countries of Europe the potential for a social-revolutionary uprising.

According to his theory, we recall, states are by their very nature expansive. Two states cannot coexist in the long run--one must yield to the other. Bakunin, accordingly, evaluates the relative strengths and weaknesses of the European countries--as states--and comes to the general conclusion that no state is capable of standing up to Germany as a state. Neighboring peoples can halt German expansion only by opposing to it the force of social revolution. Bakunin has some hope that the Slavic nations and the peoples of the north-west--of Belgium, Holland, and England--will rally to the banner of social revolution, but he looks

primarily to southern Europe: to France, to Spain, and, above all, to Italy. Marx expects revolution from the urban proletariat; Bakunin looks to other classes:

There does not exist in Italy (as there does in many other European countries) a special workers stratum, partially privileged because of higher pay, boasting of some degree of literate education, and so saturated with bourgeois principles, strivings, and vanity that the working people belonging to it distinguish themselves from bourgeois persons only in their situation, and in no way in their orientation. In Germany and Switzerland, especially, there are many such workers. In Italy, in contrast, there are very few; so few that they are lost in the mass without the least trace or influence. Italy is dominated by that miserable proletariat (lumpenproletariat) to which Messrs. Marx and Engels, and following them a whole school of Social Democrats in Germany, refer with profound scorn--but completely in vain. For in it, and only in it, by no means in the above-mentioned bourgeois stratum of the working class, is contained the entire force of the social revolution. 31

Bakunin's faith in the Italian lumpenproletariat is a reflection of his own popularity in Italy; his "theory" conforms to this fact. Bakunin ties his theory of revolution not to that class which is being created by industrialization, but to an indelible mass of discontented elements which Marx scornfully refers to in the "Manifesto" as "that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society," 32 and the peasantry, the class whose existence is most directly threatened by "progress." To Bakunin, these classes are still fresh and uncorrupted, whereas the urban proletariat is caught in a process of "bourgeoisification" which makes it increasingly reactionary.

Bakunin agrees with Marx on one crucial point: it is not sufficient for a people to seek its emancipation behind society's back, in a slow and systematic restructuring of society; the sheer inertia of the capitalist system dooms such limited efforts to failure. Both agree that the process of revolution is necessary. Marx, however, stresses

the creative aspect of revolution, whereas Bakunin has a passion for destruction. Revolutionary violence is necessary to liberate the people; all corrupt institutions must be swept away in one millennial act:

A rising of the people--elemental, chaotic and merciless in nature--always involves a great expenditure and sacrifice in property--its own and that of others. The popular masses are always prepared for such sacrifices. For this reason they make up a crude and savage force which is ready to accomplish feats and to achieve goals which seem impossible. Because they have little or no property, they are not swayed by it. When it is necessary, for defense or for victory, they do not hesitate to destroy their settlements and their cities, and since the property is usually somebody else's, a veritable passion for destruction is often displayed. This negative passion is a long way from being sufficient for raising revolutionary tasks to the fore; but without it the latter would be impossible. There cannot be a revolution without large-scale and passionate destruction, a destruction of deliverance and of creation, for it is mainly out of this, and only by means of it, that new worlds are born and grow. 33

Bakunin tells us here that "this negative passion" is not sufficient for bringing about a revolutionary situation. What, then, are the preconditions for revolution?

Poverty is one; however, "the worst poverty, even when it strikes millions of proletarians, is not a sufficient guarantee of revolution." ³⁴ Despair is another, for "when man is brought to despair, revolt becomes increasingly possible." ³⁵ Despair leads to action; it is "an acute passionate feeling, which calls him from his dull, half-sleeping suffering and suggests to him a more or less clear idea of the possibility of a better situation, which more than hopes to achieve." ³⁶

Poverty and despair are sufficient for producing isolated uprisings, but something else is needed to trigger general revolt:

There is yet required a common, popular ideal, which always evolves historically from the depths of popular instinct, and which is nurtured, spread, and clarified by a series of portentous events (bitter experiences which are hard to bear).

It is necessary to have a common concept concerning one's right, and a deep and passionate, one could say religious, belief in this right. When such an ideal and such a belief meet in a people whose poverty drives them to despair, the social revolution can not be turned aside. It is unavoidable, close at hand, and no power can compete with it. ³⁷

This ideal offers the people "an end to need, an end to poverty, and the complete satisfaction of all material demands by means of collective labor." ³⁸ If a people does not work out this ideal, then nobody can give it to them; it is "the figurative, generally understood, always simple expression of [its] real demands and hopes," ³⁹ and has nothing to do with the "socio-political solutions, formulae and theories developed outside of popular life in the service of the bourgeois scholars and pseudo-academics, and generously offered to the ignorant mob as the necessary preconditions of the future."⁴⁰

Revolutionaries must therefore limit themselves to defining "the negative factors logically arising out of a strict criticism of present society." ⁴¹ In this way, revolutionaries arrive at the negation of statism, anarchy:

...the free and autonomous organization of all the units or parts which make up the communes and their free federation, from bottom to top, not by the order of some boss, even elected, and not according to the formulations of a learned theory, whatever it might be, but as a result of the natural development of all sorts of needs that are given by life itself. ⁴²

* Bakunin's opinion of bourgeois revolutionaries is unambiguous:

The most ardent and red democrats were, are, and will be bourgeois to such a degree that the slightest declaration of socialist demands and instincts by the people is always sufficient to compel them to fling themselves immediately into the most ardent and insane reaction. ⁴³

The job of the revolutionary, therefore, is to give direction to instinctive ideas. Take a less-educated or ignorant man, Bakunin explains:

If you can but discover in him really honest instincts and, even though vague, aspirations which correspond to the social-revolutionary idea, no matter how primitive his present concepts, have no fear, but occupy yourself seriously with him; and, with love, you will see how broadly and how passionately he embraces your ideas and makes them his own. More precisely, they are his own ideas, because they are none other than the clear, full, and logical expression of his own instinct, so that you, in essence, did not give him anything new, but merely made clear for him that which lived in him much earlier than when you met him. ⁴⁴

Revolutionaries are to "submerge themselves" in the people. All propaganda of the International is to direct itself toward the realization of the popular idea--possibly correcting it (in accordance with the people's wishes) and directing it along a better and faster route towards its goal.

Marx vs. Bakunin

We now turn to those passages of Statism and Anarchy which Marx criticized in his notebooks.

The social-revolutionary program of Bakunin's International Social-Democratic Alliance had called for "'equality of individuals' (not only in the political or legal sense, but above all in an economic sense) 'and classes' (in the sense of a total destruction of the latter)" ⁴⁵ and the "realization of total equality, not physiological and not ethnographic, but social-economic, between all persons no matter to what part of society, what people, or sex they belong." ⁴⁶

In Statism and Anarchy, Bakunin carries this idea of equalization to an extreme. After the revolution, he muses, when states are destroyed, when communes are united in a free fraternal union, then geographical

equality will be the only barrier to a just society. This leads him to generalize: "All history, in its progressive aspects especially, was made by coastal peoples,"⁴⁷ Unfortunately, however, even after a social revolution, when all inland dwellers will have access to the sea, the coastal dwellers will have "most of the natural advantages, intellectual-moral as well as material" and thus constitute a kind of "aristocracy in humanity." Bakunin comes to the curiously naive conclusion that air travel would become especially important "in that it [would] finally equalize the level of development in all countries."⁴⁸ To this, Marx can only say: "This is the main task, according to Bakunin--to level all of Europe to the level of Slovak mouse-trap dealers."⁴⁹ As for the notion that coastal-dwellers form a natural aristocracy of humanity, Marx has only to remind us that this generalization ignores the differences "between low- and highland, river regions, climate, soil, coal, iron, acquired forces of production, material and intellectual, language, literature, technical abilities, etc., etc..."⁵⁰

The most interesting passage in Marx's conspectus is his attempt to defend his position in the face of Bakunin's critique of "authoritarian communism."

Bakunin reminds us that Marx has called for the organization of the proletariat as a ruling class. He asks, "Over whom would the proletariat rule?" and answers his own question: "It means that there will still remain another proletariat, which will be subject to this new domination, this new state." Marx's reply:

It means that so long as the other classes, especially the capitalist class, still exists, so long as the proletariat struggles with it (for when it attains governmental power its enemies and the old organization of society have not yet vanished), it must employ forcible means, hence governmental means. It is itself still a class and the economic conditions from which the class

struggle and the existence of classes derive have still not disappeared and must forcibly be either removed out of the way or transformed, this transformation process being forcibly hastened. 51

Nothing surprises us in this explanation, but we recall that Marx did not develop this theme in much detail in his writings on the Paris Commune, nor did he need to. The Communards did not have to concentrate their efforts on fighting a class enemy in their midst; the class enemy had fled to Versailles. In the case of the Paris Commune, "class war" meant mounting a military campaign--with clearly drawn lines of battle--against an external enemy. Nowhere does Marx provide an example of the proletariat employing governmental force against an internal class enemy.

Bakunin complains that the krestyanskaya chern--the common peasant folk--would be governed by the urban proletariat if Marx had his way. Marx replies that, where the peasant exists in the mass as a private proprietor (i.e., where he has not been replaced by the agricultural wage-laborer, as in England), the proletariat must take measures which immediately improve his condition, so as to win him for the revolution--"measures which will at least provide the possibility of easing the transition from private ownership of land to collective ownership, so that the peasant arrives at this of his own accord, from economic reasons." 52 The proletariat must not "hit the peasant over the head" by abolishing the right of inheritance or confiscating his property. Such measures are possible only "where the true cultivator is just as good a proletarian, a wage-laborer, as is the town worker, and so has immediately, not just indirectly, the very same interests as him." 53

Bakunin then considers these questions from a national angle and concludes that the Slavs would stand "in the same slavish dependence

towards the victorious German proletariat as the latter does at present towards its own bourgeoisie." ⁵⁴ "Schoolboy stupidity!" Marx calls this idea. At this point, he criticizes the ahistorical character of Bakunin's argument: "A radical social revolution depends on certain definite historical conditions of economic development as its pre-condition. It is also only possible where with capitalist production the industrial proletariat occupies at least an important position among the mass of the people." Naturally, the proletariat must consider the needs of the peasants; the idea that the rule of labor involves the subjugation of land labor is absurd. Bakunin understands "absolutely nothing" about the social revolution, "only its political phases":

Its economic conditions do not exist for him. As all hitherto existing economic forms, developed or underdeveloped, involve the enslavement of the worker (whether in the form of wage-laborer, peasant, etc.), he believes that a radical revolution is possible in all such forms alike. Still more! He wants the European social revolution, premised on the economic basis of capitalist production, to take place at the level of the Russian or Slavic agricultural and pastoral peoples, not to surpass this level [...] The will, and not the economic conditions, is the foundation of his social revolution. ⁵⁶

Bakunin explains why anarchists are declared enemies of the state-- "If there is a state, then there is unavoidably domination, and consequent slavery"--and asks, "What does it mean, the proletariat organized as a ruling class?" Marx answers, "It means that the proletariat, instead of struggling sectionally against the economically privileged class, has attained a sufficient strength and organization to employ general means of coercion in this struggle." ⁵⁷ The proletariat uses economic means to abolish its own class character, and "with its complete victory its own rule thus also ends."

"Will the entire proletariat perhaps stand at the head of the government?" Bakunin asks. Marx's answer is consistent with Engels'

observation that "a certain authority, no matter how delegated, and, on the other hand, a certain subordination are things which, independent of all social organization, are imposed upon us together with the material conditions under which we produce and make products circulate": 58

In a trade union, for example, does the whole union form its executive committee? Will all division of labor in the factory, and the various functions that correspond to this, cease? And in Bakunin's constitution, will all 'from bottom to top' be 'at the top'? Then there will certainly be no one 'at the bottom.' Will all members of the commune simultaneously manage the interests of its territory? Then there will be no distinction between commune and territory. 59

The exchange which follows has the character of a heated debate:

Bakunin: The Germans number around forty million. Will for example all forty million be members of the government?

Marx: Certainly! Since the whole thing begins with the self-government of the commune.

Bakunin: The whole people will govern, and there will be no governed.

Marx: If a man rules himself, he does not do so on this principle, for he is after all himself and no other.

Bakunin: Then there will be no government and no state, but if there is a state, there will be both governors and slaves.

Marx: i.e., only if class rule has disappeared, and there is no state in the present political state.

Bakunin: This dilemma is simply solved in the Marxists' theory. By people's government they understand (i.e., Bakunin) the government of the people by means of a small number of leaders, chosen (elected) by the people. 60

Marx indicates that his theory is being misrepresented here; Bakunin's explanation is nothing but "democratic twaddle, political drivel."

Indeed, this would be no more than Marx's radical-democratic position in 1843, when he wrote, "It is not a question whether civil society should exercise legislative power through deputies or through all as individuals. Rather it is a question of the extent and greatest possible universalization of voting, of active as well as passive suffrage." 61

More than thirty years later, he explains that universal suffrage is meaningless except in a changed economic context:

The character of the election does not depend on this name, but on the economic foundation, the economic situation of the voters, and as soon as the functions have ceased to be political ones, there exists 1) no government function, 2) the distribution of the general functions has become a business matter, that gives no one domination, 3) election has nothing of its present political character. 62

This is not very convincing. Given that "a certain authority" is imposed on man together with the material conditions under which he produces, Marx has yet to demonstrate how the distribution of general functions can become a business matter that gives no one domination. Even if we assume that he is referring exclusively to class domination (a fair assumption), this brings us no further. Marx essentially believes: Yes, there will be bureaucracy in post-revolutionary society; No, it will not have its present political (class) character. But he provides nowhere a concrete model for this non-oppressive post-revolutionary bureaucracy, unless we are to believe that the mandat imperatif and the threat of recall are sufficient to make "real" representatives of the people out of "sham" representatives.

We cannot understand Marx's confidence in this process unless we understand the Hegelian rhythm which Marx retains throughout these writings. We are searching here for a systematic treatment of post-revolutionary bureaucracy, of those "inevitable" forms of subordination and domination which will remain even after the proletariat comes to power. In vain. Marx provides us with "answers" which raise more questions than they answer.

Herein lies the value of Bakunin's critique. In the following passage, he confronts Marx with a perceptive critique. Marx's answers astonish us; he does not provide the serious attempt at refutation which

this critique deserves:

Bakunin: The universal suffrage of the whole people...

Marx: Such a thing as the whole people in today's sense is a chimera--

Bakunin: ...in the election of people's representatives and rulers of the state--that is the last word of the Marxists, as also of the democratic school--[is] a lie, behind which is concealed the despotism of the governing minority, and only the more dangerously in so far as it appears as expression of the so-called people's will.

Marx: With collective ownership the so-called people's will vanishes, to make way for the real will of the cooperative.

Bakunin: So the result is: guidance of the great majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, say the Marxists...

Marx: Where?

Even the highly decentralized model of "The Civil War in France" called for regional assemblies of communal deputies--do they not constitute a minority of sorts?

Bakunin: ...will consist of workers. Certainly, with your permission, of former workers, who however, as soon as they have become representatives or governors of the people, cease to be workers.⁶³

Marx apparently believed that, if civil functionaries received workers' salaries, they would retain a worker's mentality and never again regard themselves as a privileged caste. This avoids a fundamental issue: that workers and functionaries operate under significantly different circumstances and may be expected to develop different attitudes towards the people with whom they come in contact. Marx's rebuttal is weak:

Marx: As little as a factory owner today ceases to be a capitalist if he becomes a municipal councillor...

Bakunin: ...and look down on the whole common workers' world from the height of the state. They will no longer represent the people, but themselves and their pretensions to people's government. Anyone who can doubt this knows nothing of the nature of men.

This is a potent accusation. Marx was convinced that, under different economic conditions, the "nature of men" would be different. In his reply, he points to the manager of a workers' cooperative factory as

an example of an administrator who is not in a position of domination, but says nothing of high state functionaries.

Bakunin: But those elected will be fervently convinced and therefore educated socialists. The phrase 'educated socialism'...

Marx: ...never was used.

This may be true, but Marx did write, in the "Communist Manifesto":

"The communists...have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."

Bakunin: ... 'scientific socialism'...

Marx: ...was only used in opposition to utopian socialism, which wants to attach the people to new delusions, instead of limiting its science to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself...

Bakunin: ... which is unceasingly found in the works and speeches of the Lassalleans and Marxists, itself indicates that the so-called people's state will be nothing else than the very despotic guidance of the mass of the people by a new and numerically very small aristocracy of the genuine or supposedly educated. The people are not scientific, which means that they will be entirely freed from the cares of the government, they will be entirely shut up in the stable of the governed. A fine liberation! The Marxists sense this contradiction and, knowing that the government of the educated...

Marx: Quelle rêverie!

Bakunin: ...will be the most oppressive, most detestable, most despised in the world, a real dictatorship despite all democratic forms, console themselves with the thought that this dictatorship will only be transitional and short. ⁶⁴

"Non, mon cher!" Marx counters, adding, however, nothing new: that the class rule of the workers can exist only so long as the economic basis of class existence is not destroyed.

Bakunin: They say that their only concern and aim is to educate and uplift the people ...

Marx: Saloon-bar politicians!

Bakunin: ...both economically and politically, to such a level that all government will be quite useless and the state will lose all political character, i.e. character of domination, and will change by itself into a free organization of economic interests and communes.

An obvious contradiction. If their state will really be popular, why not destroy it, and if its destruction is necessary for the real liberation of the people, why do they venture to call it popular? 65

Marx reminds us at this point that a period of time is necessary for the destruction of political forms which belong to the old society, and that the proletariat "employs means for its liberation which after this liberation fall aside." As for the simple solutions offered by the anarchists: "Mr. Bakunin concludes from this that it is better to do nothing at all...just wait for the day of general liquidation the last judgement." 66

We have watched Marx struggle with what we know to be a prophetic critique, and see that Bakunin anticipates problems in areas which Marx assumes will simply take care of themselves after the revolution. Marx points out many weaknesses in the anarchist program and in its ahistorical analysis of social conflict, but we are astonished to find that, when Bakunin confronts him with issues which we recognize as the great problems of our time, Marx refuses to acknowledge them as problems. Although he clearly realizes that a certain division of labor is essential in a modern industrial society, and that this division of labor implies a certain degree of authority and domination, his comments in the con-spectus show convincingly that he was so confident in the ability of the proletariat to abolish class differences that he neglected to discuss systematically the nature of post-revolutionary structures of domination and authority.

NOTES: III

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⁷The Correspondence of Marx and Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1943), p. 338.

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¹⁵Ibid., p. 29.

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¹⁸Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 16.

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CONCLUSION

Karl Marx perceived the state as a deadening incubus upon the body of living society and devoted his life's work to the transcendence of this duality - a manifestation of man's alienated condition. As a radical democrat, he believed that universal suffrage would solve the problem; as a socialist, he turned to revolution as the means by which society would regain control over these alien forces.

In the 1840's he conceived of revolution as a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat, which would constitute itself as a ruling class, centralize the means of production under its control, and make despotic inroads on the conditions of bourgeois production. In the years of reaction which followed the failure of the 1848 revolutions, Marx immersed himself in economic studies, but when he was invited in 1864 to participate in an international alliance of trade unions, he set aside his books and devoted himself to the task of turning the International into that "most advanced and resolute section of all the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others." ¹ Concerned with building an all-embracing coalition of working-class organizations, Marx tolerated a wide range of ideologies, but the anarchist charge--that he was trying to introduce "the principle of authority" into the International so as to bring about the triumph of his personal point of view--was not unjustified.

In "The Civil War in France," Marx elaborated his theory of proletarian revolution in the form of a polemical account of the Paris Commune. He called for self-government of the producers, radical demo-

cracy, and an almost anarchistic decentralization of the economy, but the exceptional nature of the Commune allowed him to avoid a direct discussion of how the proletariat--constituted as a ruling class--was to use political power to abolish its own class rule. The tension in his thought between radically democratic ends and dictatorial means remained unresolved. We have seen that, when Bakunin propounded an anarchistic alternative in Statism and Anarchy, Marx was able convincingly to refute much of his analysis, but in the face of Bakunin's prophetic critique of "authoritarian communism," the deficiencies of Marx's own analysis stood out in bold relief.

Decades later, in 1917, the process of bureaucratic centralization which set in soon after the October Revolution confirmed Bakunin's fears: after suppressing the opposition and taking control of the media in the name of a hypothetical proletariat, the new leaders of Russia perverted Marxism into a science of legitimation for a frenzied program of forced industrialization.

The ideological bankruptcy of the Soviet Union became abundantly clear in 1968, when tanks of the Warsaw Pact crushed the nascent reform movement in Czechoslovakia. During the invasion, a minor economic functionary in East Berlin quietly resolved to settle accounts with the regime.

Rudolf Bahro, an obscure bureaucrat with a model career in the ruling Socialist Unity Party, worked secretly for the next decade on a scathing inside critique of "really existing socialism." The appearance in September, 1977 of Die Alternative in West Germany stunned the East German regime and created an uproar on both sides of the Wall. It

represented an important turning point in the process of dissent in the German Democratic Republic.

In The Alternative, Bahro acknowledges the perceptiveness of Bakunin's critique of "authoritarian communism" and the deficiencies of Marx's rebuttal: "One probably had to be anarchist and Russian in order to perceive, in the year 1873, the shadow of Stalin behind the authority of Marx and his teaching. Marx did not, could not, and wanted not to see the shadow." ²

In Bahro's analysis, the Soviet system is, however, not socialist--it is a non-capitalist bureaucratic system which comes close to Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production, in which a ruling class controls an ideological and administrative apparatus. Nothing is "revolutionary" about Soviet bureaucracy: it resembles, more than anything else, a church hierarchy, with a concomitant tendency toward inquisition. ³

Marx had noted in 1843: "Bureaucracy is a circle no one can leave. Its hierarchy is a hierarchy of information. The top entrusts the lower circles with an insight into details, while the lower circles entrust the top with an insight into what is universal, and thus they mutually deceive each other..." ⁴ Nevertheless, we have seen how Marx failed to acknowledge and discuss systematically the problem of a post-revolutionary hierarchy of information, and the effect this would continue to have on the human consciousness. Bahro continues where Marx left off--with an analysis of the bureaucracies in the "post-revolutionary" societies of "really existing socialism," and concludes that political and social domination persist as a result of the vertical

structure of the social work process. To the different "functional levels" of the work process correspond different forms of consciousness: most people are confined to the particular context of a specialized function within a highly complex social division of labor and are excluded from the "universal sphere" of the top. It is this subalternität which is the source of alienation, Bahro argues, and not the commodity form or private ownership of the means of production.⁵ The state does not wither away after the abolition of private property, but continues to assert its own particular institutional interests in opposition to the rest of society.

Bahro reminds us that the communist movement originally began with a promise to solve the fundamental problems of modern man, and that the lands which consider themselves to be the heirs of this movement still claim to follow this program. But when he asks himself whether they have actually achieved the promised breakthrough to a more humane mode of life, he must answer that they have not. Indeed, the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe must daily recognize that the existing system contradicts its own declared principles:

If we consider really existing socialism, with its cultivation of social inequalities which goes far beyond the spectrum of financial incomes, with the continuation of wage-labor, commodity production, and money, with its rationalization of the old division of labor, with its quasi-ecclesiastical family and sexual policies, with its high official cadres of functionaries, with its standing army and police force, which are only responsible to their superiors, with its official corporations for the classification and tutelage of the population, with its fusion of the shapeless state machine into one state and party apparatus, with its isolation in the state borders--then its incompatibility with the conceptions of Marx and Engels is evident.⁶

All of this has been pointed out before--both in the West and in the East, by anti-communists as well as communists--but Bahro's

book is so important in this context because it goes beyond a negative critique of the Soviet system. He does not reject socialism in favor of Western monopoly capitalism, but outlines in his book a socialist alternative to both systems. The recognition of differences between Marx's vision and "really existing socialism"--that the centralized Soviet apparatus is precisely the kind of state machine that Marx wanted to smash in a revolution--is merely a requisite for his broader emancipatory project.

Bahro calls for a renewal of Marxism, but draws a distinction between his approach and a sort of Marxist fundamentalism:

The political-historical conception which is expressed in the mode of argumentation "What Marx really said" is completely unfruitful, will always lead to easily attacked distortions in the depiction of the "Teaching" and put the war on level of scholastic quotation-battles. When I...quote Marx, Engels, and Lenin extensively, then I do not do it for this dogmatic purpose. Something completely different is at stake. 7

Under the Second and Third Internationals, Marxism was petrified into a positivist "science" which explained historical processes in terms of the inevitable evolution of "matter" and considered the self-appointed representatives of the proletariat to be the saviors of humanity. Indeed, this ossification of doctrine was begun by Marx himself; we have discussed in Part Two the process by which Marx linked the philosophical categories he inherited from Hegel to actual historical, social entities.

By placing Marx back into the historical context of nineteenth-century Europe--a society confident that industrialization was leading toward a better society--Bahro can reject the categories of Marx's historical interpretation while retaining a critical Marxist analytic approach. He analyzes "really existing socialism" from a revolutionary

perspective.

Bahro rejects the notion that the proletariat will revolutionize society: salvation will not come from the subalterns. Furthermore, the Prague Spring has shown him what to expect from the official Marxist-Leninist party. In his discussion of the division of labor under socialism, he stresses the importance of intellectual labor for the maintenance of the system as a whole. The production of an appropriate mentality among the subalterns serves to preserve and reproduce the highly complex forms of social domination. But, if education were revolutionized--if even the subalterns were to receive an education broad enough to give them insight into the functioning of the system as a whole--then, Bahro postulates, this would result in the production of a "surplus consciousness" which would become a source of system renewal. ⁸

In 1845, Marx wrote, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it." ⁹ In 1977, Bahro specifies: "The point is to force the overproduction of consciousness." ¹⁰ Were "surplus consciousness" to accumulate, then the rigid system of subordination and the vertical division of labor would no longer be able to contain it. The latent opposition at all levels of society would crystallize around the most conscious members of the bureaucratic intelligentsia and make a cultural revolution.

Such a cultural revolution, he writes, would go far beyond mere liberalization. The elimination of the subaltern mentality implies a radicalization of the social division of labor. Bahro envisions the redistribution of work tasks to allow all persons to share in the work at all functional levels, and the subordination of economic

production to the ideal of individual "self-realization." He envisions a radical democratization of public life, new, emancipatory methods of child-rearing, and a social sphere restructured to overcome fragmentation. Many of his demands come straight from "The Civil War in France": functionaries must not enjoy special privileges, but must be considered as members of the work force; the wage scale must be revised in an egalitarian direction; the communist party must not develop into an institution controlling society--it must be a mass movement, subject to radically democratic control. ¹¹

Bahro's critique represents a radicalization rather than a rejection of the moral imperatives of classical Marxism. Like his forefather, Martin Luther, Bahro is turning the ideology from which a corrupt, bureaucratic system draws its legitimacy into a lethal weapon against the system itself. He submits a self-proclaimed "Marxist" regime to a critical Marxist analysis as a precondition for the revolutionizing of that system.

The police force of the GDR can easily suppress those scattered reformers who call for freedom of speech and a multi-party system. Opposition from the ranks of the party hierarchy, however--from those discontented bureaucrats who take the emancipatory message of Marxism seriously--cannot be combatted effectively. "I have written a book against which the political police will be powerless," Bahro writes, "because it hits the party apparatus in its heart." ¹²

Bahro's book has already led to the organization of an underground communist opposition in the GDR; it remains to be seen whether this movement will expand in the near future. This mode of dissent may lead to profound social change in Eastern Europe.

NOTES: CONCLUSION

¹Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, ed. Lewis Feuer (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 20.

²Rudolf Bahro, Die Alternative. Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus (Cologne: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1977), p. 48.

³Ibid., p. 36.

⁴"Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State," in: Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, eds. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959), p. 185.

⁵Hugh Mosley, "The New Communist Opposition: Rudolf Bahro's Critique of the 'Really Existing Socialism,'" in New German Critique 15 (Fall 1978), p. 30.

⁶Bahro, p. 42.

⁷Ibid., p. 24.

⁸David Bathrick, "The Politics of Culture: Rudolphe Bahro and the Opposition in the GDR," in New German Critique 15 (Fall 1978), pp. 20-21.

⁹Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in: Easton, p. 402.

¹⁰Quoted in: Bathrick, pp. 20-21.

¹¹Mosley, p. 34.

¹²"Das trifft den Parteiapparat ins Herz," in: Der Spiegel, Nr. 35 (22 August 1977), p. 31.

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