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Marx on Peasants

by

Michael Duggett*

This paper discusses the writings of Marx on peasants, and argues that the characterisation of him as 'against' the peasant overlooks the central ambivalence in his theory. It considers Marx's relevant writings on Asia, Ancient Greece and Rome, European feudalism, and, more specifically, England, France and Russia, and attempts to account for the development of his views over time. The aim is to put the notorious epigrams and passages into the full context of his thought.

Some people know only that Marx spoke of peasants as 'rural idiots'. Some know that he also compared French ones to potatoes in a sack and described them as representing 'barbarism within civilisation'. And many will have read David Mitrany's *Marx against the Peasant* (1951). There exist therefore several different levels of knowledge on the matter of Marx on peasants, and if it is necessary to confront the notorious epigrams, it is even more necessary to examine the theory that lies behind them. That this in an important element of his work seems to me as evident as that we still lack an adequate account of it. This is not to say that Mitrany's book is without value. First published in 1951, it is a scholarly and moving account of what he saw as the disaster that had overcome peasants in Eastern Europe and Russia as a result of the antipathy between them and Marxists, so that they had been defeated by the Right in the interwar years (as a result of a division between peasants and workers) or destroyed by the Left, as in Russia. The whole problematic was a result of his actual experiences in Eastern Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and the subtitle—'A Study of Social Dogmatism'—underlined the thrust of the title, that Marxists were against peasants because of the original Marxist's dogmatic beliefs.¹ The whole argument depends, in other words, upon the interpretation of Marx. Now Mitrany's Marx is undoubtedly Marx as he was understood in that period, the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*, *Capital*, and the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (these are the main works Mitrany refers to in his brief, six-page account of the 'Agrarian Theory of Marx', [1951: 23-8]). Today, however, we have

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access to works of his that Marxists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not know of, especially the *Grundrisse*, manuscripts that are of critical importance in understanding Marx's views on peasants, and it is from these manuscripts that any interpretation must start. It is to be the argument of this article that, although Mitrany's characterisation of Marx as 'against' the peasant basically holds true, there are many contrary passages to justify the use of the term 'ambivalence' instead. Thus there seems to be emerging a till-now-hidden Marx that may enable us to comprehend the paradox that seems to have been involved in the post-1945 leadership of peasants by Marxists towards revolution in much of the non-industrialised world. Our perspective is necessarily different from Mitrany's, and the new textual evidence makes a different interpretation possible, as well as desirable.

1. *Marx's Theory and Peasants*

Let us proceed to look at the general problem of Marx's conception of the peasant. It was not simply the result of an attitude or prejudice, but the necessary conclusion of a certain view of the world. His basic categories for explaining modern capitalist society—bourgeois and proletarian, the former living by their capital, the latter by the sale of their labour-power—were essentially based on the difference between those who own, and those who operate, work within, a mode of production. Peasants, however, combine both of these properties into one social group. Hence the peasant, to some degree a worker, to some degree an owner of the means of production, falls in between his vital categories. (The use of a term like 'petit bourgeois' is to some extent an admission of this). Insofar as he maintains the monism of his thought, and insofar as he has nonetheless to write about peasant-dominated societies in which 'the worker is a proprietor, or in which the proprietor works' [*Marx, 1973: 497; 1964: 97*] ambivalence is the inevitable result. However, Marx did not consider this to be a vital problem. The categories of bourgeois economy are valid for all other social formations and hence one can discuss the peasant in this way, as 'two persons. As owner of the means of production he is capitalist; as labourer he is his own wage-labourer' [*Marx, 1969a, i: 408*]. But this statement needs to be qualified, firstly because the categories if so used have to be taken 'with a grain of salt' [*Marx, 1973: 106*] and secondly because Marx elsewhere says only that this kind of operation, using capitalist categories to explain non-capitalist societies is done 'to a certain extent not incorrectly' [*Marx, 1909: 1021*]—which is little more than faint praise. The point is that Marx does not anywhere deal explicitly with this methodological problem, and that this resultant ambivalence was not cleared up.² Evidence, I would suggest, that the matter was not of great importance to him.

This was the case because his theory was also essentially an

historical one, and because understanding of a social group whose place was not to be of any importance in present and future historical events was low on his list of priorities. The peasant, who had played little positive part in the dynamic events of capitalist development in England and elsewhere, had a basically negative part to play in the historical drama, as Marx saw it. He was to be released from rural idiocy and turned into a proletarian or in some cases a bourgeois. Peasants were most interesting for Marx when they were ceasing to exist as such, their expropriation from the land constituted 'the prelude to the history of capital' [1961: 762], and that is of immense significance. But to wish for the perpetuation of them upon their land would be to wish for the perpetuation of 'universal mediocrity' [*ibid*]. History for him was not about the mediocre or the defeated—Marx did not wish, like E. P. Thompson,³ to rescue the inevitable victims of progress from oblivion.

This brings us on to another important point, Marx and capitalism. Although it may seem strange to talk of him as an apologist of capitalism, whenever he came to compare it with the stagnation of rural life, he became, at least in his early years, little short of ecstatic. In the *Communist Manifesto* [1968: 31-63], as is well known, capitalism is described as an all-conquering force, destructive of the fixed and narrow, creative of a world market, demystifying and liberating up to a certain point. In this context (and this was the context of the 'idiocy' remark) peasants seemed to him the epitome of backwardness. His belief in the technical superiority of the capitalist mode of production in both agriculture and industry, as against the pre-capitalist, was seldom shaken [see Marx, 1961: 505], although, as we shall see, he did come to have some doubts as to whether it was always better to uphold capitalism against peasants, or whether to use their help in overthrowing it. But this was later, in the peculiar circumstances of the Russian problem. Marx remained then, above all, a hard-liner for progress.

2. *Peasants in Pre-Capitalist Societies: Oriental, Ancient and Germanic*

In the relevant section of the *Grundrisse* entitled 'Forms which precede capitalist production' [1973: 471; 1964: 67] Marx does not speak of 'peasant societies' as such. But this section of the manuscript, however, was essentially about the presuppositions of capitalist production and first among these was the destruction, in his view, of social forms in which 'the worker is a proprietor or in which the proprietor works' [1973: 497; 1964: 97], and although this also includes small craft or artisan workers of the medieval type, most of his argument relates to peasants of various kinds. He separates the main pre-capitalist societies into three types, which he refers to as Oriental, Ancient Classical and Germanic. Each of these preceded the capitalist mode but was, in its

way, more advanced than the first mode of human self-production, which he describes as 'pastoral society' [1973: 472; 1964: 68] which is essentially a clan living a migratory life, herdsmen and hunters, endlessly mobile. Each of the three forms is further than this along the road to fully developed private property, although some are more developed than others. And all of them are primarily agricultural societies, in which 'landed property and agriculture form the basis of the economic order' [1973: 485; 1964: 80].

Let us look at his account of the three forms in the *Grundrisse*.⁴ It is a rather disembodied and elliptical account, for it is, after all, only about forms rather than contents, and these were no more than notebooks filled for self-clarification in 1858-9. Hence at some points his arguments need to be supplemented by other of his writings, as in his account of Oriental society, for example. By this he meant the societies of Imperial China and of India. His emphasis, in this as in all of the cases, was upon the level of the village community, the level at which land was owned and worked, the social base, rather than the level of politics. (He of course knew that there were important differences between the societies, but these were less important, in terms of his implicit comparison with the capitalist West, than the similarities, as with Max Weber). The Orient always remained something of a mystery to Marx, as a fossilised form of life that had existed unchanged, while elsewhere societies had risen and fallen. The problems he was concerned with in all his discussions were these—why had this form of social organisation not developed over time, what was the origin of the peculiar mode of government (Oriental despotism), and what form did property take? These were discussed first in his letters and articles of 1853. At this point he conceived that the characteristic feature of Oriental society was its total lack of anything that could be called private property ('the real key, even to the Oriental heaven' [1965a: 81]) as noticed by travellers like Bernier. He communicated this fact in a letter to Engels, who in his reply, produced what has by now become familiar as the argument for strong central government and weak property from irrigation [see *ibid.*: 82]. Marx more or less accepted this, and quoted him at length in an article of his own in the *New York Daily Tribune*, but also added an argument about the low level of civilisation in the East necessitating governmental intervention, and the self-sufficiency of the village communes there, which are characterised by the 'domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits' [1969b: 92]. He also went on to argue that the English would disrupt these communities in India because the Hindu cotton trade would be undercut by the Manchester one—'blowing up their economical basis' [*ibid.*: 93]. And this did not sadden him, for he went on to attack these communities in no uncertain manner—'this undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life . . . subjugated man to external circumstances . . . transformed a self-developing

social state into never changing natural destiny' [*ibid.*: 94]. The Indian peasants thus stood accused of historical stagnation and parochialism, they were a standing denial of all his theories of historical development.

In his discussion of the Orient in the 'Forms . . .' Marx deals at length with the problem of why this state of affairs has come about. Although he realises that his initial Bernier-inspired insight is a simplification, he discusses the way in which peasants in the Orient can be said to 'own' land. Certainly they do not, and this is meant to apply to all societies, own their land in their capacity as individuals, for the presupposition of any ownership is, obviously enough, the existence of a community—'Property therefore means belonging to a tribe (community) . . . and by means of the relationship of this community to the land, to the earth as its inorganic body, there occurs the relationship of the individual to the land' [1964: 90; 1973: 492]. Hence in Oriental forms, private property, although not non-existent, was underdeveloped and conditioned by its social environment. In each village, again, as he says, characterized by 'a combination of manufacturers and agriculture within the small commune, which thus becomes altogether self-sustaining' [1973: 473; 1964: 70], there was little connection with, or need of, other villages. But the immense need for irrigation, and the inability of the vilages to co-operate to do it themselves, leads to the State having immense power, but of a profoundly superstructural kind. It is not Oriental despotism that leads to weak private property, but the means of production in the villages. The relation between these is complex,⁵ but in terms of historical impact, the Oriental State has been ineffectual, its cities have been merely parasitic, have had no modernising impact, have been little more than centres for tax-collection—'royal camps . . . works of artifice erected over the economic construction proper' [1973: 479; 1964: 78]. But, the problem of historical stagnation also needs to be considered at the ultimately determining level of the village community. The 'communal property and private possession' [1964: 75; 1973: 477] is itself part of the explanation—the tight societal control in the villages, the lack of opportunity, means that the Asian villager remained a non-Faustian undynamic individual; such a closed society leaves little chance for anyone to break through social customs, to take over other people's land. There is gain here for the villagers as peasants—'In the Oriental form this loss [of property] is hardly possible . . . since the individual member of the commune never enters into the relation of freedom towards it. . . . He is rooted to the spot, ingrown' [1973: 494; 1964: 94]—but the historical progress of the Orient has suffered thereby. 'The Asiatic form necessarily hangs on most tenaciously and for the longest time . . . there is a self-sustaining circle of production' [1973: 486; 1964: 83]. Only an outside force can break the vicious circle, and Marx saw the British Empire in India and European

imperialism in general, as a progressive force insofar as it brought the Orient into history, and thus ultimately into the realm of his theory.

Ancient, or Classical society, as he calls it, is also talked about at some length in the 'Forms. . . .' He placed it after the Asiatic as a progressive epoch in the economic development of human society in his famous 'Preface' of 1859 [1971: 21]. This placing, however, did not necessarily suggest that it evolved out of it, for his theory does not really allow for a social system that gives birth to another to outlive its product by thousands of years. For it was obvious that whereas the Asiatic form still remained a problem of contemporary politics in Marx's own day, Ancient society posed only theoretical problems. But this very fact about Greece and Rome—that they had declined and fallen, not only under external pressure but for internal reasons—gave them the pathos of change. Marx was more interested, more charitable, to children destined to become old, than he was to the eternally young, the retarded.

He saw the characteristic feature of Ancient society as a contradiction so built into its basic structure that it was doomed to collapse. The basic method of production in this form was peasant farming on individual property, an individualism, however, that was tempered by the need of the communities in which the peasants lived to defend themselves against other communities. The communities here consisted of cities that lived by farming the land around them, cities of soldierly peasants. Here it was not irrigation that the communities needed as a precondition of life, but warfare: 'War is therefore the great comprehensive task, the great communal labour' [1973: 474; 1964: 71]. But thereby the community comes to be experienced by the individual in only a negative way, and the development of a private-property perspective is assisted by the method of production: 'Their relation to the natural conditions of labour are those of proprietors; but personal labour must continuously establish these conditions as real conditions and objective elements of the personality of the individual' [1964: 73; 1973: 476]. For the households are independent: 'small agriculture working for direct consumption; manufacture as domestic side occupation of wives and daughters' [1973: 475; 1964: 73]. These small communities of equal soldierly peasants are affected by differentiation from within and by imperialistic impulses, inherent in communities that live by warfare (his examples are the Greeks, the Romans and also the Jews [1973: 476; 1964: 73]). The formation of a soldierly class outside in the Empire, the peasants who have left their land to conquer, is matched by the creation of a new leisured and politically powerful class at home. The solidarity of the old community is lost, and the commonly-owned land is steadily taken over by the patrician group [see Marx, 1973: 479; 1964: 77]. So instead of 'equality among its free self-

sustaining peasants' [1964: 73; 1973: 476] one has patrician-owned latifundia operated by slaves. He saw this kind of process of peasant expropriation as in some sense typical, a process that in Rome did not lead to the establishment of a fully capitalist society (for although peasant expropriation and the creation of a proletariat is a necessary precondition of capitalism it is not a sufficient condition) but which nonetheless made it a precursor, in some sense, of the modern development. This was the point he made later on, in 1877, in the famous letter to a Russian journal [1965a: 311]. Whether his account is historically valid, as opposed to fascinating, is another matter. It probably helps us to understand Marx rather more than it does Roman history. One cannot match his twenty sentences against Gibbon.⁶

'Feudalism' occupies a more strategic position in Marx's writings than does any other social system except capitalism, and he says rather more about it than he does about socialism. His writings do not try to convey any kind of insight about the meaning of life in it at the level of Bloch's *Feudal Society* [1965] or Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages* [1924]. He does not try to understand it, as it were, for itself, but only as the sole pre-capitalist form that gave birth to capitalism. In the 'Forms . . .' he deals with the basic structure of the village, which, as with the Asian form, ultimately determines the social structure, and in the first volume of *Capital* with its transformation, as in the case of England, into a fully capitalist society. In the 'Forms . . .' Marx talks about the 'Germanic system' as the third precapitalist form to evolve out of the primitive state of human existence. It only becomes accurately described as 'feudalism' when it also includes towns and landlords, which exist over and above the village communities and live off their surplus. The account of the mode of farming in the village, which is called 'Germanic' for no chauvinistic reason but probably out of homage to Hegel, whose Western post-Roman civilisation is also so-called,⁷ is again frustratingly sketchy and elliptical. His vision is of individual families settling down in the vast forests of Europe—"The economic totality is, at bottom, contained in each individual household, which forms an independent centre of production for itself" [1973: 484; 1964: 79]—whereas, in the Orient, the level of independence was at the commune, in Classical Society at the level of the warrior-city. Thus there is a much greater degree of individual autonomy: 'The commune exists only in the inter-relations among these individual landed proprietors as such. Communal property as such appears only as a communal accessory to the individual tribal seats' [1973: 484; 1964: 80]. The community is needed only for war, religion, or disputes and judgments. The communally-owned land does exist, and it is used for grazing or hunting, but it is used by the peasants in their capacity as individual members of the commune.

In its early forms, Germanic society is distinct from the other

two in that it lacks cities. When it does develop them it creates a peculiar form of city that is ultimately destructive of itself. The combination of individual, almost fully-developed private property, and the emergence of groups within it that are dependent upon the peasants but separate from them, lords and bourgeois, is the crucial process. The mere fact that feudal lords ruled over peasant villages in order simultaneously to exploit and defend them was not of particular significance to him. No more than conquest or enslavement did this become a significant fact until the 'relationship of domination' [1964: 102; 1973: 500] becomes used to alter the mode of production. And while the serfs are bound to their soil by the sword of their master, they are, nonetheless, owners of it insofar as they work it and are allowed to keep some of the fruits for themselves, as he says later in *Capital* of fourteenth and fifteenth century England: 'the immense majority of the population consisted . . . of free peasant proprietors—whatever was the feudal title under which their right of property was hidden [1961: 717]. It is only their being freed from this land, not just from their lords, that is the crucial change, and as long as this society remains orientated towards the production of use values, with no larger market than the lord's court, it remains stable. Under the classic feudal system serfs are too valuable as soldiers to be disposed of. But the lord's power over them 'forms a necessary ferment for the development and the decline and fall of all original relations of property and of production' [1973: 501; 1964: 102-3] as he later demonstrates. The city, too, in a way that he does not thoroughly describe in the 'Forms . . .', is also destined to overcome the peasants around it, and absorb them: 'the Middle Ages (Germanic period) begins with the land as the seat of history, whose further development then moves forward in the contradiction between town and countryside; the modern (age) is the urbanisation of the countryside' [1973: 479; 1964: 78].⁸

3. *Peasants and Capitalism—England and France*

Let us now leave the purely theoretical realm of the *Grundrisse* and proceed to look at the account Marx gives in his other writings of the relationship between peasants and capitalism in three different countries—England, France and Russia. He wrote on France in the context of Bonaparte's seizure of power in the 1840s and 1850s, and later, at the time of the Paris Commune in 1871. His writings on England, and by this I mean *Capital* rather than anything else, were done in the 1860s. He wrote on Russia in occasional letters in the 1850s, but the most interesting things were written at the very end of his life, in 1877 and 1881. Russia will be dealt with last. I propose, however, to talk about Marx on England before Marx on France, although this is chronologically incorrect. But it makes sense for two reasons, firstly because it is convenient at this stage to follow through the development of

feudalism into capitalism begun above and the English experience as presented in *Capital* is the epitome of this, and secondly because it is convenient to examine the French experience in the light of the English one.

The first volume of *Capital* is about mankind in general, but its arguments and examples are drawn from the English experience. It was there that peasants were first expropriated on a large scale and became the first proper proletariat in history. (In Rome the expropriated peasants became a mob of 'do nothings'—see his 1877 letter [1965a: 311]). It was in England that the peasant, both worker and owner, with his rights in common land, was split into two men, and the separate concepts of 'labour' and 'capital' were created. The chapter of *Capital I* entitled 'The So-Called Primitive Accumulation' is about how capitalist methods of farming have destroyed the English peasantry. It is written with a serious polemical intent, to mock and jibe the English bourgeois economists into an awareness of the reality behind such bland phrases as 'primitive accumulation' or 'establishing the foundations of the capitalist method of production'. Although, in Marx's eyes 'in the tender annals of Political Economy the idyllic reigns' [1961: 714] the fact is that the key 'moments', as he puts it, in the process of primary accumulation, are those when 'great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence and hurled as free and "unattached" proletarians on the labour market. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process' [1961: 716]. He is arguing here that the English peasants were expropriated, that this was a necessary precondition of capitalism, that it happened with a good deal of violence, and that it was nonetheless progressive. Marx wanted to expropriate the expropriators, not prevent the peasants from being expropriated in the first place. He would not have had it *not* happen—he merely wishes to make it clear how it did.

Marx's account of this long historical process focusses upon the importance of political power—that of lords over their local subordinates, and that of the central government. In the fifteenth century, as Marx sees it, the old feudal nobility were destroyed in the Wars of the Roses and replaced by a new one, with a bourgeois sensitivity to the possibility of commercial enrichment. Land now came to be seen as a possible source of cash income from sheep grazing, and the peasants as less valuable as soldiers than before. In the period that followed, the impact, as Barrington Moore has put it, of 'Royal peace and wool' [1967: 7] was two-fold. First, the armed retainers, no longer of value in the piping times of peace, were disbanded, and secondly, the lords began to make initial attacks upon the common land, of critical importance in the structure of the village economy. The new nobility, 'the child of its time, for which money was the power of all powers' [1961: 718] thus came into conflict not only with their own people, but with

the State. At this time the Tudor State saw its prime need to defend the peasants, as it needed soldiers and feared social disorder. So on behalf of their stout yeomanry, the King and Parliament fought against the lords. But land was taken over nonetheless, for, Marx says, the capitalist system required expropriation, and the government were fighting a historical current. Since there was also an internal process of differentiation going on, some peasants bought up the land of their neighbours and became prosperous yeomen, although still tenants. This was, after all, an example of his 'Germanic system', and the wall of custom was broken down not only from the outside, but from within.⁹ Peasants remained, but in the sixteenth century the process had begun, and there appeared in the countryside not only paupers, but the man-eating sheep of More's *Utopia* [1965:46].

It was the Civil War and the 'Glorious Revolution' of the seventeenth century that were the crucial period. Before the peasant could be put in his place, his defender, the Monarch, had to be put in His. In this sense these constituted a bourgeois revolution, in that power passed to a Parliament dominated by the 'landlord and capitalist appropriators of surplus value' [Marx, 1961: 723]. Now it was possible to use the legal mechanisms and power of the State to take over peasant land, to enclose the commons, and from the eighteenth century onwards continued the process, of gradual theft: 'The parliamentary form of the robbery is that of Acts for enclosures of Commons, in other words, decrees by which the landlords grant themselves the people's land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the people' [*ibid.*: 724]. Hence 'About 1750, the yeomanry had disappeared, and so had, in the last decade of the eighteenth century, the last trace of the common land of the agricultural labourer' [*ibid.*: 723]. So the English countryside possessed a new structure of big landlords, tenant farmers and landless wage-labourers, and agriculture could be carried on in a new and rationalised fashion. Capitalism in the countryside meant that 'The irrational, old fashioned methods of agriculture are replaced by scientific ones' [*ibid.*: 505].

The disappearing of the English peasantry has since prompted immense controversy as to its cause, its duration and its consequences. Marx's account, with its stress upon compulsion, upon the enclosure movements, and upon dramatic transformation in social structure, has been more or less upheld by many writers, not all Marxists, although there is of course an opposing school.¹⁰ The strength of Marx's account is his emphasis upon the connection between technological advance and political power, and the social costs incurred in raising productivity. The implications of his claim that the process of accumulation in England involved the use of 'reckless terrorism' [*ibid.*: 732-3] would require another article to consider fully.¹¹ Capitalism comes into the world, as Marx

sees it, dripping with blood. He certainly has, at this point, a tragic vision of the contradictions of progress.

Capital I, as I have said, is mainly about England, and its argument, although applicable to all countries in Europe, fits England best. There are some references to France in it, especially a footnote in which Marx argues that 'A similar movement is seen during the last ten years in France; in proportion as capitalist production there takes possession of agriculture, it drives the "surplus" agricultural population into the towns' [*ibid.*: 693n], and he goes on to claim that whereas the rural percentage of population was 75.58 in 1846, it was down to 71.14 in 1861. In other words, he expected the future social structure to be roughly similar to that in England. Although his famous 'De te fabula narratur' [*ibid.*: 8] was directed to Germans, it might as well have been said to the French. But while he might have expected future events to be similar, he knew very well that France had several peculiar features derived from her history. For although in her bourgeois revolution a monarch had lost his head and feudal property relations had been overthrown and replaced by bourgeois ones, it had not been the peasantry who had been freed from their land but rather the rural upper classes, and the peasantry survived as the rulers of their soil. Hence one had a completely different social structure, with a dominant bourgeoisie, a small but growing proletariat, and a numerous peasantry whose weight, if they chose to use it, was decisive. In his capacity as a strategist of revolution he perforce had to consider them. The problem for him was this—would the peasants become a worthwhile ally of his chosen class, the proletariat, against capitalism, and would they be able to act as a class at all? Would these 'Hobbesian' men be able to act in a 'Marxian' manner?

Marx's writings on French peasants in the 1850's were his first confrontation with the problem of peasant political action as a contemporary issue, and they remain perhaps his most oft-quoted and notorious. In these writings—the 'Class Struggles in France, 1848-50' [in *Marx, 1950, i: 128-220*] and the 'Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' [in *Marx, 1968: 95-180*]¹—he comments upon the role of the peasants in the 1789 Revolution, that they were 'gratuitously freed' by it [1950: 196], which does not suggest a very active rôle. But, active or not, they were beneficiaries of it, were 'transformed' from 'semi-villeins into freeholders' [*Marx, 1968: 173*]. Their main function during the Revolutionary period and after, was to defend the soil of their country, now also their own, in the armies of France, which they did, in Marx's view with much eagerness, full of a 'youthful passion for property', the gift of a Revolution that had meant for them both 'liberation and enrichment' [*ibid.*: 173-4]. But by the time Marx was writing, the bourgeoisie, the former ally of the Revolution, had become an oppressor as vicious as the old nobility, although through different mechanisms. Now it was debt, the burden of usury, that weighed upon the

peasantry: 'the feudal obligation that went with the land was replaced by the mortgage' [*ibid.*: 174]. It remained a fact, however, that in 1850 the peasant loved and clung to his land, even if he was horribly exploited upon it. Marx accepted this, but believed that the consciousness of oppression would grow, and that the peasant would become an anti-capitalist in time, because, although like the bourgeois, an owner, of property, he had, by the 1850s, through the effect of increased population, subdivision of the soil and indebtedness, 'sunk to the level of the Irish tenant farmer—all under the pretence of being a private proprietor' [1950: 197]. In what way did peasants act politically as a result of these conditions?

Marx discussed this in the context of Louis Bonaparte's rise to power, a rise that seriously disturbed his sense of reality. It always seemed like a sick joke to him, that such a small man could become so powerful, and all of the events that he describes in such loving (or rather, contemptuous) detail that preceded Bonaparte's taking absolute power were only 'politics' to him, in the weak superstructural, sense. But more, Bonaparte was a profound puzzle to him (he was always solving riddles, finding keys and discovering secrets, because his immensely comprehensive paradigm threw these at him all the time, and because he always tried to see behind appearances to reality). He connected Bonaparte and the peasants in several ways—it was apparent to him that the massive peasant vote for Bonaparte had been decisive and had to be explained—and the first of these is of deep psychological interest. This is the famous passage in which he admits that both peasants and Napoleon baffle him and that hence the one represents the other, that Louis Napoleon, 'clumsily cunning, knavishly naive . . . an undecipherable hieroglyphic for the understanding of the civilised—this symbol bore the unmistakable physiognomy of the class that represents barbarism within civilisation' [*ibid.*: 159]. Journalistic, Hegelian and splenetic, this piece of writing, famous as it is, should not perhaps be taken too seriously. But if a man chooses to make epigrams he must be judged by them. From this passage it is evident that Marx despises Louis Napoleon, and that he also, in a more abstract sense, despises French peasants, who are seen as barbarians but cunning, a kind of 'Sancho Panza' stereotype. Mitrany's thesis about social dogmatism find plentiful support in this kind of outburst, and the sweeping judgment of 'barbarism within civilisation' is hard to accept, carbuncles notwithstanding.¹² Of course Marx was capable of better than that. He also analysed peasant Bonapartism in terms of their distinct interest as an economic group—that the other ruling houses of France in the nineteenth century represented classes hostile to them, the Bourbons the landed nobility, the Orleans the capitalists, and that memories of the first Napoleon suggested to them that Bonaparte was their man. A vote for Napoleon was hence a vote against the old régime

and the capitalists that were sucking them dry: 'Napoleon was to the peasants not a person, but a programme. . . Behind the Emperor was hidden the peasant war' [*ibid.*: 159]. He further believed that this trust, once given, would as soon be taken away when Napoleon proved manifestly unable to defend the peasants against the consequences of trying to be petit-bourgeois in a capitalist society, and that this loss of faith in Napoleon would also lead to a loss of faith in their own small scale property as a way of life and so 'the entire state edifice erected on this small holding will fall to the ground'; the peasants, disabused of both the Napoleonic and the private property illusions, would become revolutionary and anti-capitalist, 'and the proletarian revolution will obtain that chorus without which its solo song becomes a swan song in all peasant countries' [*Marx, 1968: 177n*].

This optimism of Marx's as to peasant disbelief in smallholdings seems to me, and not only in hindsight, excessive. Did he really believe that disillusion with Napoleon meant disillusion with their piece of land, meant alliance with the townsmen against capitalism and private property? Certainly there is some evidence that Marx had doubts about the imminent appearance of the peasant 'chorus'. Seventeen years after the first (1852) publication of 'Eighteenth Brumaire', Marx's new edition in 1869, omitted the crucial passage referring to the 'chorus'. Perhaps he had doubts by that time that the chorus would appear, or perhaps he did not believe it any longer necessary. The idea certainly remained correct for all peasant countries. We shall return to this in a moment, but let us continue to consider Marx's optimism about revolutionary peasants in 1852. For although in his recent book Zeldin has said of the nineteenth-century French peasantry that 'Debt was their great scourge' [1973: 136], very much Marx's view, he does not see much evidence of class-consciousness or radical political action, whereas Marx believed that the peasant of the future would be willing to overthrow the old social order, including his land, and strike out 'beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding' [1968: 172-3].

Nonetheless, the question of how the peasants, as a class, would be able to act in a revolutionary manner remained to be resolved, for he had often expressed doubts as to the ability of peasants to carry out even successful *revolts*; he says in 1846: 'The great risings of the Middle Ages all radiated from the country, but equally remained totally ineffective because of the isolation and consequent crudity of the peasants' [1965b: 66]. Were they in fact a class at all? (It is immaterial that he used the word loosely of them, as in 'class that represents . . .'). Now a class, for Marx, is more than a group of individuals that share the same relation to the means of production, and it is more than the possession of a consciousness of common interest—the crucial factor is a common political organisation directed against other classes and actively engaging in class

struggle. Only then is full 'classness' achieved. What the French peasants have in common, however, has the paradoxical but inevitable effect, given their way of life, of dividing rather than uniting them. They have some of the prerequisites: 'Insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class' [Marx, 1968: 172]. But their individual self-sufficiency, like that of the Germanic villages he was to talk about in the *Grundrisse*, reduces the amount of community feeling and need, and hence their solidarity as a class is equivocal, in the sense that 'potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes'. More precisely, and less epigrammatically: 'Insofar as there is merely a local inter-connection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class' [*ibid.*]. On the one hand they are, on the other they are not. This unhappy conclusion (from our point of view only; for Marx this fact was explanatory of the peasant need for Bonaparte and paternal government, unable to represent themselves they had to be represented) is an inevitable consequence of his class model, normally appropriate when dealing with workers in factories in towns, or with the bourgeoisie in their clubs, but less appropriate to peasants spread over a large country. The question of French (or any) peasant classness is not resolved here—Marx almost seems to be agreeing with the recent argument of Shanin that perhaps one definition of peasants is that they are almost incapable of definition in terms derived from other social contexts and historical experiences [Shanin, 1971: 239, 254].

The remarks of Marx in *Capital*, in 1867, have already been mentioned, and the 1869 sudden doubt in peasant militancy has already been referred to. His treatment of the potential of the French peasants during the Commune, in 1871, however, reveals that he still considered them important. The problem was, however, that they had not acted to assist the Paris Commune. This was not, Marx thought, because they were opposed to its social programme but because they were unaware of it, and kept unaware by the bourgeoisie. By 1871, the 'chorus', so long looked for, had almost appeared, and the proletariat had a good deal to offer to their prospective allies in revolution. The Commune, Marx says, 'alone was able, and at the same time compelled, to solve in favour of the peasant, viz., the hypothecary debt, lying like an incubus upon his parcel of soil, the *prolétariat foncier* (rural proletariat), daily growing upon it, and his expropriation from it enforced, at a more and more rapid rate, by the very development of modern agriculture . . ." [1968: 296]. He argues, further, that the Napoleonic, small-holding illusion was rapidly breaking down (it was supposed to have been doing this in the 1850s) and that, crucially,

'three months' free communication of Communal Paris with the provinces would bring about a general rising of the peasants' [*ibid.*: 297].

In other words, his vision in 1871 is of a peasantry that only requires (although it does require it) a stimulus from the centre, a concrete programme, to rise in revolution. But this peasant revolution would be, as he says, aimed at overthrowing the rule of the bourgeoisie, not in order to build socialism, but in order to remove the incubus of mortgage and debt from their private patches of land, so that they could live a little better but in the same old way. Is this the same result as that desired by the putative proletarian government? How long could such a régime survive surrounded by a sea of newly liberated peasants, and would not the proletarian/peasant alliance break down after the future revolution, as a result of class interest, in just the same way that the bourgeois/peasant alliance of 1789 had broken down—as Marx saw? This was, after all, a real problem in Russia later on.¹³ Marx did not carry the argument through. It is one thing to call for the peasants, like spirits from the deep—but will they come when you do call for them? And, if they come, what do you do with them then?

4. *Peasants and Revolution in Russia*

As we have seen, when confronting a society in which peasants still constitute a large percentage of the population, Marx is quite able to consider them rationally as potential allies of the proletariat against capitalism. The point is this, however: if it is a necessary precondition of capitalism that peasants become proletarianised, that their land is freed for rational methods of farming, and if this is a progressive historical process that is to be applauded, how can one seriously envisage allying with them against this attack on their way of life when the result will be the overthrowing of capitalism before it has done its rationalising work and when this will mean that a proletarian government will have to do the work that should already have been done (replace small-scale inefficient peasant farming by large-scale efficient farming and so on) in the teeth of the opposition of the peasants who have just helped to make your revolution and who can therefore only be overcome by a massive use of State power? Not to carry out this historic task would be to condemn socialism to inevitable failure. This was the essence of the problem. Marx does not discuss the tactics of the post-revolutionary dilemma, but it is implicit in his writings, for he is aware that a pre-emptive strike against capitalism, in countries where it does not yet dominate the mode of production, has costs for socialists that have to be considered. His ambivalence on the desirability of this kind of revolution is well illustrated in his treatment of Russia. Only becoming industrialised in his lifetime, this distant country became more and more important to him at the end of his life. He learned its language, corresponded

with its earnest intellectuals, and talked of making it the model, as England was of volume one, of the second part of *Capital*. Also, since revolutions had failed, or not yet occurred, in England, France and Germany, Russia seemed a logical land of hope.

He had first referred to it in the 'Forms . . .' section of the *Grundrisse* at a couple of points, as possessing, in the Slavonic village community, a form that closely resembled the Oriental, with 'common property and communal production' [1973: 490; 1964: 88]. It was this village community, as a pre-capitalist institution still alive in modern times, that held his interest the whole time. From the beginning, his views were formed in a debate with the figure, and after 1866 the ghost, of Baron von Haxthausen, whose discovery of the 'mir' in his *Russian Empire* [1856] presented something new to the eyes of Europe, a social institution that had died elsewhere and that might be able to save Russia from the horrors of industrialization and of having proletarians in her cities. This seemed something special and unique to Haxthausen, if not to Marx [see *Marx*, 1971: 33n].

Haxthausen also argued that the commune was an essential prop for the political stability of the Tsarist Empire. Marx doubted that this was the case. In the first place he seemed to believe that in fact there was an active anti-Tsarist potential in the peasant communes. In 1858 he wrote to Engels: 'in Russia the revolution has begun. . . . As soon as the business there develops somewhat more perceptibly, we shall obtain proof of how far the worthy State Councillor Haxthausen allowed himself to be taken in by the "authorities" and by the peasants trained by the authorities' [1965a: 110-11]. Later on, in 1860, he compared the Russian Emancipation to the American slave rebellion, both being anti-feudal, bourgeois revolutions insofar as slavery and serfdom were being destroyed, even if the Russian was a revolution from above rather than below [*ibid.*: 121].

In the second place Marx had the advantage over the Baron in that he knew that if the Russian régime wished to modernise itself, it would be forced by the logic of capitalism to break up the *mir* as a form of peasant control. For if development was to proceed, the conservative political function of the institution, that, as Haxthausen put it, 'no proletariat can be formed so long as they exist with their present constitution' [1856, i: 124] becomes an economic handicap for precisely that reason, and they must be broken up. By 1868, Marx seemed to have enough evidence that this was occurring, and it was a loss that he did not seem to mourn. In a letter to Engels he said that the commune was not at all democratic, but patriarchal in character, and that it discouraged peasant initiative (as he had argued in the *Grundrisse* of Oriental communes [1973: 486, 1964: 83]) so it did not concern

him much that 'the whole foul mess is in process of collapse' [1965a: 217].

So then, by 1868 it looked as if Marx had written off the commune as in any way useful either to oppose Tsarism or to build upon, because it was being destroyed by a newly arisen capitalism. But if he had, others had not. The debate between Easterners and Westerners in Russia inevitably called forth correspondence to the master to adjudicate whether she had to follow the path of Europe. His theory, after all, had no obvious geographical halting-point, and *Capital* had first appeared in Russia, in 1869, before it was even translated into English! His letter of 1877 to a Russian journal (never sent in his lifetime but forwarded in 1884 by Engels to Vera Zasulich, of whom more later) was written to define his position. It is a fairly long letter, but the 'meat' of it is contained in this passage: 'If Russia continues to pursue the path she has followed since 1861, she will lose the finest chance ever offered by history to a people and undergo all the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist regime' [*ibid.*: 312]. Now this sentence, because of its 'If . . . then' form would seem to have the inestimable advantage of ambiguity. It suggests that an opponent of capitalism must also oppose the régime, and must try to ensure the survival of the *mir*. But it also suggests that there is a good deal of historical momentum, sixteen years, in the direction of capitalist development and that, if not stopped soon, this would become irreversible and the chance lost. Hence the Easterners would have to act soon or forever hold their peace. Marx argues that then, Russia would experience the 'pitiless laws' [*ibid.*: 313] of capitalism like everywhere else. But it ought to be noticed that he does not now seem quite so sure that the *mir* is no more than a foul mess.

In 1881, Vera Zasulich, a Narodnik, wrote him an anxious letter about the fate of the Russian peasantry, and his immense difficulties with the reply (as well as his much greater knowledge on the matter) are revealed in the number of drafts he wrote. The final letter is only the tip of an iceberg. In it he says that the thrust of his argument in *Capital I* was that in order for capitalism to flourish, small, self-earned (peasant) private property had to be replaced by large-scale private property, whereas in the case of Russia the first of these does not yet exist, and she has in the *mir* a common-property form that has not yet been individualised. Hence, he says, the analysis there given is not relevant to Russia—that story is not told of you.

This seems an extremely odd argument, for two reasons. The first is that although in *Capital* his argument was that it was small peasant property that in England had to be transformed to allow the dominance of the capitalist mode of production in agriculture, it is also true that in the very first paragraph of the 'Forms . . .' section of the *Grundrisse* he had written that the presupposition of this was 'dissolution of small, free landed property as well as of

communal landownership' [1973: 471; 1964: 67]. In other words, if the type of property in England had to be altered, so too did it in Russia. And it could also be argued that the transforming of common property, which he says must happen first in Russia and which he has said nothing about in *Capital*, is in fact dealt with therein, in his account of the destruction of common lands in England by enclosures. So Marx is a little unfair to himself—he does in fact say a good deal about the problem in *Capital* and elsewhere. Secondly, it is odd to see Marx so undecided. In the 'Forms . . .' he had little time for the Oriental village which had not self-developed, which had been historically stagnant. But when asked to choose, in 1881, between a neo-Oriental system and its transformation into something closer to the Germanic progressive form, he refused. For the Russian commune may, he says, become the 'mainspring' of Russian development, even though it is attacked by 'deleterious influences' [1955a: 340]. All of this becomes a little more comprehensible if one looks at the drafts of the letter.

The several drafts contain an extended discussion of the nature and prospects of the Russian village community. By 1881, Marx had read and been influenced by Morgan's *Ancient Society* [1877]; he now talks of 'Gentile society' and distinguishes between the 'archaic organisation' [Marx, 1953: 219] of society and the commune, which is, he argues, a transitional stage between primitive communalism and individual private property: 'It is easy to see that the dualism inherent in the structure of the village community can endow it with a vigorous life. . . . But it is no less evident that this very dualism may transform itself into a germ of decomposition' [*ibid.*: 220]. It can evolve in an individualistic or in a collectivistic direction. And what will decide this, Marx thinks, is the 'historical environment' [*ibid.*: 221].

Now Marx had argued that capitalism in its development in the West was, in a sense, collectivist, insofar as it had to overcome small private property and rationalise production. If socialism triumphed in Russia, then the machinery developed in the capitalist West could be transplanted, immediately, to the fields of a country that was not troubled by many irrationally small plots: 'It can gradually supplant the tilling of the soil by lots, by collective agriculture, with the aid of machines' [*ibid.*: 220].¹⁴ If socialism does succeed in Russia, then she will be able to leap-frog a stage. So he can envisage a historical situation in which the commune, insofar as it survives, can become the 'direct point of origin' [*ibid.*: 222] of socialism. This would have gladdened the heart of Vera Zasulich, had she been able to see it. It is almost the Narodnik position; it is strange to hear him talk of the vigorous life of the commune in Russia, meaning its survival over time, when it was the same survival of Oriental communities that had so aroused his historicist contempt.

But this is only one theme in the drafts. Because Marx is also

aware that the peasant commune is being already influenced by developments in Russia: 'A certain type of capitalism . . . wishes to annihilate the community' [*ibid.*: 224] which will disappear through the effects of differentiation, migration and so on 'unless it is broken by a powerful counterforce . . . only a Russian revolution can save the Russian village community' [*ibid.*: 226]. It is inside Russia that the decisive events, in this context, will occur. But what kind of a revolution would this be? The answer seems to be clear enough that it was to be a revolution in the towns that was to save rural Russia, and whether bourgeois or proletarian, the important point is that nowhere does Marx suggest that the peasants might save themselves, or that the solidarity produced by the commune might be a revolutionary factor in its own right. As in 1871 in France, the motive force had to come from the city.

Marx did not seem able to decide the issue very clearly. The best way to help the peasants would seem to be by organising a revolution in the cities. If there is a revolution now, the peasantry might be an ally, but the main point is that their social organisation would be fine material for the development of socialist farming methods. But here is the problem—if you have a revolution now then you have very few proletarians to work on, whereas, if you have a revolution later, then you have plenty of proletarians, ex-peasants, but the peasantry will have become more individualised and hence not only political enemies but economic obstacles. Faced with this perspective, it is not surprising that Marx was ambivalent. I do not think he could have envisaged a situation in which Russia had not only a proletariat but a peasantry still living in their communes and attached to them. He thought the choice was between capitalism and the *mir*, that you could not have both at once—and hence he spans both the position of the later Narodniki and anti-Marxists (the commune is admirable, there are strong normative arguments for saving it) and that of the later Marxists like Lenin (the commune is being differentiated out of existence). In this sense Marx is unable to decide whether he is 'for' or 'against' the Russian peasant. His was a manful attempt to confront the problem, but I do not think one can conclude other than that Marx's answer to the intellectuals was to leave matters to history, and ultimately to the West of Europe. Perhaps it was right that a German theorist living in London should leave questions of revolutionary strategy in Russia to Russians. His last word to them was, in effect, to wait and see. Someone else was needed to tell them what was to be done.

5. Conclusion

The underlying theme of this article has been Marx's ambivalent attitude to peasants throughout his work. This, it has been argued, follows from his basic, and vital categories of bourgeois and proletarian, which he uses to understand modern capitalist society, and

in which terms peasants cannot be understood without ambivalence and continual 'on the one hand . . . on the other hand' forms of argument. For the peasant is at once a worker and a proprietor. This ambivalence manifests itself in two ways—in his difficulty, as observed above, in maintaining a consistent attitude at any one time when analysing particular peasantries in detail (as on France and Russia)—and in his gradual change of mind over time, so that by 1881 he had developed a more sympathetic attitude to peasants, and particularly backward ones at that, than was evidenced in his famous 1848 reference to 'the idiocy of rural life' [1968: 39]. The first of these has, it is hoped, been demonstrated in the course of the argument. The second will now be examined more closely.

In 1848 a cheap insult sufficed to describe the majority of the world's population; peasants were no more to him than a residual category in the process of world-history. But study of France in the 1850s revealed to him their potential importance, as political actors in countries where history had not yet driven them off the stage, and although his belief in their cultural level remained low ('barbarism') he could see their value as an ally of the proletariat against capitalism. In effect, he argued that French peasants would become proletarian, since their land would only be theirs in an equivocal sense, and thus their interests would be identical. Peasants proper, and non-European ones at that, he still had immense contempt for, as in his 1853 articles on India, wherein England's brutal imperialism is approved of insofar as she is acting as a tool of history and breaking up the stagnant village communities, bringing change to the unchanging, economic revolution to the Hindoos. When his choice is between the liberating effects of bourgeois civilisation and non-European peasant society, he is unhesitatingly for the former. Even when writing about the Taiping rebellion, in 1862, the tone is uniformly contemptuous and the writing disappointingly unanalytic, journalistic, even if it is a newspaper article, for he does not mention any social cause or content of the rebellion — opium and European intervention the cause, hooliganism and plunder the content [see Marx, 1969b: 443-4] and although no doubt he had a problem of information, one does not get the impression that he cared about a peasant rising with such religious, non-rational trappings. In the first volume of *Capital*, in 1867, although there is an awareness of the social costs incurred in progress, costs borne by the English peasantry (and this is an awareness he certainly did not seem to have for the Asian peasantry), the needs of progress are paramount, as has already been said; he would not have had it *not* happen. Wherever, as in Europe, peasants are to be identified with small-scale private property, then the advance of capitalist property relations—'The transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labour, into capitalist private property', although

'protracted, violent, and difficult' and much more so than 'the transformation of capitalist private property . . . into socialist property' [1961: 764]—is supported unhesitatingly by Marx. Where there is already a powerful proletariat to act as ally and leader, then resistance may be possible, he did envisage in 1871-2 some sort of alliance against an already established capitalist system in the case of France. But where capitalism has not yet begun to do its work of modernisation, then the problem is more difficult. At the end of his life, it seems that he began to have some doubts about the desirability of capitalism conquering all over the world, and the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against it, in particular in Russia, began to haunt him. For the aim of this attack would have to be revivification of the Russian peasant community, and although he had in 1868 called this a 'foul mess', it had the advantage of not yet having reached the stage of small-scale private property. Hence doubts about the civilising mission of capitalism (and about its willingness to carry out the mission) and hopes about a social form that in some ways resembled his socialist ideal, combined in a hesitant approval of rescuing these peasants from their historical fate. Not that they could actually rescue themselves.

Thus, by 1881, it was no longer so clear that Marx was unambiguously against the peasant, even if he was hardly unambiguously for him. He was still contemptuous of the type of life that peasants lived (or how he thought they lived)—happy to stagnate upon their possessions in the circle of sowing and harvesting, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, a life always the same, for it was good enough for their fathers, going nowhere, non-teleological, and the certainty that this, how life is, is how it must always be, for how could it be different? All this was anathema to Marx, his cultural contempt seems to be a constant. But he also grew to despise, almost as much, the capitalist Europe of his day, with its complacency, and its failing drive for change elsewhere. Hence he tunnelled in the Blue Books to unearth the horror behind the respectable bourgeois façade, and the more he knew of capitalism, the more he despised it.¹⁵ Out of the balance between these two contempts—for the rural idiot, the barbarian egotist, the potato in a sack—and for the bourgeois, in another man's phrase, fumbling in a greasy till—comes a grudging admission that the former may be a useful ally for the proletariat against the latter, although only in the short term.

This later vision of Marx's, a different one from that he had earlier, never became as well known as his views in the major works, the ones that Mitrany talks about. For men like Lenin, at the end of the century, it was the impact of capitalism that was primary, the destruction of the peasant community a fact for Marxists to demonstrate with glee. Whether this had in fact happened, even by 1917, seems dubious in the light of some recent

research. Hence Marx's last words on this subject are acquiring a new relevance and even a new pathos. Like all of his words, they bear a heavy burden of historical consequence.

NOTES

- 1 The original article was published in 1927 (see Dalton and Gregory [1927]) and he spent much of the interwar period as a newspaper correspondent in Eastern Europe, where he noticed the divide between socialists and peasants. In order to explain 'the division which I found everywhere I was taken far back into ideological disputes of the second half of the nineteenth century' [Mitrany, 1951: 11].
- 2 This issue was well discussed by Chayanov. As he says, the peasant family farm 'can be interpreted with the aid of the categories of the capitalist farm based on hired labour. To do this, however, we have to create an exceedingly doubtful concept; we must unite in the peasant both the entrepreneur capitalist and the worker he is exploiting. It is possible that this fiction ought, in fact to be preserved in the interests of the monism of economic thought' [1966: 41]. He himself firmly rejected this approach. Marx never fully confronted the problem.
- 3 See Thompson [1968: 13] for his concept of 'rescue' in historical work.
- 4 Marx first discussed types of ownership in history in the *German Ideology* in 1846 [1965b: 33-6], but there he only has two post-primitive forms, the Ancient and the German, he does not speak of the Orient at all. It is a solely European, typically Hegelian, version of world history. The 1858-9 analysis in the *Grundrisse* is equally abstract, but much more thorough and convincing.
- 5 The two factors, State and village, are expressly said to explain the 'stationary character' of the area by their interaction in his letter of June 14, 1853. Krader's claim that Marx did not see the Oriental monarch as responsible for public works [Krader, 1972: 39] flies in the face of his direct testimony in this letter that this is his view, in 1853 if not in 1880-1 [Marx, 1965a: 85].
- 6 Whose *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published in 1776 in six quarto volumes.
- 7 Plamenatz [1963: 208] discusses Hegel's use of the term 'German' for the European post-Roman age and concludes that its use is relatively 'harmless' and lacking in overt nationalism. Even more is this the case with Marx.
- 8 Interestingly, he uses an almost exactly parallel phrase in the *German Ideology*: 'If antiquity started out from the town and its little territory, the Middle Ages started out from the country' (his emphasis) [1965b: 35].
- 9 The idea, of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as a time in which great changes were not made but in which there occurred a 'breach in the walls of custom' is implicit in Marx, but the phrase comes from Tawney [1912: 173].
- 10 This debate in English historiography, which really began at the turn of the century, has been summarised in a recent paper by Joan Thirk [1974]. She does not refer to Marx, nor did most of the participants, but the accounts of the writers of this period are similar to Marx's; see J. L. and Barbara Hammond [1911], A. H. Johnson [1909], and R. H. Tawney [1912]. While more recent accounts have tended to dispute their arguments and therefore, implicitly, Marx's too, like J. D. Chambers and G. E. Mingay [1970].
- 11 This is a serious claim by Marx and it deserves serious consideration, for other processes of accumulation have occurred since that involved considerably more manifest terror than the English one. Primarily, this would involve an elucidation of the concept of 'terror' and variables like

extent, duration and compliance. For it could be argued that the most effective terror is the least manifest, that England's ruling class were skilful in its use, whereas its use by, for example, the Soviet régime during collectivisation, was clumsy and inefficient.

- 12 As with 'rural idiocy', the problem with this phrase is that it conflates an insult and a serious idea. With 'barbarism' the conception is of French peasants as representing a particular stage in evolution, a kind of agricultural method, 'barbarians' in the technical, if not wholly value-free, sense of nineteenth century anthropology. Marx read much of this, especially later on, and in his notebooks on Morgan [1877] in Krader [1972: 98] one finds the phrase, 'So Africa was and is an ethnical chaos of savagery and barbarism' as a statement of fact. With 'idiocy' the serious reference is of course to the notion of Aristotle (one of Marx's favourite authors) of man as essentially a *zoon politikon*, that a human brought up outside the polis was only one in an equivocal sense, not fully human or adult [see Aristotle, 1962: 29, Bk. 1 ch. 2 or Marx, 1973: 84].
- 13 And foreseen by Rosa Luxemburg in 1917. She thought the Bolshevik approval of land seizures by the peasants 'has created a new and powerful layer of popular enemies of socialism in the countryside' [Luxemburg, 1961: 46].
- 14 Compare this to Trotsky's 'law of combined development' [Trotsky, 1967, i: 23].
- 15 For a similar argument see Lichtheim [1963: 98]. His growing interest in pre-capitalist societies at the end of his life is evidenced by his reading of anthropologists like Morgan, Maine, Phear and Lubbock [see Krader, 1972] a preoccupation continued by Engels after his death. At his death he is reputed to have left two cubic metres of material and statistics on Russia [McLellan, 1973: 422] and it seems unfortunate that he never completed anything substantial on that country.

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