

# MARX AND THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION IN FRANCE: BACKGROUND TO THE *COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

by Bernard H. Moss

To those who believe in fifty year Kondratieff cycles, those long waves of **growth** and deflation repeated in history, it is not accidental that the sesquicentennial of the *Communist Manifesto* comes after a quarter of a century in which its basic condition, the polarization of classes, has been realized. For just as in 1848, the year of its publication, the sesquicentennial falls after a long period of deflation during which wages and conditions have deteriorated and income inequality risen to unprecedented levels. Indeed, it is perhaps truer today than in 1848 that the condition of workers has sunk 'deeper beneath the level of existence of their class.' The sinking has taken different forms in Europe and America, with mass unemployment in the first – an eleven per cent average in the European Union – and disguised unemployment or low-wage unproductive jobs in the second. During the period 1973–93 in which GDP per capita rose 29% in the USA, annual male incomes fell 11%.<sup>1</sup> Never before in the history of capitalism have workers faced such a long-term impoverishment, which has enriched the owners of capital, more than quintupling the number of those earning more than a million dollars a year. More than ever, the factor determining life chances is not gender, race, educational attainments or even occupation, but access to capital.

The polarization between wage-earners and capitalists has not gone unnoticed. The last few years have seen signs of increasing awareness of the contraction of opportunity in capitalist society. 'Downsizing' and 're-engineering' have caused insecurity in both the working and the middle class. Despite the euphoria over prices on Wall Street the American dream of each generation doing better than its parents is **fading**.<sup>2</sup> Disillusionment with government has produced growing electoral abstentionism among workers in the U.S., France and Britain.

In France rising unemployment has produced a loss of faith in private business and the governing elite, and a demand for more state intervention that resulted in the election of the red-rose-green government of Lionel Jospin in June 1997.<sup>1</sup> It is not accidental that the only Western working class that has so far offered serious resistance to the exploitative pressures of capital is the one in the background of the *Manifesto*, so deeply rooted are political traditions that can be recharged and redeployed to meet new challenges.

**As** in 1848, France today is ruled by a social democratic coalition representing the working and middle classes with a programme for wage reflation, reduction of hours and job creation that is not explicitly anti-capitalist. **As** Marx foresaw, the experience of 1848 showed that capitalist resistance to even minimal reforms like hours reduction could lead to intensified conflict and even civil war. Jospin is likely to compromise his programme before approaching that point. Today as in 1848, when Marx was the lone Communist in a Parisian republican club, there are no mass **vanguard** parties, the Communists having abandoned the goal of socialism and dissolved into multiple currents; for the first time Left Trotskyists, Communists, Socialists and Greens have more in common with each other than they have with their respective parties. The striking absence from the movement today is that of intellectuals and the utopian imagination. **As** in 1850 when Marx first decided on the formation of a working-class Communist Party, time will tell whether its absence makes a crucial difference.

**Marx's** positions and analyses shifted with circumstances. He made three successive different interpretations of the revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune, but that does not make his politics merely **circumstantial**.<sup>4</sup> There are contradictions between texts and within texts, but some explanations are more robust, some determinations more fundamental, and some historical formulations more balanced than others. His texts must be read as part of a corpus and understood in historical context, particularly in relation to the working-class movement that gave unity to his life and thought, for it is in the texts and formulations that engage with the working-class movement that Marx is the most illuminating. Conversely, it is when he loses touch with the movement – either when he takes up an ultra-revolutionary position, as in 1849–50 or, in reaction to its failure, a detached objectivism as in 1851–52 – that his vision becomes skewed and distorted. The first of these mistakes was subjectivist – the belief that all was made possible by political will; the second was objectivist – the belief that human action could not **change** the immutable laws of history.

These deviations occurred because of the disintegration of the social democratic movement with which Marx identified, particularly in Germany; but the subjectivist one, amazingly enough, prefigured the future, both the Paris Commune and 1917.

### THE POLITICS OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

A sketchy pamphlet written for a small sect, the mostly German League of Communists, the *Manifesto* is nevertheless the most complete and balanced expression of Marx's politics, largely because of its engagement with the larger democratic movement. One reason it was not much noted in 1848 was that most of the ideas it contained were commonplace among working-class democrats, certainly in France.<sup>3</sup> The greatness of the work lies in the synthesis. The history of society is the history of class **struggle** that tends to polarize between workers and employers under capitalism. Communism is seen arising from a double movement, the economic development of capitalist society, polarizing classes and stimulating class **struggle** and organization, and the activity of the Communists, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class party, who push it forward, understanding the goal and line of march and need for unity across industries, localities and nations. As in the past, the outcome of the **struggle** is open-ended; it could result in the revolutionary re-constitution of society or the common ruin of the contending classes.

According to the *Manifesto* the Communists do not form a separate party but act as a vanguard in the democratic working-class movements of different countries: Chartists in England, agrarian reformers in America and Poland, radicals and social democrats under middle-class leadership in Switzerland and France, and democrats supporting the bourgeois revolution in Germany. Marx recognized that the bourgeoisie helped to organize the proletariat through its own struggles against feudalism. The success of the bourgeois democratic revolution would, he argued, clear the way for direct class struggle and organization against the bourgeoisie. Communists in Germany should support the bourgeoisie so long as it acted in a revolutionary way, even to the extent of restraining their own demands; yet they should never cease to instil antagonism to it into the workers, so as to be able use the political and social conditions it must necessarily introduce as so many weapons in the **fight** against it that would begin immediately with the fall of the reactionary classes.

The aim of the Communists was to make the proletariat the ruling

## THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1998

class by winning the battle for democracy. By 'democracy' Marx meant not a formal system of parliamentary governance, but a class coalition of workers, peasants, and petty bourgeois, the movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority. For them he proposed a transitional programme of political and social democracy, including measures of gradual nationalization that would be too radical for the system to absorb and which, outstripping themselves, would lead to socialism. Marx and **Engels** hoped that the proletariat with its revolutionary momentum would be able to lead this process, but realized that the middle class might be able to exploit the parliamentary system for its own purposes in order to stabilize capitalist relations and halt progress toward socialism. The proletariat had a better chance of assuming leadership in the course of armed struggle than in electoral contests and parliamentary debates. Thus, a second revolution might be needed. The actual course of the 1848 revolutions demonstrated, however, that the bourgeoisie could not stand the risk of parliamentary democracy, and that the real choice lay between worker-led revolution and reaction."

In the *Manifesto* the purpose of working-class rule, which Marx in 1850 called the dictatorship of the proletariat, was to wrest by degrees all capital from the **bourgeoisie**, to centralize all means of production in the hands of the state and increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible. The dictatorship was a transitional regime that exercised coercion against the capitalists, expropriating them, rapidly increasing the productive forces and thereby sweeping away the bases of class antagonism and of its own rule.' When Marx talked of the need to centralize and rapidly increase production he was thinking of less industrialized nations like France and Germany that had to catch up with Britain. In these countries the dictatorship would also have to prosecute the civil and international war that it would provoke, eventually carrying the revolution to the leading capitalist nation, Britain. Reform in one country could not be sustained unless the revolution triumphed on a world-wide scale. This was a rather extreme apocalyptic scenario that anticipated the dilemma of the Soviet revolution. What if the necessary conditions for the success of world revolution were beyond the political and economic possibilities of the moment?

Previously Marx had thought that the revolution would first come to the country that had the **largest** proletariat and most clear-cut class division. But in *The Class Struggles in France*, written in 1850, he recognized the revolutionary advantages of backwardness, what

Trotsky in 1905 was to call 'combined and uneven development.' In France, conflicts among factions of the bourgeoisie, the subordination of peasants, petty bourgeois and industrialists to finance capital, and of the latter to English capital, are all superimposed upon the conflict between workers and employers. The proletariat, focusing the grievances of all the subordinate classes, leads them in a coalition against the bourgeoisie. In a revolution that combines democratic and socialist reforms the ideas of the French Revolution spur on the subordinate classes, carrying even a section of the bourgeoisie beyond the economic limits of their class interest. The revolutionary process makes up for economic and social backwardness.

### LEGACY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND MARX'S POLITICS

The fundamental background to Marx's thinking and action in 1848–1851 was the French Revolution of 1789. Marx, a German philosopher, was ambivalent about the value of this heritage, at times regarding it as a spur, and at others as a barrier, to materialist class consciousness ('a nightmare that weighs on the minds of the living'). At all events he was careful about making his own theoretical demarcation. Marxists have tended to take their distance from the French Revolutionary tradition; social democrats because of its association with dictatorship and terror,<sup>10</sup> and Communists because of their pretension to theoretical closure." Conservatives since Edmund Burke have better understood the subversive potential of 1789 and 1792, 'the living and unbroken tradition'<sup>12</sup> running from Jacobinism to Marxism, but their analyses remained ideological, abstracted from social context.

As the French Socialist leader and historian of the Revolution Jean Jaurès declared, with only a bit of exaggeration, 'the French Revolution contains the whole of socialism.... Socialism was contained from the outset within the republican idea.'<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the Revolution was a whole, a 'bloc', as the radical-socialist Georges Clemenceau said in 1891. It cannot be separated into an antiseptic liberal phase and a bloody Jacobin one; the raging populace were present in the first just as a fraction of the bourgeoisie carried through the second. It includes the 1796 communist conspiracy of Babeuf, the most advanced point of the popular movement, as well as the arch-conspirator of the nineteenth century, Auguste Blanqui, whose politics were much closer to Marx's than tradition allows.

By background and reading Marx was steeped in the Revolution. He

came from a part of the Rhineland that had been transformed by it. His father, and his philosophical mentor **Hegel**, were both enthusiasts for it. He spent most of **1843** in Kreuznach and Paris reading the *philosophes* and the history of the Revolution, both the bourgeois historians Adolphe Thiers and Auguste Mignet and the Robespierriest *Mémoires* of R. *Levasseur*, Philippe *Buchez's Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française*, and possibly Filippo Buonarroti's *Conspiracy* of the Equals. From Rousseau, with his concept of the 'general will' overcoming the particular barrier of private property, he drew communist **conclusions**.<sup>14</sup> Obviously fascinated by the Jacobins, he was planning a history of the **Convention**.<sup>15</sup>

Marx alternated between bourgeois and Robespierriest interpretations without achieving a synthesis. From the liberal historians he learned of a class struggle of the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy for the abolition of feudalism. According to this reading, the bourgeoisie, faced with the resistance of the king and aristocracy, who came to represent all the injustices of the old regime, was able to arouse the enthusiasm of the masses in the name of the universal Enlightenment ideal of freedom. The Terror was a necessary instrument of the bourgeoisie to defend liberty against internal subversion and foreign invaders and to abolish the last remnants of feudalism and royalism.

From the Robespierriest historian *Buchez*, on the other hand, Marx would have gotten a different view of the Terror as an attack on bourgeois egoism and attempt to found an egalitarian community. *Levasseur* also saw the Jacobin republic as a sharp break with monarchy; from him Marx learned that it arose from the popular will, expressed in clubs and municipalities, smashed the monarchist state apparatus, and elected a unitary **working** body, the Convention, which combined legislative, executive and judicial **powers**.<sup>16</sup> This strong, coercive, unitary state, emanating from the popular will, prosecuting civil and international war and serving as a transition to a constitutional republic, became for Marx the archetype for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The truth was multi-faceted. The Jacobin dictatorship did represent the bourgeois revolution at its most advanced point, but its alliance with the smallholding *sans culottes* was **inspired** by the egalitarian and communitarian ideals of **Rousseau**.<sup>17</sup> Arising from popular demands, measures of food requisition, price control, forced loans, state provision of work or welfare, and the distribution of the land of convicted traitors to the poor, all pointed toward a more regulated egalitarian **society**.<sup>18</sup> This was expressed in Robespierre's Declaration of

the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which defined property as a social convention subordinate to the rights of existence. But Marx and later historians found it hard to admit that this Robespierriest vision could be so subversive of the propertied order.

Yet it was only natural that its spirit would inspire a communist insurrection after the fall of Robespierre left the *sans culottes* without bourgeois allies or succour for their hunger. The ideal of smallholding democracy had been sustained by the alliance of the Jacobin fraction of the *bourgeoisie* with the masters and shopkeepers of the *sans culottes*. With the disappearance of bourgeois allies and return of dire hunger, the centre of popular gravity moved to the wage earners, who were one half of Parisian society. The proletarianization of the *sans culottes* prepared the way for the communisation of Robespierriest by Gracchus Babeuf.

Babeuf's conspiracy was preceded by two spontaneous uprisings, those of Germinal and Prairial, which demanded bread and the application of the Jacobin Constitution of 1793.<sup>19</sup> It arose out of recognition that for a popular uprising to succeed it needed the planning, offensive initiative and secrecy that only a small, tight-knit leadership could provide. The conspirators were agreed that only common, not equal, ownership, could prevent a return to inequality. Since the people did not yet understand what they required for happiness, the conspirators proposed to establish a temporary dictatorship, supported by the people in arms, that would eliminate its armed enemies, undertake measures of re-distribution to show the benefits of equality, and guide the people back to the Constitution of 1793. The conspiracy was not an isolated, eccentric plot by extremists, but had popular support from below and tentative links with the army and the government. It was the last expression of the popular democracy unleashed by the Revolution.<sup>20</sup>

From the history of the Revolution Marx could thus derive almost all the elements of his politics: class struggle and hegemony; the need to smash the old state; the necessity for a popular dictatorship to prosecute civil and international war, and as a transition to a more egalitarian order; and the process of permanent revolution. The revolution was permanent because it was continuous, uninterrupted, never stabilized. It followed an ascending line of radicalization, and a descending line of democratic participation, with each phase growing out of the preceding one. From the Constitutionals to the Girondists and the Jacobins, each faction leaned on its more progressive neighbour for support. As soon as it had brought the revolution far

enough to be unable to follow it further, each faction was thrust aside by the bolder ally that stood behind. As more and more radical strata came to dominate the scene, the springs of society, overloaded by the strain, snapped back to make the revolution conform to historical possibilities.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the revolution had left the classes so fissured that the bourgeoisie, threatened by both the aristocracy and working classes, had to rely on an expansionist Napoleonic dictatorship to establish stable rule.

Marx initially regarded the Revolution as a philosopher rather than a historian, in the light of a Feuerbachian critique of Hegel. According to this reading it had achieved merely a political emancipation that consecrated the sanctity of private property, creating through the legal equality of the liberal state an illusory community that masked the reality of propertied inequality. Jacobinism was but the extreme example of the political illusion that human will was sufficient to create equality, an illusion that led to violence and terror and ended with the reassertion of bourgeois society under Thermidor. Napoleon conducted the last battle of terror against bourgeois business interests by glorifying the state and 'substituting permanent war for permanent revolution.'<sup>22</sup>

In this Feuerbachian vein Marx saw the state as an independent power rising above social classes: the absolutist monarchy arbitrated between bourgeoisie and aristocracy<sup>23</sup> the Napoleonic state was an end in itself, and the bureaucracy was a closed corporation oppressing society.<sup>24</sup> Marx also returned to this state-centred analysis to explain the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon. The revolution against feudalism had produced a bureaucratic state that was nonetheless infected by feudalism, by its spirit of hierarchy and domination. It provided sinecures for political adventurers and the propertied elite, usurped social and economic functions, and taxed the peasantry. In this light the Paris Commune of 1871 was initially perceived not as a socialist revolution, but primarily as a revolt against the centralized Napoleonic state.

But Marx rejected the idealism of this state-centred explanation of history, which became the basis for the Tocquevillian school, in *The German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach* of 1846. Here he abandons Feuerbach's contemplative materialism for an engaged one. There is no 'essence of man' to be realized in communism, but only the open-ended development of humans in their productive relations. The proletariat is to be transformed through revolutionary practice, without the help of theoretical anticipation and guidance; the only role

of leaders and theory is to **clarify** existing consciousness. From the materialist viewpoint the state is merely a reflection of civil society and an instrument of the ruling class, the aristocratic monarchy, the bourgeois Napoleonic state. The French Revolution remained bourgeois, the Terror representing the plebeian way for the bourgeoisie to eliminate feudalism, Napoleon the military way of securing its interests.

This materialist view, while basic, was one-dimensional, leaving little room for political activity, theory and the relative autonomy of the state. The bourgeois revolution in its Rousseauistic phase had anti-bourgeois consequences. The working class did not immediately develop its own materialist consciousness, but in the nineteenth century stormed heaven with ideas borrowed from the bourgeois democratic revolution that preceded it.

#### THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION AND SOCIALISM: 1830-48

These ideas were taken over and translated into socialism and communism after the July days of **1830** overthrew the restored monarchy with Parisian workers in the **lead**.<sup>25</sup> The outbreak of worker protest that followed was accompanied by a revival of republican and Robespierist idealism. The school-teacher aristocrat Albert Laponneraye<sup>26</sup> opened courses for workers on the history of the Revolution that criticized Robespierre for not going far enough in the redistribution of wealth. Using the Saint-Simonian concept of exploitation, republicans focused on the plight of wage earners, proposing trade or producers' associations as the way to achieve worker ownership of the means of production. Blanqui, condemned to prison for trying to arm the workers, already saw history as a struggle of the oppressed against property-owning exploiters. The only way to resolve the duel between profits and wages was through common ownership in producers' associations. Workers, however, needed the guidance of 'intellectual pariahs' like **himself**.<sup>27</sup>

Young students and intellectuals organized skilled workers into revolutionary sections that adopted Robespierre's Declaration of the Rights of Man as their credo. The **significance** of the credo, which divided working-class from middle-class republicans, was that it implied at least a redistribution of wealth if not common property. The German section that adopted the credo, the League of the Outlaws, was the origin of the League of Communists. Like its French parent

## THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1998

the German league had a programme for collectivization through state-aided producer cooperatives.<sup>28</sup> The mass organization of the *Droits de l'homme* – 3000 workers in 162 Parisian sections led by an elected committee of students and intellectuals – was outlawed and suppressed in 1834, but from its ruins came the secret societies and communism.<sup>29</sup>

To survive the suppression of press, freedom of association and jury trials, activist republicans needed organizations that were tighter and more disciplined, with secret, self-selected leaders. The Blanquist secret society, led by a triumvirate, kept its members in a state of readiness for a blow against the symbols of state power that would spark a general insurrection. This action would 'derive its legitimacy and force from the consent of the armed population who will represent the will of the great majority of the nation.'<sup>30</sup> Like the dictatorship of Babeuf, this one would also liquidate the enemy, satisfy workers' demands and gradually expropriate capitalists through the formation of workers' cooperatives, after which it would tend to wither away.<sup>31</sup> The similarity to Marx's conception is striking.

The League of Outlaws, renamed the League of the Just, participated in the abortive Blanquist uprising of May 1839. Blanqui paid the price of voluntarism and secrecy, always striking when the iron was not hot. 'The profound secrecy of the conspiracy had the effect that republicans were neither less surprised nor more prepared than the government.'<sup>32</sup> The secret society was a response to the suppression of public political life but one that severed its connection with neighbourhood sections and public opinion. When the revolution came in 1848 secret societies were in the vanguard, but only after a long depression had provoked popular protest and a middle-class banquet campaign for electoral reform had brought hope in the form of a public demonstration on the streets of Paris.

The secret societies that succeeded Blanqui's, like the *Société des travailleurs Pgalitaires*, which was divided into trades, workshops and factories, were explicitly working-class and communist.' The election campaign of 1840 set off five months of strikes and political agitation in Paris that saw the first public communist banquet and also the publication of Etienne Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie* and Louis Blanc's *Organisation du travail*. Blanc's programme for the gradual collectivization of industry through state-aided trade cooperatives became the panacea of social republicanism. Cabet, advocated a peaceful communism in which an elected parliament would act through wage increases and a progressive income tax gradually to collectivize property. Cabet had 200,000 working-class supporters.

## BERNARD H. MOSS

Other communists like **Théodore Dézamy**, criticizing him for his reliance on the bourgeoisie, thought a **violent revolution** against the monarchy was required but did not exclude a parliamentary transition to communism. In the Code *de la Communauté*, which Marx, however, found infected with private property, **Dézamy** foresaw an industrialized communist society of abundance and 'generous equality'

This, then, was the **background** to **Marx's** discovery, when he arrived in Paris in the Fall of 1843, that workers were communists, that sociability and 'the brotherhood of man' were 'no mere phrase with them,' and that 'theory and propaganda [were] their first end.'<sup>38</sup> **Engels** **similarly** discovered a revolutionary class among the Chartists in London. It was not without reason that they concluded that a majority of democrats, certainly working-class democrats in the major centres, were communists. 'Nowadays democracy is Communism. . . . Democracy has become a proletarian principle, the principle of the masses. The masses may be more or less clear about this, the only correct meaning of democracy, but all have at least an obscure feeling that the social equality of **rights** is implicit in democracy,' wrote **Engels** in 1846.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in practice little separated him and Marx from middle-class radicals like **Alexandre Ledru-Rollin**, who with their programme of cooperative socialism were 'communists without knowing it.'<sup>40</sup> **Engels** wrote for Ledru-Rollin's daily *La Réforme*. The Jacobins of 1793 were the communists of today, Marx concluded on the eve of the 1848 **revolution**.<sup>41</sup>

Marx criticized French republicans for their 'phrases and illusions handed down from the **Revolution**,'<sup>42</sup> but theoretical differences were of little immediate consequence. The French republicans may well have had a better understanding of early industrial society than Marx. Though they acknowledged the class struggle that was just emerging between workers and employers, they focused on secondary forms of exploitation by landholders and financiers – the 200,000 electors of the July Monarchy – in the form of rent, interest and taxes. On the other hand they conceived of socialism as a final goal, rather than as a transition to communism made possible by the growth of productive forces. And they expected to succeed within the boundaries of France, whereas Marx asserted that socialism could not **survive** in one country without conquering Britain, which dominated the world **market**.<sup>43</sup>

## MARX AND THE MID-CENTURY REVOLUTION: 1848–51

The working-class revolution that broke out in February 1848 in Paris installed a provisional coalition government that included the socialists Ledru-Rollin, Blanc and Albert, a metal worker and one of the first conspiratorial communists. Marx was invited as a guest of honour by the socialist minister Ferdinand Flocon. He joined the *Droits de l'homme*, one of 250 clubs formed by the working classes to pressure the government against bourgeois influence and push it towards the socialist 'organisation of labour.' He proposed sending delegates to the provinces to organize a demonstration calling for the deferral of elections. The government needed time to educate the public and demonstrate to it the benefits of equality, particularly to peasants under the thumb of local gentry. He marched 'in the shadow of Robespierre,' he said.<sup>48</sup> Alongside Blanqui he wanted to arm the workers in order to protect public liberties and to make sure ministers kept their promises. He also spoke on behalf of small manufacturers. His politics were indistinguishable from those of Blanqui who, apparently trusting to the ballot box, walked away in disgust from the ridiculous coup *de main* of 15 May that nonetheless put him in prison.<sup>49</sup>

Marx and Engels returned to Germany and worked to build a social democratic coalition in support of the bourgeois revolution. For that purpose they had issued a seventeen-point programme. The demands were limited, so as to attract some bourgeois support: free education, limitations on inheritance, a national bank. Marx dispatched Communists to form workers' associations all over Germany. He joined the Cologne Democratic Association, was elected president of the local Workers' Association and launched the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* as the advanced working-class organ of social democracy.<sup>50</sup>

But the bourgeois democratic coalition in Germany would not hold. The *Manifesto* had excoriated the German petty bourgeoisie as reactionary, helplessly dependent on the princes. Engels was surprised by the depth of popular unrest in Germany and the wide gulf separating workers and peasants from middle-class democrats. As regards bourgeois leadership of the revolution, Marx's pessimistic analysis of 1843 was vindicated. Frightened by the popular upheaval, the bourgeoisie refused to break with the old regime. Only the working class was in a position to carry on the movement, but German workers, dispersed over many states and divided by craft and guild affiliations, lacked the experience of a national struggle for power. It was too late

for the bourgeoisie and too early for the working class to take up the struggle.<sup>43</sup>

The **disintegration** of the bourgeois democratic front in Germany conditioned Marx' analysis of the situation in France.

In June 1848 the dismissal of workers from the jobs scheme known as the national workshops provoked a mass uprising in Paris that lasted three days. Marx interpreted this spontaneous uprising, which lacked leadership and **organization**, as the **working class breaking** free from the petty bourgeois social democrats. After this Marx and **Engels** would interpret social democracy through a prism that fractionated it into proletarian and petty bourgeois components. This described a potential, rather than an actual, break between workers, organized in clubs and secret societies, and the parliamentarians of the Mountain like Ledru-Rollin. The latter made a huge advance in the elections of May 1849, gaining one-third of the peasant vote, perhaps half of the army and raising the spectre of a 'red' **presidential** victory in the election of 1852. They were committed to leading a rebellion in the event that Louis Napoleon used force against the Roman republic in violation of the Constitution. On 13 June 1849 Ledru-Rollin led a demonstration against the violation and called the people to arms. The uprising failed not because of the lack of will and 'parliamentary cretinism' of the petty bourgeoisie, as Marx claimed in *Class Struggles*, but for lack of revolutionary organization, coordination and initiative. The remnants of the Mountain in parliament after June were torn between real **hopes** of electoral victory in 1852, and workers and peasants in secret societies who had given up on constitutional processes.<sup>44</sup>

Marx and **Engels** hoped that a second revolution in France would save the faltering German revolution. The June Days in 1848 had demonstrated the futility of relying on social democracy and the need for a workers' party capable of leading any second revolution. After the failure of the military campaign to save the Reich Constitution in April 1849 Marx resigned from the Rhenish Committee of Democratic Associations and undertook to organize a congress of workers' associations and a working-class party.<sup>45</sup>

From friends in Paris he heard that **workers** were turning away from the Mountain to the secret societies. '**Blanqui** has become their real leader, the permanent Revolution their goal.'<sup>46</sup> The peasants, weighed down by taxes and mortgages, were joining workers in opposition to the bourgeoisie. This was the context for *Class Struggles* in which Marx explained **why** uneven and combined development is a stimulus to

revolution. The model is that of the permanent revolution, the armed workers pushing the petty bourgeois democrats forward in February 1848, but being abandoned by them in June. The fiasco of the demonstration of 13 June frees them from their last illusions and they rally around the revolutionary socialism of **Blanqui**. When the government restricted the **suffrage** in May 1850, disenfranchising the poorest third of the electorate, Marx and **Engels** urged the Blanquists to launch an insurrection that would establish a long-term dictatorship of the proletariat to confront the prospects of civil and world **war**.<sup>47</sup>

This ultra-revolutionary turn by Marx in 1850 is perhaps understandable in view the suppression of public political activity, but it went beyond the possibilities of the moment. On the other hand, it brilliantly prefigured the future – the Paris Commune and the Soviet revolution. The League of Communists in Germany was re-formed as a working-class party. In the March Address of its Central Committee Marx outlined a strategy of dual power in which the German working class would help **bring** the petty bourgeoisie to power and then, armed and organized in municipal governments and committees, push it forward to make maximum inroads on property before taking power itself, simultaneously with the next revolution in France. **Marx's** eagerness for action was seen in the international alliance he formed in London with Blanquists and other putschists. Called the Universal Society of Revolutionary Communists, it was organized as a self-selected party of combat dedicated to overthrowing the privileged classes, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and permanent revolution leading to the realization of communism—a remarkable anticipation of the **Third International**.<sup>48</sup>

By June 1850, however, Marx had concluded from the absence of response in France and from the evidence of world-wide recovery that the era of revolution was over. Ensnared in the British Museum, he set out to win intellectual victories with his work on economics while his politics languished. He turned disillusioned from revolutionary optimism to an ironic detached pessimism. The Hegelian abstractions of **Kapital**, from which workers' struggle is conspicuously absent, are a product of this **period**.<sup>49</sup> Marx had lost touch with workers and peasants, driven **underground** by repression. Nothing more, he thought, could be expected from workers exhausted by defeats and peasants incapable of social initiative. With the threat of proletarian revolution averted, the ruling class could settle the question of power amongst themselves, overcoming parliamentary division by strengthening executive **power**.<sup>50</sup>

## BERNARD H. MOSS

This was the approach Marx adopted in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, written in December 1851. Engels believed bourgeois press reports of peasant atrocities and called Louis Napoleon a mediocrity, his coup a farce. He urged Marx to write from 'the standpoint of world history,' of the inexorable Hegelian world spirit, 'a diplomatic non-committal epoch-making article.'<sup>29</sup> The resulting narrative is full of appearances, shams, illusions, ridiculous postures and the spirit of paradox. The model of permanent revolution is run in reverse as restoration *en permanence*. The revolution **begins** deceptively at its highest point with the proletariat in the lead, posing solutions which could not be realized, and proceeds in descending order. The victory of Louis Napoleon is not that of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat, but that of the executive over the legislative and the bureaucratic state over society. His juggling of contradictory interests, being all things to all men, produces instability that will lead to his downfall. The lumpenproletariat get spoils of office, the bourgeoisie get social order and public contracts, the peasantry get mortgage banks and nationalism, the working class get public works and promises of association. The account is, as Engels recommended, 'prolix,' over-complex and sophisticated, too contradictory, detached and ironic, missing the central tendency.

Missing is the centrality of class struggle that previously aroused Marx' hopes: the crises of January 29, March 21, June 13 now seen as merely rehearsals for Louis Napoleon's coup and the polarization of classes that took place in 1849 described in *Class Struggles*. Marx does not **identify** the main cause and consequences of the coup: the bourgeois fear of an electoral revolution in May 1852<sup>30</sup> and the uprisings of more than 100,000 peasants and workers from 900 communes, followed by the arrest of 26,884 mostly working-class republicans, the first mass political purge in history, that ended opposition and **grounded** political **stability**.<sup>31</sup> The description of the peasantry as an atomized 'sack of potatoes,' subsistence farmers needing state representation, is distorted. Smallholding peasants living together in villages, victims of market fluctuations and open to socialist propaganda, were the very people who carried out insurrections against the coup. If some – not all – approved **the** coup in the referendum, it was because they were terrorized. Marx foresees a revolution against Louis Napoleon that will do away with bureaucracy, infected with feudalism, while preserving necessary centralization, but he seems to regard state intervention of all sorts, for education, **credit**, bridge and railway building, as a usurpation of self activity. In his disengagement

from class Marx retreats to his early Feuerbachian state-centred analysis.

### THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND THE COMMUNE: BREAK OR CONTINUITY?

Marx did not return to an engagement with the actual workers' movement until 1864 and the formation of the First International, of which the most important product was the Paris Commune of 1871. Some writers have tried to distinguish between the 'Blanquist' Marx of 1848-1850, with his recognition of the need for vanguards and dictatorship, from a more accommodating procedurally democratic Marx of this later period.<sup>34</sup> This distinction is more than questionable. Marx's engagement with the labour movement of the 1860s was not essentially different from that of the democratic movement in 1848. In each case he was prepared to violate procedural norms and to break with the existing movement in order to accelerate the formation of the revolutionary party.

In the International Marx acted from behind the scenes to push it toward socialist conclusions, framing them '*fortiter in re, suaviter in modo* (bold in matter, mild in manner)' to make them acceptable to the existing labour movement.<sup>35</sup> Little pushing was at first required since the key group, the French Proudhonians, were being radicalized under the impact of strikes and the revival of republicanism. Marx had to exercise control over the British sections because the English lacked the necessary spirit of generalization and revolutionary passion.<sup>36</sup> Marx was drawn by the success of the German socialists to the importance of electoral politics as a means of organization and propaganda. The failure of the Commune and the repression that followed also pointed to the need for the formation of disciplined national parties that could contest elections.

This evolution was blocked by Michael Bakunin, the anarchist antagonist to state socialism, and his allies in the International, who rejected electoral action.<sup>37</sup> Following the fall of the Commune, Marx used his authority to convene a secret conference that extended his powers to combat the Bakuninists and passed a resolution, rewritten by him, that 'the proletariat can only act as a class by forming itself into a distinct political party opposed to the old parties formed by the propertied classes.'<sup>38</sup> Through his authoritarian methods Marx lost the support of nearly all the national sections and decided to transfer the headquarters to New York rather than allow the triumph of the

## BERNARD H. MOSS

federalist majority. The willingness to break with procedural norms to accelerate the movement was **repeated** in France in 1880 when Marx supported the split of the bourgeois intellectual Jules Guesde, a centralist, from the majority of federalists in the workers' **party**.<sup>59</sup>

Nor is it true that the Commune forced a revision of the Manifesto. The Commune **proved** that the working class could not simply lay hold of ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own **purposes**.<sup>60</sup> But from the time of his early notes on the French Republic Marx was aware of the need to break with the old state apparatus, which encapsulated the power of the ruling class, and for a new state arising from the working class. This idea was implicit in the Manifesto and explicit in the 1850 **Address**. French workers adopted a communalist strategy because they were strongest in the disenfranchised cities and because they were battling against a highly centralized and bureaucratic repressive apparatus.

Marx initially **perceived** the Commune not as a socialist revolution, but primarily as a revolt against the centralized state. It attacked the incubus of 'parasitic' bureaucracy, paying public officials a workman's wage (actually much more) and making them elective and revocable, reducing taxes for peasants and providing a free and unencumbered space for the class struggle. In the final draft of *The Civil War in France*, however, Marx came to appreciate that the Commune had more directly socialist objectives and that the Napoleonic state was attacked not as a parasitic excrescence, but primarily as the repressive apparatus of the bourgeoisie. The Commune, with its programme for trade cooperatives, was a lever for economic emancipation or expropriation. It did not merely reduce taxes, but reached out to peasants who were being ground under by capital. It did away with excessive bureaucracy but not with the necessary centralization of social and economic functions in the hands of the state. He did not **regard** it as a final transition to communism, but as the beginning of a **long** series of struggles and processes following capitalist **development**.<sup>61</sup>

While recognizing it as a workers' government, Marx in fact criticized it for not being enough of a dictatorship of the **proletariat**.<sup>62</sup> He was aware that, surrounded by French and Prussian troops, it faced insurmountable problems of survival. **The** first duty was military – to intimidate and repel the enemy. The National Guards had not taken advantage of the disarray in government ranks to launch an offensive against Thiers, but had instead conducted elections in which sworn enemies had been allowed to stand. Three months after the fall of the Commune Marx suggested that it did not meet the conditions for a

**successful** transition to communism of an armed proletariat constituting a revolutionary **dictatorship**.<sup>63</sup>

The Commune had more features of such a dictatorship than Marx imagined. He never appreciated the revolutionary role played by his own internationalists in preparing the ground, notably in the insurrection of 18 March that **brought** the Commune to **power**<sup>64</sup> – perhaps because he did not control them and was surprised by their action. He minimized the degree of political coordination and control that actually existed through the action of the revolutionary socialist party arising from neighbourhood committees, the creation of the Committee of Public Safety in imitation of the Jacobins, and the use of force against internal enemies, the banning of opposition press and meetings, a show of strength that swung opinion behind the Commune." Marx does not discuss the contradiction between the forms and content of democracy – he was never interested in forms of governance and constitutional constraint – but the Bolsheviks also had to sacrifice Soviet democracy in the Civil War in order to survive.

### CONCLUSION: NEW ROADS TO SOCIALISM?

This essay has looked at the permanent revolution in France as background to **Marx's** politics and the Manifesto. The French Revolution was a violent resolution of the contradiction between forces and relations of production, protocapitalist forces bursting through their feudal integument, that combined bourgeois and democratic reforms." The key to its permanence was the resistance of the king, church and aristocracy to the new political and juridical arrangements necessary for the development of capitalism. To break that resistance the bourgeoisie had to appeal to the peasantry and working classes, who pushed the Revolution further than it wanted to go toward the abolition of feudalism and under the Jacobins toward an egalitarian social democratic state that was incompatible with bourgeois society. Faced with the hostility of both aristocracy and populace, the bourgeoisie finally had to rule by means of an expansionist Napoleonic **dictatorship**.<sup>65</sup>

The short cycle of permanent revolution was repeated in France over the course of the nineteenth century with the working class emerging out of the populace and communism out of social democracy. Worker radicalism resulted from the popular depth of the anti-feudal bourgeois revolution." The French Revolution provided a model of social democracy for the working class and of monarchist or Napoleonic reaction for the propertied. The democratic revolution of 1848 could

not be accomplished without socialism. Rather than terror without end under parliamentary democracy the bourgeoisie chose an end to terror with another Napoleonic dictatorship.

Marx's politics were revolutionary because framed in the context of continental states in which the combination of feudal resistance to liberalization and the radicalization of the working class made peaceful transition and **parliamentary** government impossible. Here the proletarian revolution required the violent smashing of the old state and the establishment of a strong coercive government in the context of civil and world war. In countries with long constitutional traditions—and completed bourgeois revolutions—like the U.S., Britain and perhaps Holland a peaceful transition to socialism, he said in 1872, might be **possible**.<sup>49</sup> Of course, the absence of permanent revolution in these countries deprived workers of the spirit of generalization and revolutionary passion. But if reformism triumphed in the labour movements of these countries, it was because capitalism was able to provide expanding opportunities for higher wages and social mobility."

These opportunities may now be closing. One of the features of the present situation reminiscent of 1848 is that even reformist campaigns in defence of the welfare state are fiercely opposed by business in the name of globalization and competition. The socialism of the *Manifesto* may once again appear on the agenda, but the path will not be the same. In societies in which wage-earners constitute the immense majority, there may not be a leading role for the manual working class or of a vanguard party. The 1848 revolution was preceded by an **efflorescence** of the utopian imagination, which made socialism seem practical and possible. Today a **generation** of intellectuals who once found the labour movement too reformist for their consideration are paralyzed by a belief in the 'world spirit' of globalization, not realizing that like Bonapartism it is partly the result of political defeats and resignation." In the absence of socialist leadership, popular movements against capitalism may stray as in France into right-wing extremism or a **self-defeating** social democracy. The *Manifesto* warns us that without a historical theory and a vision of the future these struggles will end not in the 'revolutionary reconstitution of society' but in 'the common ruin of the contending classes.'

#### NOTES

1. Jeffrey Madrick, 'In the Shadows of Prosperity,' *New York Review of Books*, 14 Aug. 1997.

## THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1998

2. Andrew Sullivan, *The Sunday Times*, 4 Feb. 1996. *International Herald Tribune*, 6 March 1996, p. 1.
3. Bernard H. Moss, 'France: Economic and Monetary Union and the Social Divide,' in *The Single European Currency in National Perspective: A Community in Crisis?*, eds. B. Moss and J. Michie (London: Macmillan, 1998).
4. Cf. Alan Gilbert, *Marx's Politics: Communists and Citizens* (Oxford: Robertson, 1981).
5. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Le Manifeste Communiste*, ed. C. Andler, 2 vols. (Paris: SNLE, 1901).
6. Bernard H. Moss, 'Marx and Engels on French Social Democracy: Historians or Revolutionaries?' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46(1985): 542.
7. Hal Draper, '*The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*' from *Marx to Lenin* (London: Monthly Review, 1987), minimizes its coercive character.
8. Michael Lowy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981), pp. 2–8.
9. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975) 11:103, hereafter *CW*.
10. The revisionist Eduard Bernstein regarded Marx's politics in mid-century, particularly his address of 1850, as Blanquist. George Lichtheim, *The Origins of Socialism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), who stressed continuity with the French Revolution, also regarded 1850 as an aberration.
11. Exceptional are Roger Garaudy, *Les Sources françaises du socialisme scientifique* (Paris: Hier et aujourd'hui, 1948), and articles by R. Huard, C. Mainfroy and K. Halszapfel and M. Zeuski in *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut de recherches marxistes*, no. 21 (1985).
12. J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Praeger, 1952), p. 249 and *passim*. See also, François Furet, *Revolutionary France, 1770–1880* (London: Blackwell, 1992).
13. Cited in Ian Birchall, *The Spectre of Babeuf* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 102.
14. Marx and Engels, *CW* 3:29–31, 142–4. Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (London: C.U.P., 1968), pp. 33–4.
15. Jean Bruhat, 'La Révolution française et la formation de la pensée de Marx,' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 38(1966): 125–70. Maximilien Rubel, 'Les Cahiers de lecture de Karl Marx,' *International Review of Social History* II(1953): 392–420.
16. Bruhat, 'Révolution,' pp. 140–1. *Mémoires de R. Levasseur* (Brussels: L. Hauman, 1830), I, 72–75, 113–5.
17. See Ellen M. Wood, 'The State and Popular Sovereignty in French Political Thought: A Genealogy of Rousseau's "General Will,"' *History from Below: Studies In Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honour of George Rudé*, ed. F. Krantz (Montreal: Concordia U.P., 1985).
18. Cf. Jean-Pierre Gross, *Fair Shares for All: Jacobin Egalitarianism in Practice* (London: C.U.P., 1997).
19. *Levasseur*, IV, 241, 256, V, 12–17.
20. Birchall, *Babeuf*. Filippo Buonarroti, *Conspiration pour l'Égalité dite de Babeuf* (Brussels: Librairie romantique, 1828).
21. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,' *CW* 11:124.
22. Marx, 'The Holy Family,' cited in François Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 139, *and passim*.

## BERNARD H. MOSS

23. See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974), pp. 8–23.
24. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, vol I: State and Bureaucracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), adopts this view.
25. Bernard H. Moss, 'Parisian Workers and the Origins of Republican Socialism, 1830–1833,' *1830 in France*, ed. J. Merriman (London: Franklin Watts, 1975).
26. *Cours public d'Histoire de France depuis 1787, en 1830* (Paris: Rouanet, 1832).
27. Samuel Bernstein, *Blanqui and the Art of Insurrection* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 59–62.
28. Marx and Engels, *Manifeste*, II, 16–17.
29. Moss, 'Parisian Workers,' pp. 210–14.
30. Cited by Jacques Grandjonc, *Communisme/Kommunismus/Communism: Origine et développement international de la terminologie communautaire prémarxiste des utopistes aux néo-babouvistes, 1785–1842* (Trier: Karl-Marx-Haus, 1989), p. 167.
31. Bernstein, *Blanqui*, pp. 81–3.
32. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 93.
33. Grandjonc, *Communisme*, pp. 159, 210–12.
34. Marx and Engels, *CW* 3:313.
35. *Ibid.* 5:5.
36. *Ibid.* 38:168.
37. *Ibid.* 5:545.
38. *Ibid.* 5:518.
39. Bernard H. Moss, 'Marx and Engels on French Social Democracy: Historians or Revolutionaries?' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46(1985): 543.
40. Samuel Bernstein, 'Marx in Paris, 1848: A Neglected Chapter,' *Science & Society* III(1939): 347.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 343–58. Moss, 'Marx and Engels,' pp. 545–6.
42. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, vol. II The Politics of Social Classes* (London: Monthly Review, 1978), pp. 212–14.
43. Moss, 'Marx and Engels,' pp. 543–6.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 545–50. Also, my 'June 13, 1849: The Abortive Uprising of French Radicalism,' *French Historical Studies* 14(1984): 390–414.
45. Moss, 'Marx and Engels,' pp. 546–7. Draper, *Social Classes*, pp. 237, 247–9, 665.
46. *Der Bund der Kommunisten: Dokumente und Materialien, Band 2, 1849–51* (Berlin, 1982), p. 513.
47. Moss, 'Marx and Engels,' pp. 551.
48. Norman Plotkin, 'Les Alliances des Blanquistes dans la proscription,' 1848: *revue des révolutions contemporaines*, no. 189(1951), pp. 120–1.
49. See articles by J. Mephram, K. Tribe, and J. O'Malley in *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought: Critical Assessments*, ed. B. Jessop, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1989).
50. Moss, 'Marx and Engels,' pp. 551–3.
51. Marx and Engels, *CW* 38:505, 516.
52. Thomas Forstner, *French Provincial Police and the Fall of the Second Republic: Social Fear and Counter-revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1981).
53. Ted Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979). J. Merriman, *The Agony of the Republic: The Repression of the Left in Revolutionary France, 1848–1851* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1978).
54. G. Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Routledge and

## THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1998

- Kegan Paul, 1961**), ch. 4. Cf. Monty Johnstone, 'Marx and Engels and the Concept of the Party,' *Socialist Register 1967*, pp. 12–58.
55. Marx and Engels, *Correspondence, 1846–1895* (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934), pp. 159–63 (Marx to Engels, 4 Nov. 1864).
  56. Henryk Katz, *The Emancipation of labour: A History of the First International* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 65.
  57. *Ibid.*, chs. 7–10. Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement: The Socialism of Skilled Workers, 1830–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 71–82.
  58. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 77.
  59. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–21.
  60. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. H. Draper (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 226.
  61. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
  62. Cf. Monty Johnstone, 'The Commune and Marx's Conception of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Role of the Party,' *Images of the Commune*, ed. J. Leith (Montreal: McGill-Queens U.P., 1978), pp. 204–05.
  63. Marx and Engels, *Commune*, pp. 221 (Marx to Kugelmann, 12, 17 Apr.), 224–5 (speech at London Conference, 1871), 233 (Marx to Nieuwenhuis, 22 Feb. 1881).
  64. Moss, *French Labor*, pp. 48–62, 73–5. Martin Phillip Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organization in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).
  65. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–60, 116–22.
  66. Ricardo Duchesne, 'The French Revolution as a Bourgeois Revolution: A Critique of the Revisionists,' *Science & Society* 54(1990): 321–50.
  67. Despite torrents of revisionist abuse the best history is still Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799: From the Storming of the Bastille to Napoleon* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). As Albert Mathiez remarked about Jaurès, the best historians of the Revolution have been political activists. An excellent commentary is Paul McGarr and Alex Callinicos, *Marxism and the Great French Revolution* (Paris: International Socialism, 1993).
  68. For comparisons see Bernard H. Moss, 'Republican Socialism and the Making of the Working Class in Britain, France and the United States: A Critique of Thompsonian Culturalism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35(1993): 390–413.
  69. Katz, *Labour*, p. 136.
  70. See Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working-class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).
  71. See *Single Currency in National Perspective*, eds. Moss and Michie.