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MARXISM, IMPERIALISM AND THE FUTURE OF UNDEVELOPED SOCIETIES: FROM EXPECTED TO UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

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Whatever bitterness the spectacle of the crumbling of an ancient world may have for our personal feelings we have the right, in point of history, to exclaim with Goethe:

'Should this torture then torment us
Since it brings us greater pleasure?
Were not through the rule of Timur
Souls devoured without measure?'

- Karl Marx, 'The British Rule in India' (1853)[1]

ABSTRACT

In his *The Passions and the Interests* (1977), Albert Hirschman examined the manner in which social and political thinkers during the 17th and 18th centuries argued that by countervailing and taming the avaricious passions of human beings with their supposed salutary interests, it would be possible to support commercial expansion, i.e., capitalism, as an economic order that ensured civil order and harmony. But these thinkers, Hirschman wrote, 'would have shuddered … had they realized where their ideas would ultimately lead'. Hirschman thus explored the phenomenon of the impact of ideas on social action and of their unexpected and unintended consequences. In the present paper, I attempt to do something similar but in a different historical context, that of the 19th and 20th centuries: I examine the manner in which thinkers of that period advanced and employed ideas to promote radical change and the transformation of undeveloped societies. In the first section of the paper, I look at how Karl Marx, inspired by Hegel, embraced notions of progress and change in relation to advanced capitalist societies in general. In the next section, I show how Marx, here too influenced by Hegel, became fascinated by the non-European world and of the impact upon it of imperialism, which, so he believed, would have progressive, beneficial ramifications for backward societies, however morally repugnant it was. After much reflection, he also adopted a Eurocentric, virtually deterministic, view according to which all societies, including backward ones, must follow a uniform path of development. As concerns Russia, Marx did raise the possibility of a certain deviation from this universal future but he left it equivocal. I then take up the manner in which Marxist thinkers in general, and Russian ones in particular, adapted Marx's ideas so that they would facilitate development from backwardness to socialism without the intervening capitalist stage. As we know only too well today, the consequences of these 'revisions' proved to be not only unintended but also disastrous: Marx and others would certainly 'have shuddered' at what had eventually transpired. The original expectations of progress, development and enlightenment lay shattered, and the social systems they created would one day come crushing down. In the last section of the paper, I attempt to explain why it all went wrong.

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[1] Karl Marx and Frederick Engles, *Collected Works*, Vol. 12 (New York, 1979), pp. 132-133. The stanza Marx quotes is from Goethe's 'An Suleika', *Westöstlicher Diwam*. (Originally published in *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853.)

I first met Albert Hirschman in the fall of 1993, at the beginning of the sabbatical year I was to spend in the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. By chance, I was provided with an office next to his so that in the course of the year we often ran into each other and had many opportunities to speak of this and that. Aside from these conversations, I remember vividly that shortly after we met, the Oslo Accord, the initial attempt to establish a framework for the eventual resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was about to be signed in Washington and he invited me to come and watch the live broadcast of the ceremony at his home. We were both extremely moved at the sight of Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shaking hands while Bill Clinton brought them together. When the ceremony was over, Albert suggested a toast and as we raised our glasses – Albert's wife Sarah was also present – I felt we had established a rapport that went beyond our academic interests.

However, my acquaintance with his intellectual work, and its impact on my own early ideas, had begun more than a decade earlier, in 1981, while I was on a previous sabbatical at Princeton, this time at the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University. At that time I had been working on the curious ramifications of action-oriented Marxist ideas and had become fascinated with the question of why a view of the world so rigidly governed by a 'scientific' approach to past and future had brought about such unexpected results, wherever such an approach had been pursued. I had just finished writing a paper on the subject when, quite by chance, I came across a book called *The Passions and the Interests*, first published in 1977, by one Albert Hirschman. Reading it was no less than a revelation. It made arguments, albeit in the different historical context of the emergence of a capitalism in the 18th century largely unexpected by its supporters, that were so akin to what my paper had argued about the emergence of a Soviet Union and other Marxist-inspired societies in the 20th century that were so unimagined in the minds of *their* supporters. I sent a copy of my paper to Hirschman and received a note of thanks and a promise that he would read the paper shortly. In the event, I never heard from him again, or rather not until we met in 1993 and he recalled the paper, apologized for neglecting to respond after having read it and said some nice things about it, which much encouraged me to pursue this direction of thought.

In *The Passions and the Interests* Hirschman examined the arguments employed by European social thinkers in support of a capitalist future 'before its triumph'. Here is how he described what this eventually led to:

> On the one hand, there is no doubt that human actions and social decisions tend to have consequences that were entirely unintended at the outset. But, on the other hand, these actions and decisions are often taken because they are *earnestly and fully expected to have certain effects that then wholly fail to materialize*. The latter phenomenon, while being the structural obverse of the former, is also likely to be one of its causes; the illusory expectations that are associated with certain social decisions at the time of their adoption help keep their *real* effects from view. (*The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, Princeton, 1977, pp. 130-131. The emphases are in the original.)

Hirschman thus raised the double irony of the relationship among ideas, actions and historical outcomes. Firstly, human actors think and act as they do because they expect their actions to lead to certain desired results when, in fact, these very actions lead to something wholly unanticipated. Secondly, the unanticipated emerges precisely because the intentions of the actors blind them to other possible outcomes. Two complementary phenomena are therefore at play here: the one, unintended but realized consequences (or effects), the other, intended but unrealized consequences.

Hirschman then continued with the following striking observation (p. 131):

> Curiously, the intended but unrealized effects of social decisions stand in need of being discovered even more than those effects that were unintended but turn out to be too real: the latter are at least *there*, whereas the intended but unrealized effects are only to be found in the expressed expectations of social actors at a certain, often fleeting, moment of time. Moreover, once these desired effects fail to happen and refuse to come into the world, the fact that they were originally counted on is likely to be not only forgotten but actively repressed. This is not just a matter of the original actors keeping their self-respect, but is essential if the succeeding power holders are to be assured of the legitimacy of the new order: what social order could long survive the dual awareness that it was adopted with the firm expectation that it would solve certain problems, and that it clearly and abysmally fails to do so?

This is the background to what I propose to present in this paper, namely, a return to Hirschman's (in the above book) and my preoccupations at the time. Anyone acquainted with Albert's work will know that the scope of his interests was mind boggling; he was, of course, an economist but in the great European-Weberian tradition which recognized no boundaries between economics, history, politics and social, cultural and ideological endeavor, as well as that of the realm of ideas in general. Thus in *The Passions and the Interests* he undertook a

historical analysis only too rare among economists: an interpretation of the ideas of social and political thinkers, amongst them St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Bacon, Spinoza, Montesquieu, as well as the economists Mandeville and, in particular, Adam Smith, in order to trace the manner in which (enlightened) 'interests' were juxtaposed against (wicked) 'passions', so that the pursuit of wealth, and thereby capitalism, could be legitimized. 'In general the story told …', Hirschman wrote (p. 41), 'illustrates how unintended consequences flow from human thought (and from the shape it is given through language) no less than from human actions.'

My paper is a similar exercise in the history of ideas, but in an era in which capitalism was triumphant. Of course, within his broad framework of academic interests, Hirschman also wrote profusely about the great issues of contemporary history, and above all about development and the phenomenon of undeveloped societies finding themselves suddenly undergoing change and attempting to overcome their comparative backwardness. Indeed, he was also much involved in the actual formulation of development policies, mainly in Latin America. This paper is not about Latin America but about the issue of development in general, in particular in societies such as Russia and China whose social thinkers-cum-political activists, having immersed themselves in the writings of Karl Marx, came to perceive their countries as backward and sought ways of extricating themselves from that backwardness. Thus, what follows is by way of paying tribute and homage to Albert and a renewed attempt on my part to ruminate on how things go wrong, even with the best of intentions, or perhaps *because* of them.

I. The Idea of Progress

In J. B. Bury's renowned work, *The Idea of Progress*, Karl Marx is barely mentioned; there is a brief allusion in it to the 'cold wind of scientific socialism which Marx and Engels created' and by which, after 1848, 'sentimental socialism' had been blown away' - and that is all.[2] Charles Beard, in his introduction to the American edition of Bury's book, notes that Marx was among the 'great thinkers' whose writings Bury had 'familiarized himself with' before issuing his own work in 1920.[3] This makes it all the more curious why Bury should have treated Marx in such cavalier fashion. How, one wonders, could he have failed to grasp the significance of Marx for the intellectual history he was recording, the fact, indeed, that Marx was the culminating link in the long chain of Western thinkers who had brought forth the modern obsession with the idea of progress, belief in which was to become, as Bury wrote, 'an act of faith'?[4] Be that as it may, early in his book Bury provided a succinct description of the fundamental attributes of the idea of progress, a description that, had it been intended as a summation of the idea in the thought of Marx himself, could hardly have been improved upon:

> The idea of human Progress. . .is a theory which involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future. It is based on an interpretation of history which regards men as slowly advancing … in a definite and desirable direction, and infers that this progress will continue indefinitely. And it implies that, as 'the issue of the earth's great business', a condition of general happiness will ultimately be enjoyed, which will justify the whole process of civilization; for otherwise the direction would not be desirable. There is also a further implication. The process must be the necessary outcome of the psychical and social nature of man; it must not be at the mercy of any external will; otherwise there would be no guarantee of its continuance and its issue, and the idea of Progress would lapse into the idea of Providence.[5]

If this was the nature of the idea that came to be worshipped during the Enlightenment and thereafter, then Marx, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, was its High Priest.

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[2] J. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*, (New York, 1960), p. 322.

[3] *Ibid*., p. xv.

[4] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[5] *Ibid*., p. 5.

Synthesizing the manifold intellectual currents at the crossroads of which he stood in time and space, namely, the humanitarian and scientific rationalism carried over from the eighteenth century, German (more precisely Hegelian) idealism and speculative philosophy, French revolutionary socialism, and British empiricism and political economy, Marx so assimilated the idea of progress they all shared in their different ways as to turn it into the ubiquitous leitmotif of his views of man, of history, and of social change and into the powerful animating element that he bequeathed to his followers everywhere. Despite Bury's inexplicable sin of omission, this is so clearly evident throughout Marx's writings, as often as not explicitly, that it has become perhaps the most commonplace of observations about the corpus of thought known as Marxism, and it need hardly, therefore, be belaboured.

What should be emphasized, however, since it will constitute the thematic framework of the subject I will be discussing, is that Marx's idea of progress was accompanied by a grim, if realistic, sense for the ironic in history. There was, to be sure, a utopian ring to some of his more passionately forthright declarations about the future. But Marx rejected any notion of a painless or frictionless, uninterrupted transition to a new era and his attitude to historical progress eschewed that simplistic moralism and reforming zeal which assumed that all would be well if only the nefarious, and presumably unnecessary, by-products of human advance were done away with. It is this well-intentioned but misguided naïveté that he so deprecated in, for example, Proudhon, as the following derisively characteristic dismissal of the latter demonstrates:

> For him, M. Proudhon, every economic category has two sides – one good, the other bad ...The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad . . . For him the dialectic movement is the dogmatic distinction between good and bad . . . If he has the advantage over Hegel of setting problems which he reserves the right of solving for the greater good of humanity, he has the drawback of being stricken with a sterility when it is a question of engendering a new category by dialectical birth-throes. What constitutes dialectical movement is the coexistence of two contradictory sides, their conflict and their fusion into a new category. The very setting of the problem of eliminating the bad side cuts short the dialectical movement.[6]

[6] Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* in Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (London, 1976), pp. 167-168.

In contrast, therefore, to what he considered the unsophisticated and counter-productive assault upon the wicked iniquities of the historical process, Marx, adopting enthusiastically the originally Hegelian penchant for irony, welcomed and encouraged the intensification of the 'bad side' of every social or economic 'category': 'the worse the better' is a notion *he* gave currency to, though perhaps without the heartless cynicism which was later attributed to Lenin. Marx was full of the sense that the greatest evils were the bearers of the greatest good, that self-serving subjective intentions were redeemed and transcended by their objective consequences, that it was in the very character of human progress, heretofore, to emerge in *this* manner, and not as a result of conscious pursuit. Hegel's 'cunning of reason', that metaphysical agency of history which transformed the perceived, particularistic aims of human beings into a rational, universalistic pattern of human development – Spirit marching onward – can be seen hovering over Marx's conception of history as well. One need only recall, in this context, the famous paean to the bourgeoisie which Marx sang in the *Communist Manifesto*, to its revolutionizing, liberating role in history,[7] to appreciate the depth of this ironic sentiment in Marx, and the intensity, therefore, of his love-hate relationship with the modern society this class had brought into the world. If history thus moved in mysterious ways, this was, perhaps, the better its 'wonders to perform'.

Unlike Hegel, however, for whom this historical process was in principle endless and, at each stage of its evolution, could only be apprehended by thought retrospectively, Marx was convinced that the process belonged to a circumscribed, if excruciatingly protracted, era of human existence now coming to a close, an era characterized by peculiar and thoroughly oppressive forms of economic organization which had been necessitated by material scarcity; once the problem of scarcity became resolvable in principle – as was now the case, Marx believed – such forms of organization would be left without their rational underpinnings, and a new, qualitatively different, historical era would emerge. This being so, social thought, or contemporary philosophy, was in the unprecedented position of 'overleaping its own age', of

[7] In Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, especially pp. 486-489.

'jumping over Rhodus', by postulating, on the basis of historical analysis, the necessarily unlimited human possibilities of the new era. We are here, so it would appear, in the sphere of futurology, not to say eschatology; but the practical significance of Marx's chiliastic convictions is that they allowed him to claim a radical, transforming role for social thought – need one recall in this connection the eleventh 'Thesis on Feuerbach'? – and to link it logically to political action.

This conjoining of self-comprehending thought, no longer bounded by the past, and self-assertive action, no longer distorted by economic or existential exigencies, would put an end once and for all, so Marx promised, to the dichotomy between intentions and consequences, between what men believed they were creating and what they actually created; it would unite, for the first time, the subjective and objective realms, that of human activity and that of hitherto invisible 'social forces', the one consciously transforming the other, but now in a manner that made human beings fully masters of their own fate, dominating not only nature but their history as well. The final act in the era of 'prehistory' would thus constitute a leap from dialectical, ironic and tortuous progress, unravelling itself at the expense of humans, to self-determined, freely chosen, and non-antagonistic progress, created in their own service. This leap, however, necessarily took place in the midst of catastrophic events: in this sense, as 'prehistory' drew to a close, the 'bad and the good sides' of an albeit doomed era became all the more essential and inseparable in order for the whole to be overcome in a new, unprecedented synthesis.[8]

On the face of it, it might seem unwarranted and perhaps unnecessarily abstruse to preface a discussion of so circumscribed a subject as Marxism, imperialism and development with the above philosophical preliminaries. However, I hope it will become apparent in what follows that Marx's attitudes towards imperialism – as well as those of some later Marxists –

[8] For the largely Hegelian philosophical underpinnings of Marx's thought, see Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1968). For Albert Hirschman's views on Hegel and Marx, see Jeremy Adelman, *Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman* (Princeton, 2013), pp. 55-58, 478-479 and 569-570, *inter alia.*

are best understood in the context of the complex and sometimes convoluted views he took of progress and of world history. These views, indeed, were nowhere more conspicuously in evidence than in Marx's recurrent attempts to place in historical perspective the disorienting and ostensibly destructive impact of Western imperialism upon non-Western (or rather, to follow his own usage, 'Asiatic') societies. Moreover, it is in the context of these views also that it will be possible to appreciate the considerable extent to which he misjudged this impact. He did not fare much better, it is true, as concerns the consequences of imperialism for the 'imperialists' themselves: but that is a subject unto itself, frequently examined in the numerous post-mortems performed upon Marxism, and will concern us here only incidentally, for in what follows I will be looking at the Marxist analysis of imperialism from the point of view primarily of its prognosis concerning the *non*-Western world. The reality that emerged there during the twentieth century bears little if any resemblance to the Marxist prognosis, and I will attempt to explain why this turned out to be so. Thus, after providing an exposition of the Marxist interpretation of the historical functions of imperialism, I will confront it with the historical reality itself. In the process, it will also be possible to speculate, bearing in mind the transforming role Marx assigned to social theory and the link he forged between it and volitional political activity, whether Marxism itself, understood both as a *Weltanschauung* and a political doctrine acting upon history, did not, however unwittingly, contribute to the undoing of the world it sought to create. Some prophecies are self-fulfilling; others are self-defeating. Marxism, on the basis of its record as an intervening historical force, appears to belong to the latter category. Paradoxically, this would seem to vindicate the grim and ironic Marx, though hardly the chiliastic one.

II. Marx's View of the Non-European World and of the Historical Functions of Imperialism[9]

Marx's Eurocentrism, so evident to us today, was originally shaped by the Hegelian legacy into which he was born. The conviction, which would color and dominate all his attitudes to the relationship between West and East, that the non-European, or Asiatic, world lay outside what he conceived of as human history, is one he took over directly from Hegel, more specifically from the latter's lectures on *The Philosophy of History*.[10] In this work, Hegel, in the course of a wide-ranging geographical survey of civilization, first made short shrift of Africa, dismissing it as having once stood on the 'threshold of the World's History' but now constituting 'no historical part of the World' since 'it has no movement or development to exhibit'.[11] Asia, on the other hand, marked the 'beginning' of history; it is here, according to Hegel, that the 'Light of Spirit arose, and therefore the history of the World'.[12] Nevertheless, its development appears to have come to a halt at the 'childhood' stage; the universal principle of its Spirit did not extend beyond the idea that only '*One* is Free', the all-powerful despot.[13] It has remained thus ever since; unable to break through this limitation, Asia disappeared from the history of humankind, doomed to stagnation and to meaningless, seemingly endless cycles of disruption and devastation that changed nothing:

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[9] In discussing European expansion into the non-European world, Marx did not actually use the term 'imperialism' since, in his time, the term still referred to something quite different, i.e., the Empire established by Napoleon in France. I have, however, ignored this since the phenomenon Marx wrote about was precisely that with which the word imperialism came to be associated after the 1880s. On the history of the term, and its changing meanings, see Richard Koebner and Helmut Dan Schmidt, *Imperialism: The Story and Significance of a Political Word, 1840-1960* (Cambridge, 1964).

[10] All subsequent references are to the English translation of this work by J. B. Sibree (New York, 1956). Hegel himself was influenced by ideas about the non-European world common during the Enlightenment.

[11] *The Philosophy of History*, p. 99.

[12] *Ibid*., pp. 103 and 99.

[13] *Ibid*., pp. 105 and 104.

> In that immediate, unreflected consciousness which characterizes the East . . . we see, on the one side, duration, stability -- Empires belonging to mere space, as it were [as distinguished from time] – unhistorical History. . .On the other side, the Form of Time stands contrasted with this spatial stability. The States in question, without undergoing any change in themselves, or in the principle of their existence, are constantly changing their position towards each other. They are in ceaseless conflict, which brings on rapid destruction . . . This History, too. . .is, for the most part, really *unhistorical*, for it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin . . . through all this restless change no advance is made.[14]

Hegel devoted a considerable, and in itself fascinating, part of his *Philosophy of History* to an account of the social and cultural heritage of the 'Oriental World';[15] but despite his obvious infatuation with some of its ancient glories, his verdict was unequivocal: China, India and other Eastern civilizations that had survived into the present still 'lie outside the World's History'. They were a 'phenomenon antique as well as modern; one which has remained stationary and fixed'.[16] So much, therefore, for the East, in Hegel's view; anyone in search of genuine history should look to contemporary Europe (though another such arena would soon open up in America).[17]

Whatever we may today think of Hegel's sweeping, dismissive ways with civilizations, they appear to have captivated Marx. The notions of 'history-less' or 'unhistorical' nations, of the Asiatic world as stagnant, unchanging, like nature untouched, as it were, by anything more than a primitive human consciousness, these notions were adopted *in toto* by Marx.[18] There were other influences to be sure; he had read Montesquieu and British economists and

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[14] *Ibid*., pp. 104-106.

[15] *Ibid*., pp. 111-222.

[16] *Ibid*., pp. 116-139.

[17] 'America is. . .the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself. . .' *Ibid*., p. 86.

[18] Marx used the term 'Asiatic' not in a geographic but a social sense, though for the most part he discussed Asian societies and only occasionally African ones. The most complete collection of his writings on the non-European world is in Shlomo Avineri (ed.), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (New York, 1968). For his writings on Russia, see P. W. Blackstock and B. F. Hoselitz (eds.), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: The Russian Menace to Europe* (London, 1953).

historians, as well as a variety of first-hand reports from travellers to the East and official documents and records.[19] All these, however, merely confirmed for Marx, though no doubt in language less philosophically tendentious, the point of view decreed by Hegel. He could not have been enthusiastically inclined towards accepting such a point of view: as we shall see, it could only mean difficulties for a theory of history, such as he was formulating, since it postulated a dichotomous world, one part of which appeared to refuse to abide by what otherwise would have been universal laws of social change. On the other hand, the difference might serve to establish the conditions making for such laws: by comparing West and East one might be able to isolate that variable the presence of which would account for change in the former, the absence of which for changelessness in the latter. In a sense, this is precisely what Marx would attempt to do and we shall deal with it presently; for the moment it is sufficient to note his acceptance of the Hegelian definition of history as change in the fundamental principles of social life, though Marx, here too standing Hegel on his head, translated the latter's principles of 'Spirit' into principles of economic organization. Here, for example, in the first volume of *Capital*, is Hegel echoed in Marx's language (in the course of a discussion of Indian village communities):

> The simplicity of the organization for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the spot and with the same name – this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic states, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remain untouched by the storm clouds of the political sky.[20]

We need only recall that Marxism is nothing if it is not a theory of change in order to appreciate the depth of Marx's obsession with the *absence* of change in Asiatic societies. Writing in 1853 about India, a country he took particular interest in, Marx noted that 'Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the

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[19] Umberto Melotti, *Marx and the Third World* (London, 1977), pp. 50-53.

[20] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1961), p. 358.

history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society'.[21] China fares no better: it is a 'living fossil', according to Marx, its periodic devastation the 'consequence of a fossil form of social life'.[22] The whole of the Oriental world, in fact, is characterized by an impregnably persevering social and economic base even while within the 'political superstructure' despots come and go.[23]

How was this to be explained? Always painstaking, Marx read a great deal to be able to provide an adequate explanation. In the event, however, he could not decide on any one cause and the 'missing historical variable' he stressed most might lead one to conclude either that he did not read enough after all or, what is more likely, that he allowed himself to be governed by the demands of his theoretical preconceptions about change in the West. Thus it is not surprising to find him generally emphasizing that the 'real key' to the stagnating character of the Orient was 'the absence of private property in land';[24] and that this was expressed in what he took to be the universal form of Asian social organization, namely, the village commune in which land was collectively owned by its members though, in principle, it belonged to the state or was subject to the ruler's whims and claims.[25] But if the absence of private property was the explanation then this, as has been often pointed out,[26] did not quite fit the facts: while it was applicable to parts of India, it did not work in the case of China where private ownership of land by both peasants and landlords was a widespread system. Even if it were generally true, Marx would have had to explain why, in contrast with Western experience, primitive communes, in the East, had failed to evolve into higher forms of social

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[21] 'The Future Results of British Rule in India', in Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, p. 217.

[22] 'Chinese Affairs' in Avineri (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 418-420.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 418.

[24] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow, n.d.), p. 99.

[25] For some of Marx's discussions of village communes, see Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, pp. 219-220 and Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1962), pp. 771-772.

[26] See, for example, V. G. Kiernan, *Marxism and Imperialism* (London, 1974), p. 169.

organization. However, whatever the empirical difficulties, one can see why Marx *needed* the 'no private property' explanation: it was surely the central theoretical tenet of his account of Western history that the institution of private property, having arisen there already at an early stage, provided the social agency, the generating force, for all subsequent development. The source of all iniquities, private property was also the basis of all historical progress. And if this was so, then the *absence* of private property had to be postulated in order to account for the absence of change and progress in Asiatic societies.

But this is perhaps to assume too much theoretical rigour in Marx and it is not altogether fair to his position: he agitated a great deal over 'pre-capitalist economic formations' in the *Grundrisse* and elsewhere[27] and at various places was clearly ill-at-ease over the complexities of the facts in Asiatic societies. He may be interpreted, at whatever cost to theory, as having in effect adopted a far more eclectic position, as the following indicates:

> Climate and territorial conditions, especially the vast tracts of desert, extending from the Sahara, through Arabia, Persia, India, and Tartary, to the most elevated Asiatic highlands, constituted artificial irrigation by canals and water-works the basis of Oriental agriculture. As in Egypt and India, inundations are used for fertilizing the soil in Mesopotamia, Persia, etc.: advantage is taken of a high level for feeding irrigative canals. This prime necessity of an economical and common use of water, which in the Occident, drove private enterprise to voluntary association, as in Flanders and Italy, necessitated, in the Orient, where civilization was too low and the territorial extent too vast to call into life voluntary association, the interference of the centralizing power of Government. Hence an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic government, the function of providing public works.[28]

This introduced too many variables – climate, soil, geography, culture – to be conveniently fitted into any coherent theory about the East which would also be compatible with Marx's theory about the West: but one can surely sympathize with his difficulties – it is *not* a simple matter to explain why the East was so different from the West, or *vice versa*. In any case, though much bothered by such matters, Marx was in the end primarily concerned

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[27] Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (E. J. Hobsbawn, ed., London, 1964) and Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 471 ff.

[28] Marx-Engels *Collected Works*, vol. 12, p. 127. Marx here based himself on information he had received in a letter from Engels: see *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 99-100.

with establishing the reality itself, whatever the aetiology of its persistence, of what he would define as the 'Asiatic mode of production' and, alternately, 'Oriental despotism'.[29] The reality consisted of the climatic, geographical, and cultural factors mentioned in the previous quotation, as well as such resulting economic characteristics as the simple division of labour in the communal villages and their material self-sufficiency (and thus lack of motivation to change their ways) made possible by the integration of agriculture and handicrafts or primitive manufacture.[30] 'Under such circumstances', Marx wrote elsewhere, '. . . the state is then the supreme lord.'[31] Hence, the remote and highly centralized, bureaucratic despotism reigned unhindered, providing public works though hardly interfering in the everyday economic or social life of its subjects whose world did not extend beyond the primitive, but non-antagonistic, local milieu. We would do well to remember Marx's emphasis on this absence of social antagonism, for in effect it would constitute the primary reason for the role that Marx, and Marxists, would assign to imperialism.

After all that has been said, it becomes an insoluble mystery why, in the famous 1859 'Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*' Marx should have written: 'In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.'[32] The Asiatic a progressive epoch? It could only have been a slip of the pen, for everything else Marx had written about this mode of production announced the very opposite. We shall presently see what Marx may have had in mind when formulating this inconsistent juxtaposition of the Asiatic and other modes; but that would have nothing to do with the supposedly indigenously

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[29] See the excellent account of Marx's notion of the 'Asiatic mode of production' in George Lichtheim, 'Oriental Despotism' in his *The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays* (New York, 1967), pp. 62-93.

[30] There is a useful summary of these characteristics in Shlomo Avineri, 'Marx and Modernization', *The Review of Politics*, vol. 31, no. 2 (April 1969), pp. 181-182.

[31] *Capital*, vol. 3, pp. 771-772.

[32] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1 (Moscow, 1955), p. 363.

progressive character of the Asiatic, as the juxtaposition implied. On the contrary, the whole point of Marx's analysis of Asiatic society was that it was incapable of giving rise to any higher form of economic formation, that, in fact, there was no prospect whatever of an internal, independent transformation. It is worth noting at this stage that Marx never resorted to the dubious intellectual trick or political stratagem which would emerge among Marxists in the 20th century, namely, to loosely describe all pre-capitalist societies as 'feudal': that might conveniently justify the claim that they were on the threshold of the bourgeois phase but it would make nonsense of historical facts and analysis. Asiatic society, for Marx, was *not* feudal society, for it exhibited none of the emerging characteristics that, in the West, had ultimately coalesced in the bourgeois individualist ethos.[33] Feudalism was not to be equated with primitiveness. The latter was exclusively associated with the Asiatic, which, therefore, left to itself would simply continue stagnating, in principle forever.

But if this were so then it transpired that not only was there no one universal history of social development but that there could be no one theory of historical change. In fact, it would appear that Western development, far from being the rule, was a very special case, an exception and one involving a very small portion of humankind at that: for most of humanity the European model was irrelevant. One can only guess at the consternation this must have caused Marx. It must surely have thrown into disarray his assumption that progress was both universal and inevitable. But he should at least be given credit for facing up to the dilemma honestly: whatever impression he may have made on those, not least later Marxists, who either read him selectively or presumed to find in his work the comforts of a natural law of social development valid everywhere, he himself denied the existence of a deterministic, universal model of 'modernization'.[34] He declared this denial on a number of occasions. In 1877, for

[33] The one Asian society where Marx was prepared to entertain the existence of feudalism was Japan: see *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 718. No doubt he would have referred to this if he were today asked to explain the success of Japanese modernization along Western lines. Marc Bloch in his *Feudal Society*, vol. 2 (London, 1967), pp. 382, 446-447, and 452, also refers to Japan as the one non-European society where European-like feudalism emerged.

[34] See, in this connection, Avineri, 'Marx and Modernization', *op.cit*., especially pp. 172-174.

example, he scathingly berated the Russian Populist N. K. Mikhailovsky for attributing to him an 'historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself' and argued that each 'form of evolution' must be dealt with 'separately'.[35] And in 1881, replying to an enquiry from Vera Zasulich, Marx made a point of emphasizing that in his *Capital*, the 'historical inevitability of [the development of capitalism] is … explicitly limited to the *countries of Western Europe*'.[36]

However, it was one thing to admit the limitations of theory, and of humankind, another to throw up one's arms in despair. Marx was made of sterner stuff than that; what is more, his Eurocentric universalism would out in the end after all. The question that presented itself was whether one world history was nevertheless possible: the question was not only theoretical, it was also political and immediate, for Marx did not believe that Europe could bring an end to 'prehistory' in isolation from, or regardless of, what transpired in the rest of the world. This is to say that socialism, if it was to be realized at all had to be realized on a world scale.[37] On the answer to the question hinged, therefore, the prospect of socialism everywhere, and not least in Europe. How far the uneven development of world history was a source of anxiety for him, can be seen from the following words in a letter of 1858 to Engels: 'The difficult question for us is this: on the Continent the revolution is imminent and will immediately assume a socialist character. Is it not bound to be crushed in this little corner, considering that in a far greater territory the movement of bourgeois society is still in the ascendant?'[38]

As the above allusion to 'bourgeois society' being in the 'ascendant' in the East already indicates, Marx had in fact discovered the necessary link between West and East. We now

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[35] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 379.

[36] *Ibid*., p. 412 (emphasis in the original).

[37] See, for example, Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* in *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (London, 1976), pp. 49, 51, 73-74.

[38] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 134.

arrive at the crux of the matter: if socialism cannot be brought into being except on a world scale and if most of the world was so backward and stagnant as to preclude any movement in it on the basis of its own, endogenous forces, then, so it followed for Marx, *exogenous* forces had so to interfere as to provide the impetus which would jar Asiatic societies onto a course leading to the modern world, to world history. And, lo and behold, this was precisely what was happening, Marx concluded: history – the 'cunning of reason'? – had wrought another of its wonders, this time in the form of imperialism. Perhaps *this* was the intention of the curious juxtaposition in the 1859 'Preface'.

Since I am not here concerned with the Marxist interpretation of imperialism as such but only with its analysis of the consequences of imperialism for non-European societies, I will pass over quickly Marx's assessment of the genesis or causes of imperialism. Suffice it to say, for our purposes, that Marx saw imperialism as a natural and necessary extension of the capitalist mode of production. In part, he attributed its emergence to purely economic motives and to the cunning bourgeois stratagem of placating workers at home by exploiting workers abroad.[39] He also argued, however, that in terms of profits and losses it did not always pay on a national scale, though it did enrich the upper classes at the expense of the 'tax-payers'.[40] Nevertheless, whatever the immediate and narrow economic motives, Marx believed that imperialism grew out of the very rationale, orientation, and fundamental nature of capitalism which could not contain itself within national boundaries and was, compulsively as it were, obliged to make the whole world its arena. The capitalist mode of production, understood in the broad economical-cultural sense, was the first truly universal civilization, for the principles of its existence – technological development, competition, exploitation of all available natural resources, unabated economic growth, and the individualist, accumulative ethos that went with all these – recognized no artificial, human-made, historical boundaries. The universalism of

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[39] *The Poverty of Philosophy* in *Collected Works*, vol. 6, p. 160.

[40] See his articles in the *New York Daily Tribune* of September 21, 1857 and April 30, 1859 in Avineri (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 222-225 and 345-352.

capitalism is a central theme that recurs in all of Marx's writings and it is often accompanied by highly technical arguments of an economic kind, but the following passage, from a relatively early work, will serve to summarize his view of the origins of this universalism and, thereby, of imperialism:

> . . . large scale industry universalized competition . . . established means of communication and the modern world market . . . By universal competition it forced all individuals to strain their energy to the utmost. It destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality, etc. . . It produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations. It made natural science subservient to capital . . . Generally speaking, large-scale industry created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar features of the various nationalities. And finally, while the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, large-scale industry created a class which in all nations has the same interest and for which nationality is already dead; a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it . . . The countries in which large-scale industry is developed act . . . upon the more or less non-industrial countries, insofar as the latter are swept by world intercourse into the universal competitive struggle.[41]

We are now in a position to define precisely the historical function vis-à-vis the non-European world that Marx attributed to imperialism. It was nothing less than the pitiless destruction of the Asiatic mode of production, of all that was associated with its 'history-less' past, and this, to be accompanied, almost simultaneously, by the introduction of those exogenous forces, the principles of capitalist accumulation and development, which Asiatic societies were incapable of generating independently. Reading Marx on this subject, one is impressed that there could hardly have been a more rabid supporter of the unmitigated conquest of the world by imperialism: Marx's language and motives were certainly different, but an unsophisticated imperialist of the time could be forgiven if he understood Marx to urge him on in the sacred cause of the 'white man's burden'; and an innocent Christian missionary, confronted by 'barbarians', might also have drawn not a little inspiration from this implacable enemy of bourgeois mores and religion. One could do no better to give a sense of this

[41] *The German Ideology* in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, pp. 73-74. See also *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 763, and the *Communist Manifesto* in *Collected Works*, vol. 6, p. 487.

missionary, historical, task that Marx assigned to imperialism than to quote the following famous passage from the *Communist Manifesto*:

> The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.[42]

However, Marx's motives were, of course, different. The capitalist universalization of the world was not an end in itself but rather a necessary intermediate goal, and means, the better to 'batter down' with capitalism itself. The European conquest and transformation of the non-European world was a precondition, the universal basis, for the eventual triumph of socialism. In the name of this final goal Marx was prepared to forgive imperialism all its sins. This is not to say that he was insensitive to these sins or reluctant to express moral compunctions about the evils committed by the imperialists in the course of their 'plunders' of far-off markets. But he would not allow such moral scruples to divert him from his admiration for the historically essential function that imperialism was executing. As in the critique of Proudhon's 'sentimental' socialism which I cited at the outset, Marx believed that the 'bad side' of imperialism also could not be done away with unless, simultaneously, the 'good side' too were eliminated; that the evils were an unfortunate but inevitable, unpreventable part of a necessary and objectively desirable historical process. If all the known cruelties inflicted upon Asiatic societies were the price that had to be paid for this process, then there was no choice but to pay it, and the quicker the better:

> England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state

[42] *Collected Works*, vol. 6, p. 488. Engels' view of the mission of imperialism was no different: he rejoiced over the French conquest of Algeria, the American conquest of Mexico, and even over Russian rule in Central Asia: see *Collected Works*, vol. 6, pp. 471, 527, and Avineri (ed.), p. 423.

> of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.[43]

The specific task of imperialism-capitalism, Marx believed, was to introduce into the backward societies that element of social antagonism which was lacking and which, for being absent, enabled social peace, tranquility, apathy, and fatalism to reign unabated. No system was better qualified to disseminate this element than capitalism whose whole internal economic and political logic was founded on conflict generating change. In general Marx was optimistic – much too optimistic as we shall see – about both the capacities of the backward to absorb this strange godsend and those of the advanced to administer it. Now and again, however, despite the rhetorical, hyperbolical flourishes in a work such as the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx was plagued by nagging doubts as he examined the empirical evidence. The prospects seemed to him least promising in China;[44] they were much better in India but here also the pace was too slow: 'England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society . . . The historic pages of the English rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins. Nevertheless, it has begun.'[45] Partly because of such misgivings and impatience, but in a manner entirely consistent with his basic historical assumptions, Marx always took the side of the more advanced imperialist powers against the weaker, 'reactionary' ones: thus his support for Turkey, and hence British and French interests, against Russia, during the Crimean War.[46] Similar considerations, of the need for a complete razing of the old, traditional Asiatic

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[43] 'The British Rule in India', in *Collected Works*, vol. 12, p. 132. This is followed by the stanza from Goethe quoted in the epigraph to this paper.

[44] Avineri (ed.), p. 375, and *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 328.

[45] *Collected Works*, vol. 12, pp. 217-218.

[46] See the various articles by Marx on the Eastern Question in *Collected Works*, vol. 12.

societies, of the establishment of completely modern social and economic foundations, governed what must now seem, but was not on his assumptions, as his totally surprising opposition to, and denunciation of, local struggles against the imperialist powers: the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Taiping Rebellion of the 1850s and 1860s. It was *not* surprising because this lack of sympathy for 'liberation movements' grew out of the fear that they would set back the modernizing, transforming role of the imperialists before it had exhausted itself.[47] But, to repeat, Marx would entertain no doubts about the ultimate triumph of the 'Western way of life' in non-Western societies, whatever the momentary ups and downs of its penetration.

The attitude of Marx towards imperialism was thus predicated on a global strategy for which the contemporary dialectic of history, the capitalist mode of production and the greed of the bourgeoisie, was a sharp and convenient instrument. However brutal and painful in the short-run, imperialism, in the long run, was serving the true interests of the colonialized nations. Marx would surely have had little sympathy for the sentiment, so often expressed by many Marxists and others thereafter, that if only the imperialist West had not intruded, Asiatic societies would have been able to cultivate and develop their own authentic form of life; nor would he have agreed with other Marxists who argued that the 'underdevelopment' of these societies was due to the wily machinations of the imperialists.[48] Imperialism, Marx would have admitted, had indeed created new miseries; but he would have immediately added that the Orient had been amply miserable long before the impact of the West. One cannot imagine him disturbed by any guilt feelings or regrets about this chapter of history. On the contrary, he had nothing but disdain for those who would leave well enough alone and for any tendency to

[47] For his attitudes towards the Indian Mutiny and the Taiping Rebellion, see the articles by Marx in Avineri (ed.), pp. 181-250 and 418-420. His attitudes here are strikingly reminiscent of his support for European 'progressive' nationalism against the national movements of small and backward European nations, e.g., the Czechs and Slavs: On this, see S. F. Bloom, *The World of Nations: A Study of the National Implications in the Work of Karl Marx* (New York, 1941).

[48] Such arguments appear in the much later works by, for example, Ernest Mandel, Paul Baran, and André Gunder Frank.

romanticize the 'splendours' of backwardness. Lest there be any doubt about this, the following passage – in Marx's finest stylistic passion – should put it to rest:

> Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization, and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village-communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnating, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindostan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man [to be] the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow.[49]

III. Marxist Theory in the Hey-Day of Imperialism

Marx died in 1883, just as a new phase in European imperialism was unfolding. It began with the partition of Africa and continued, during the next three decades, with an ever-widening and feverish ravaging of the world for new markets and colonies. It brought ruthless competition over colonial acquisitions to unprecedented heights, with Britain, Germany, and France leading the field, and it became more and more characterized by such motives, political, financial, military, as were for the most part muted in the earlier phases of imperialism when competition among the European powers was still in its infancy. Now, truly, the whole world became a single arena of European activity with hardly a corner of the globe exempt from the

[49] 'The British Rule in India', in *Collected Works*, vol. 12, p. 132.

scramble. It was the hey-day of European imperialism and it did not exhaust itself until the First World War left the European protagonists in ruins. Even then, of course, though henceforth in a manner increasingly anachronistic, European imperialism continued to maintain itself; and it would take another World War before it finally disappeared into the, controversial, pages of history.

Marx had not written anything new or substantial about the imperialist phenomenon since the 1860s; but the post-1880 phase would surely have stimulated him to return to the subject. Would he have changed his views in any essential way? Probably not, since nothing that transpired then and thereafter negated, on the face of it, the fundamental premises of his views, namely, that capitalism was by its very nature expansionist (the new-found German interest in colonies, for example, paralleled the *fin de siècle* spurt of German industry), that it was the fate of all backward societies to be swept into the maelstrom of world, i.e., European, history, that the more rapid and complete this conquest and subsequent integration of the world, the sooner would the universal dénouement of capitalism and the emergence of a new society come about. Nevertheless, he would certainly have begun to be intrigued, and perhaps disturbed, by two seemingly odd developments that were not anticipated in his theory of the consequences of imperialism – firstly, that even some European socialists, and presumably the working class they represented, were not immune to identifying themselves with their nations' imperialist aims, for reasons that had little to do with Marx's historical premises or the interests of socialism and were instead governed by economic and nationalist motives;[50] and, secondly, that in the backward societies too, nationalist sentiments – initially amongst the newly emerging intellectual and political élites but gradually amongst the masses as well – were evolving more rapidly than the 'Asiatic' way of life was disintegrating or than modern, bourgeois forms of social existence were crystallizing.

[50] Already in 1899, Eduard Bernstein, in his *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York, 1961), pp. 170, 174, 178, expressed support for the German entry into the European competition for new colonies.

Marx was dead but these developments could not, of course, escape the attention of Marxists who, at the turn of the century and thereafter, were compelled to re-assess the problem of 'whither imperialism?'. And, indeed, they did not ignore the new issues. However, in the case of Western Marxists, primarily of the Austro-German tradition, it is remarkable the extent to which they, like Marx before, remained imprisoned intellectually and politically within a Eurocentric outlook when analyzing the course of events in Asia or Africa. They proved unable, for the most part, to see the non-European world except through European eyeglasses and they seemed totally unaware of the distortions this might create. Although the three main Western Marxist theorists of imperialism during this period, Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding, and Rosa Luxemburg[51], contributed not a little to elaborating Marx's ideas and to the explication of the contemporary phase of capitalism, all were convinced that in this phase, even more so than in the past, capitalism was industrializing the East and transforming it in the image of the West. As early as 1898, Kautsky was the first to argue that the 'new imperialism' was based on capital export, a theme he developed in later works.[52] In 1909, determined to show that capitalism, despite its apparent economic recovery since the last decade of the nineteenth century, remained doomed, he declared that it had only succeeded in postponing its doomsday by developing new markets in the colonies and thereby allowing international trade to flourish which, in turn, facilitated industrial expansion at home.[53] The upshot of imperialism, he believed, would be war, in the wake of which revolution would sweep through Europe. As for the colonies, they were in the meantime being turned into industrial societies and the nationalist aspirations increasingly evident among them were a reflection of this. He expected the struggle for independence from European domination to continue and to

[51] Rosa Luxemburg was, of course, Polish by birth, but perhaps the most 'Western' of all Marxists.

[52] Kiernan, *op.cit*., p. 9. Kautsky dealt with imperialism in two main works, *The Social Revolution* (1902) and *The Road to Power* (1909).

[53] This was an argument very much akin to J. A. Hobson's famous and influential work of 1902, *Imperialism*.

culminate, presumably, in 'bourgeois revolutions'. He did not contemplate a different scenario for the East, though he would change his mind about the West.[54]

Hilferding's famous work of 1910, *Finance-Capital*, which now proferred in full the thesis that modern imperialism was a consequence of the growing domination of capitalism by the big banks and their capital looking for lucrative investment prospects abroad, dealt less directly with the colonies themselves, but its implications for the future of the non-European world were not unlike those of Kautsky.[55] The most forthright of all about this future, however, was Rosa Luxemburg. Her 1913 book, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Elucidation of Imperialism*[56] was, indeed, a major economic contribution to the now on-going debate on this subject. On the matter of the impact of imperialism upon the backward societies, which is all that concerns us here, she was the most adamant in insisting that industrial change and all that this brought in its aftermath were making great strides in the colonies: 'The imperialist phase of capitalist accumulation which implies universal competition comprises the industrialization and capitalist emancipation of the hinterland . . .'[57] This process could not but unfold, in her view, in the midst of social upheaval, wars, and revolution, just as had happened in the West during its era of industrialization. She was aware that the strides being made were as often as not halted by the complexity of the task and that the imperialist powers would do all possible, economically and militarily, to maintain themselves and their supremacy. But she was as convinced as Marx had been that in the long run, especially given the impending crisis into which imperialist competition would throw Europe at home, the process would culminate in a 'bourgeois revolution' in the backward world:

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[54] After the First World War, however, Kautsky no longer believed that capitalism as such was responsible for the War or that it need bring about war again.

[55] Like Kautsky, Hilferding too changed his mind and came to believe the capitalism could be 'reformed'.

[56] English translation, London, 1965.

[57] *Ibid*., p. 419.

> Revolution is an essential for the process of capitalist emancipation. The backward communities must shed their obsolete political organizations, relics of natural and simple commodity economy, and create a modern state machinery adapted to the purposes of capitalist production. The revolutions in Turkey, Russia and China fall under this heading.[58]

Rosa Luxemburg's examples referred to the rise of the Young Turks in 1908, the Revolution of 1905 in Russia, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911. The examples are problematical not only because in each case things ended badly, sooner or later, for the revolutionists – in none of these countries can it be said that a 'modern state machinery', much less 'capitalist production', were created[59] – but primarily because they involved countries not formally ruled by a foreign government. The most problematical of all is Russia which was itself an imperialist power, certainly a major pretender to such status. But she was undoubtedly a backward society in comparison with Europe and perhaps for this reason belonged more to the category of the colonies than to that of the imperialist nations. By now, to some Russian Marxists themselves, this seemed a logical classification in view of the realities of Russian society, whatever the formal reservations: Russia too was undergoing change as a result of the impact and penetration of, and interaction with, Western capitalism. It is among the *Russian* Marxists, at any rate, that a more original re-evaluation of the consequences of imperialism for backwardness was taking place, imperialism now understood in the broad sense of the impingement, in one form or another, of the West. This re-evaluation would, in fact, so shift the Marxist position as to make any resemblance between it and Marx's original views virtually a matter of coincidence. Unlike their Western counterparts, the Russian Marxists responsible for the shift naturally found it much easier to avoid Eurocentric preconceptions and to approach their subject from the point of view of a backward society itself. However, to be fair to them, it needs to be noted that, in retrospect at least, they could

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[58] *Ibid*.

[59] The 1905 Revolution in Russia was, of course, a failed revolution; the Young Turks were a spent force by 1918; and the Chinese Revolution never really succeeded in establishing itself in a final way.

have recourse to a legitimizing basis for their different views in some, albeit ambivalent, passages in Marx himself.

Before taking up their views, therefore, we need to return for a moment to Marx. The truth is that in the last years of his life he had raised the lid of a Pandora's box of possibilities concerning Russia, and had thereby bequeathed a somewhat ambiguous legacy: a great deal might depend on what aspect of it was to be given prominence, and in what context. I have already referred to his forthright denial, in the replies to Mikhailovsky and Zasulich, that he subscribed to a universal, law-like theory of social development applicable to all societies: this could be taken, and I have so characterized it, as an admission merely that the world was dichotomous, that no single model of social evolution could be made to fit both West and East, that on its own the latter could not imitate the former. As we have seen, however, there can hardly be any doubt, from the *Communist Manifesto* and other sources I have cited, that he believed this dichotomy would only disappear with the bourgeoisification of the non-European world, the creation by the Western bourgeoisie of 'a world after its own image'. Nevertheless, the replies to Mikhailovsky and Zasulich, like a few other comments of this period[60], were written with specific reference to the Russian future and, seen in that context, suggested something else as well, namely, that the impact of the West need not necessarily involve a transition to capitalism, may in fact facilitate a leap from pre-capitalist to socialist society. Some other sentences, that I have not yet quoted, from these replies, clearly raise this prospect. In response to Mikhailovsky, Marx also wrote: 'I have arrived at this conclusion: If Russia continues to pursue the path she had 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.'[61] Replying to Zasulich, Marx declared that after conducting 'special research' into the Russian village commune, the *obshchina*, he had become 'convinced' that this commune 'is the

[60] See Marx's (and Engels') 1882 preface to the second Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 22-24.

[61] *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 377-378. Marx did not actually send off his reply to Mikhailovsky; it was found after his death by Engels who passed it on to Vera Zasulich and it was first published in 1884.

mainspring of Russia's social regeneration, but in order that it might function as such one would first have to eliminate the deleterious influences which assail it from every quarter and then to ensure the conditions normal for spontaneous development'.[62] And in 1882, in a preface to the second Russian edition of the *Manifesto,* Marx defined the issue thus: 'Can the Russian *obshchina,* though greatly undermined, yet a form of the primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership? Or, on the contrary, must it first pass through the same process of dissolution as constitutes the historical evolution of the West?'[63] His own reply to this question was inconclusive but highly suggestive: 'If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting-point for a communist development.'[64]

In view of what Marx thought in general about primitive communes, and about the 'idiocy of village life', this was a curious and inexplicable *volte-face*. But it raised two hitherto uncontemplated prospects: firstly, that capitalism could be by-passed, and, secondly, that a revolution in a relatively backward society might not only break out prior to a revolution in advanced societies but might light the fuse for the latter. There were, however, two 'catches' here: the one, that Marx was speculating about Russia specifically, a country he considered as standing with one foot in Europe, backward and reactionary but only 'semi-Asiatic';[65] the other, that he made the by-passing of capitalism hypothesis dependent on the survival of the Russian village commune. One could still, therefore, conclude that the Russian situation, being different from that in fully Asiatic societies, had no lessons or implications for the latter; and that, in any case, since by the end of the nineteenth century the Russian village commune was

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[62] *Selected Correspondence*, p. 412.

[63] *Selected Works*, vol. 1, pp. 23-24.

[64] *Ibid*., p. 24.

[65] See the article of 19 April 1853 written for the *New York Daily Tribune* (in *Collected Works*, vol. 12, pp. 22-27). The article was signed by Marx but apparently written by Engels.

no longer a viable institution, as Engels would emphasize, then Russia would after all have to pass through the capitalist stage of development.[66]

And, in fact, the latter was the interpretation which was adopted by the 'father' of Russian Marxism, Plekhanov, whose conversion to Marxism – he had previously been a Populist – was motivated by a yearning for a 'scientific' theory of history, an unambiguous determination of the 'path which every people is fated to tread'. 'In Russian history', Plekhanov would write, 'there are no *essential* differences from the history of Western Europe.'[67] It was also the interpretation that would consistently characterize the position of the Mensheviks. Even Lenin ostensibly subscribed to it until the 'April Theses' of 1917 though, as I shall presently argue, he was in effect simultaneously pulling the Russian revolutionary movement in a totally different direction and ultimately towards a reformulation of the East-West relationship. After 1905, however, this was *not* the interpretation of Leon Trotsky who at that time became the first to break with 'official' doctrine by arguing that socialism, not capitalism, was on the immediate historical agenda of Russia.[68]

Trotsky wrote almost nothing before World War I which dealt directly with the issue of imperialism and his views at this time were not, as yet, explicitly intended to be applicable to all backward societies; he was first and foremost concerned with the specific conditions then prevailing in Russia.[69] But his analysis of Russian backwardness and its socio-political consequences was such that, even allowing for obvious national differences, it could without undue difficulty be projected into the non-European world as a whole and be taken to be a general theoretical statement about the impact upon it of imperialism. This is the intention that

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[66] For the views of Engels, and for further details about Marx's writings on Russia, see Baruch Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 589-598.

[67] Quoted in Samuel H. Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism* (Stanford, 1963), p. 77.

[68] This view actually originated with Alexander Helphand (Parvus) but he stopped short of taking it to its logical conclusions (see Knei-Paz, *op.cit*., pp. 19-22).

[69] Trotsky's main works of the immediate post-1905 period are *Results and Prospects* (1906), *Our Revolution* (1906), and *1905* (1910).

he himself would attribute in later years to what he came to call the 'law of combined development', a 'law' already implicit in his post-1905 theory of the permanent revolution.[70] The gist of his analysis was this: the impact of European capitalism upon a backward society compels the latter to break out of its historical and geographical egocentricity; but it does not lead to a reproduction of capitalism. The introduction of new, advanced forms of life, particularly economic, instead of provoking development in accordance with certain supposedly necessary stages – characteristic of some European countries within the context of *their* history – creates an amalgam that is unique, and that represents the peculiar juxtaposition of backward forms with the new ones. The essential point about this juxtaposition is that the new forms bear no relation to the old, much less do they evolve from them. On the contrary, the new forms are at first simply *appended* onto the backward society. It is this which accounts for 'combined development' in the sense of the adoption, at virtually one stroke, of the latest forms. At the moment of adoption, therefore, society may be said to change not from within but from without, not by evolving but by 'grafting on', appending, new ways of life. In doing so, the backward society takes not the beginnings of capitalist development, nor the stages of its emergence, but the finished product itself. On the one hand, this makes for a tremendous advantage: it obviates the need to repeat the mistakes, the tribulations of trial and error, which were the lot of those, in Europe, who were first in history and, for being first, did not know exactly where they were headed nor how to get there. The backward society need not grope in the dark; it enjoys the fruit of others' labour and is then able to make a leap into the modern world of industry and technology. On the other hand, the absence of *development* as such means that the social, cultural, and demographic changes that accompanied the growth of capitalism in Europe are here by-passed, i.e., modernization is for the most part limited to the appended new economics sphere and remains suspended above a society still largely traditional. There is, one might say, no common ground between the new and the old, no

[70] The term 'law of combined development' first appeared in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, published in the early 1930s.

adaptation of the latter to the former, so that an abyss comes into being between the new economic sector, on the one hand, and the old, primitive economy, and society and the political structure in general, on the other.

Two different worlds now co-exist. Ultimately, however, this co-existence becomes insufferable and cannot be maintained. This is so because the worlds are incompatible and continuously contradict each other. Specifically what happens is that the new, though not having evolved from society, now impinges upon it by introducing into it its own consequences. Economics has its own momentum: new methods of production demand new social arrangements so that the old society comes to be seen as an obstacle to the full implementation of a modern industrial edifice. Politics and society lag behind economics but the latter is persistently compelled to undermine the old character of the former. The antagonism, conflicts and confrontations which this generates cannot, however, be resolved through a more or less peaceful and gradual process of evolution within the existing framework. They are in fact a classic prescription for violent revolution. But this cannot be a bourgeois revolution: firstly, because the bourgeois forces are too weak, too marginal, and too isolated, the bourgeoisification of society having proceeded from above without laying down roots in the country as a whole; secondly, because a new, post-bourgeois social force, the working class, has come into being and is politically significant *before* the bourgeois revolution, with whose aims it cannot identify; thirdly, because the still predominant peasantry has lost the stability of its traditional forms of life without gaining a new basis for its existence, namely, that radical agrarian reform and ideological re-orientation which are a precondition for its support for, and identification with, a bourgeois political seizure of power; and, finally, because the revolution in the backward society is not emerging in isolation from the rest of the world but is both affected by, and itself a factor in, the political developments now taking place in the West. Trotsky's conclusion, therefore, raised to the level of necessity the prospect which

Marx had hesitantly toyed with in the last years of his life (without, however, making the conclusion dependent, as Marx had done, on the preservation of the village commune).[71]

Trotsky's prognosis, a 'permanent' or 'uninterrupted' revolution leading directly from a pre-capitalist to a socialist society, was certainly the most daringly original and ambitious of ideas; but it was either widely rejected or simply ignored by most Marxists, even in Russia, who were unprepared to jettison the comforts of the more traditional doctrine, the so-called 'two-stage' theory of revolution, according to which a backward society was compelled first to go through a bourgeois revolution and only thereafter, and ultimately, a socialist one (even if the whole process would be more accelerated than it had been in the West). Lenin too would have no patience or sympathy for Trotsky's intellectual flights of imagination; he dismissed them as wild and dangerous adventurism.[72] He must surely have been bothered by the absence in Trotsky's theory of the instrumental, political dimension: whatever the validity of its historical analysis of backwardness, the theory left fatally unclear how sociological conclusions could be translated into political reality. As Trotsky himself would in effect admit in 1917, he had neglected the fact that revolutions do not just happen, they have to be made. What class, force, or organization would actually implement the permanent revolution? A deterministic streak, enamoured with the supposed good sense of the masses, prevented Trotsky from clarifying this problem. It was the very problem, however, with which Lenin had become obsessed since the turn of the century at least and the solution to which he formulated in the famous *What is to be Done*? of 1902.

It is not necessary here to repeat the well-known tenets of Bolshevism, of party organization, of professional revolutionism, which Lenin codified in this work. From our point of view, its importance lies in two elements, which can be quickly summarized. It is no secret that the work was in part motivated by developments in the German Social-Democratic

[71] But like Marx, Trotsky made the realization of socialism in Russia dependent on revolution in the West. For a detailed exposition of his theory of the 'revolution of backwardness', see Knei-Paz, *op.cit*.

[72] After October 1917, however, Lenin conceded that Trotsky 'proved to be right' (see Knei-Paz, *op.cit*., p. 173).

movement, by what Lenin interpreted as the ominous emergence of 'revisionism' in the form of Eduard Bernstein's harsh re-assessment of the validity of Marxism.[73] Lenin's conclusion, that left to itself the working-class could only attain 'trade-union consciousness', was the result of the insight now dawning upon him that advanced capitalism was both so firmly entrenched and adaptable that workers could be tempted into coming to terms with it – hence 'revisionism' – particularly if they perceived certain immediate economic gains from such a *rapprochement*. From this it followed that the more ubiquitous and deeply anchored capitalism became, the more difficult it was to bring it down, and the less resolutely revolutionary did its natural enemies become. Conversely, capitalism was most vulnerable during its early stages, at a time when it was still spreading social havoc and disruption without as yet providing the benefits it promised. This, in his view, was the situation in a backward society such as Russia, where, consequently, the prospects of revolution were in principle most promising. The first lesson which Lenin thus sought to impress upon the Russian Marxist movement is that it must not wait until capitalism had taken roots; instead, the assault on capitalism must be launched while it was still undeveloped.[74]

The second important innovation of *What is to be Done*? is that it argued the supremacy of political action, in a backward society, over historical and social determinism. A period of social change and upheaval, of growing political instability, and the absence of legal, institutionalized channels for political activity, was the ideal framework for a well-organized party, led by an élite of determined revolutionaries whose goals were clearly defined and uncompromising and who took upon themselves the task of acting on behalf of the masses. What the implication of this was for revolutionary activity became immediately clear to Lenin's opponents already in 1903, at the Russian Social-Democrats' Second Congress which ended in the Bolshevik-Menshevik split, and was amply confirmed in October 1917 and thereafter. And

[73] *What is to be Done*? was in part an attack on the Russian 'Economists' who had been influenced by Bernstein.

[74] Lenin's views were not always as explicitly stated as they are here presented, but they were unmistakably implicit in the activist doctrine he propagated in the work of 1902, and thereafter in various other writings.

seen in the light of this, and the previous lesson that Lenin sought to convey to the revolutionary movement in Russia, his seemingly unswerving loyalty to the 'two-stage' theory of revolution in a backward society loses all significance: it emerges as, at best, a doctrinal rationalization for political action, at worst a cynical payment of lip service to the holy cows of theory which are in practice subordinated to the autonomy of the political realm.

It is true that Lenin continued to preach both the necessity and inevitability of revolution in the West as a precondition for revolution in Russia and elsewhere in the non-capitalist world; and he angrily denounced those who, like Kautsky and Hilferding, not to mention the non-Marxist Hobson, had come to believe that imperialism was not endemic to capitalism and that the European powers would survive more or less intact the loss of empire. This was, after all, the main aim of Lenin's work of 1916, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in which he desperately sought to account for the survival of capitalism by attributing it to the exploitation of the colonies, while simultaneously predicting its impending demise.[75] We need not doubt his sincerity here: before 1917 no one so much as contemplated the possibility of a successful radical revolution in Russia without a more or less simultaneous upheaval in Europe. Even Trotsky had made the 'permanent revolution' ultimately dependent upon the rise of sympathetic socialist governments in Europe; and Lenin must have been fully cognizant of the problems which an isolated workers' government in Russia would have to confront in the absence of revolution in the West – it is not a prospect he could relish. The work on *Imperialism* was, therefore, an urgent attempt to prove that the days of capitalism were numbered; this perhaps explains the combination of gross economic errors and wishful thinking that runs through its pages. Lenin cribbed unashamedly from Hobson, from Kautsky, and from Hilferding in particular, in order to argue his main thesis that capitalism was now in the hands of the financiers and that capital investments in the backward colonies were, albeit temporarily, perpetuating the life of capitalism. He did not notice that most capital investment

[75] A year earlier, in 1915, Nikolai Bukharin had published his *Imperialism and World Economy*, in which he wildly exaggerated the penetration of backward societies by the capitalist economy and seemed oblivious to the possibility that the impact of imperialism could be quite different.

in fact went to independent and developed areas overseas, to Canada, Australia, the United States, and only a small and insignificant portion to Asia and Africa.[76] An admission of this would have undermined his claim that Europe was dependent on the poor of the world. Nor did he notice that the tendencies towards the monopolization of industry and the centralization of capital in the hands of financiers, tendencies he took to be symptoms of the degeneration of capitalism, were far more pronounced in Germany, a relative newcomer to capitalism and imperialism, than in Britain, the older pioneer of both; this fact surely made nonsense of his view that imperialism was the highest or last stage of capitalism.[77] There were other economic errors as well but more interesting to note is the wishful thinking, or perhaps the pretence to it, that emerged in Lenin's refusal to countenance the exhaustion of the revolutionary spirit among Europe's workers: he would only admit that choice bones were being thrown by cunning industrialists to the top-dogs of the working class who thereby became pacified. But aside from this labour 'aristocracy', the proletariat in general, Lenin believed, would ultimately return to the revolutionary camp.

On the face of it, this, like Lenin's insistence that European capitalism was doomed, appears to be at odds with his earlier views about the 'trade-union' limits of workers organized as a mass movement and about the hegemonic strength of advanced capitalism. There was indeed a contradiction here and Lenin did not bother to resolve it doctrinally: as so often in his work, he preferred to have it both ways. But we must nevertheless distinguish between his determination not to abandon in theory traditional, 'orthodox' Marxist precepts, which allowed him to restate optimistic prophecies, and his simultaneous readiness in practice to contemplate a more realistic 'fall-back position' and provide for it an alternative political strategy. Looked at from this perspective, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* is not the main key to Lenin's views about the political consequences of imperialism. It is, for the most part, a re-assertion of positions about the imminent demise of capitalism – through war and revolution –

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[76] See Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism* (London, 1970), pp. 93-95.

[77] *Ibid*. p. 97.

which had already been well enough stated by Rosa Luxemburg and Bukharin; and it only hints at a more original, in retrospect certainly more perspicacious, prognosis that Lenin was simultaneously propagating in other writings, though not always explicitly.[78] This was the prognosis that the world was becoming divided into two camps, the backward and the advanced, and that the internal, national, as well as international, struggles would henceforth be conducted in the context of this division. The class struggle had indeed become international but at the more general level of nation against nation not class against class: it was as if the whole of the backward nations, and that of the advanced, had become two homogeneous classes, the one composed of the 'exploited', the other of the 'exploiters', and the two pitted against each other. Naturally, this meant that Lenin had to blur traditional Marxist class distinctions or ignore them. He had long done this for Russia when, after 1905, he spoke of the necessary revolutionary alliance between workers and peasants, culminating in their joint 'dictatorship'. It was a message he could now project onto backward societies everywhere and onto the relationship between them and imperialist Europe. The 'toiling, progressive masses' of the backward world would thus rise against their 'reactionary expropriators' from the developed world. True, in so doing they would not be in a position to carry out a fully socialist transformation of their societies; that would become possible only with their further economic advancement and the collapse of capitalism in the West. But neither would they simply reproduce the bourgeois revolutions of the past. In his own way, Lenin was moving toward the view preached by Trotsky since 1905. There were two major differences, however: Lenin was basing his prognosis, firstly, on the force of anti-imperialist nationalism and, secondly, on the political party as the instrument of that force.

It needs hardly be recalled that Lenin had little sympathy for nationalism or national self-determination as such. He was as free of nationalist sentiments as Trotsky or Rosa Luxemburg were. But where they ignored or denied the importance of nationalism, he

[78] For an interpretation of Lenin's views of imperialism and backwardness that is similar to that which follows here, see Alfred G. Meyer, *Leninism* (New York, 1962), chapters 11 and 12.

approached it as a political force to be reckoned with and to be harnessed, if necessary, to the socialist cause.[79] It proved to be, undoubtedly, a more realistic point of view, however problematical doctrinally. Nationalism was to play only a minor role in the initial phases of the Russian Revolution; but it would eventually come to the fore there[80] as it would, from the outset, in other revolutions of backwardness and in the ideologies of their Marxist leaders.[81] And when, by the 1920s and the 1930s, it transpired that there would be no quick collapse of Western capitalism, the orientation of Marxism towards the East became complete and its nationalist base freely exposed for all to see – though with historical implications about the future of socialism which Marx's heirs would understandably wish to conceal or deny and which Marx, had he been alive to see what had been wrought in the wake of imperialism, might well have recognized as refuting his assumptions about the ways of history and progress.

IV. Theory and Reality: Expected and Unintended Consequences

Can anyone today still harbor the illusion that the reality that emerged in the world once dominated by imperialism bore any resemblance to the prophecies contained in the original Marxist analysis of the future of 'Asiatic societies'? The gap between theory and reality is so plain for all to see that there seems little point in dwelling upon its existence as such. Instead of belabouring the obvious, therefore, I want at this stage to consider the reasons for this gap, the manner, that is, in which Marx's theory went wrong, and to suggest in the process some explanations for the reality.

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[79] Thus he could support movements for national self-determination in Russia or elsewhere because, whatever their social content, they contributed, in his view, to undermining existing regimes.

[80] As in Stalin's doctrine of 'socialism in one country'.

[81] See Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart R. Schram, *Marxism and Asia* (London, 1969), and George Lichtheim, *Imperialism* (Harmondsworth, 1974), especially chapters 8 and 9.

There is, of course, a general sense in which Marx's view of the functions of imperialism has been unequivocally confirmed by historical experience: whatever our judgement as to whether change in backward or undeveloped societies was possible without the intervention of the West, it is a historical fact that when change did begin to take place this was *because* of such intervention. Nor can it be denied that such new economic phenomena as subsequently appeared had their origins not within the indigenous forces operating in these societies but were imposed from without and from above, by the European presence. However, the more important, the central, tenet in Marx's prognosis of the consequences of imperialism was his conviction that once change was generated it would culminate, sooner or later, in the reproduction of the generating model. 'The country', Marx once wrote in a European but analogous context, 'that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.'[82] He thus believed that the wonders of the modern capitalist economy lay in its universal applicability and equalizing capacities. The West was a model which would be imitated, *mutatis mutandis*, in the non-Western world, in accordance with the premise that the introduction there of similar forms of economic production would have correspondingly similar social, political and cultural consequences. It was a matter, he wrote on that analogous occasion, of the 'natural laws of capitalist production . . . working with iron necessity towards inevitable results'.[83] Even in the case of Russia, where late in life he hesitantly contemplated the prospect of a by-passing of capitalism, he nevertheless clearly pronounced that if modern economic institutions were allowed to take root there, all the 'fatal vicissitudes' of capitalism would inevitably follow. To be sure, he was not a 'vulgar' economic determinist; his grasp of the complexities of social change was sophisticated and he generally conceived the relationship between economics and society as one of complicated mutual interaction. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in his writings on 'Asiatic'

[82] *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 450. This was written with reference to the relevance of English capitalist development for the future of Germany.

[83] *Ibid*.

societies Marx did adopt a position that was thoroughly deterministic, in so far as he consistently assumed the necessary 'spill-over' impact of the European economic mode upon non-European society.[84]

The limits of such a determinism, however, are nowhere more evident than in the actual experience of undeveloped societies. In fact, the most striking feature of their evolution under the influence of the West was, from the outset, the extent to which the adoption of Western forms of economic production did *not* have corresponding 'spill-over' effects. In part, of course, this could always be attributed to the relatively slow pace and restricted scope of economic innovation, which as a result was not sufficient to make itself felt in areas beyond its own immediate enclaves. Marx himself was sometimes well aware of this, though as often as not he tended, wishfully, to exaggerate both pace and scope, and he occasionally berated the imperialist powers for not carrying out their 'mission' to the backward world with greater ruthlessness and alacrity. Perhaps the whole process simply required more time than he may have originally contemplated. Even in England, after all, the transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist, industrial society was a protracted, painfully excruciating, and often contradictory and inconclusive affair that did not finally emerge victorious until the nineteenth century. Given sufficient time, therefore, would not modern economic development in the non-European world ultimately lead to what Marx expected, namely, its 'bourgeoisification'?

But this is surely to beg the question: it is to assume that the amount of time available is not itself a product of the social dilemmas involved. It is also to continue to assume, even as evidence to the contrary presented itself, that an economic system of production is an independently determining realm whose influence is invariably the same whatever the environment into which it is introduced. It is to make it independent by holding all other variables theoretically constant. In a word, it is to neglect the possibility that the influence of

[84] Non-Marxist theories of modernization, however, have often also made a similar assumption: for a critique of this, see Alberto Guerreiro-Ramos, 'Modernization: Towards a Possibility Model', in W. A. Beling and G. O. Totten (eds.), *Developing Nations: Quest for a Model* (New York, 1970), pp. 21-59. It is worth noting in this connection that one of Hirschman's aims in *The Passions and the Interests* was to reject deterministic views of development from *whatever* ideological perspective they emanated.

economics may itself be fashioned by the character of the environment, and in a manner that may make the end product unrecognizable on previous assumptions. The gist of what is here involved was excellently put by one economic historian:

> A good deal of our thinking about industrialization of backward countries is dominated – consciously or unconsciously – by the grand Marxian generalization according to which it is the history of advanced or established industrial countries which traces out the road of development for the more backward countries . . . But one should beware of accepting such a generalization too wholeheartedly. For the half-truth that it contains is likely to conceal the existence of the other half, that is to say, in several very important respects the development of a backward country may, by the very virtue of its backwardness, tend to differ fundamentally from that of an advanced country.[85]

Even allowing for his inveterate Eurocentrism, it is remarkable that Marx, with his acute sense for the dialectics of historical development, should have failed to take into account the possibility of alternative outcomes to the encounter between advanced and backward societies. Let us therefore try to reconstruct the historically unique dynamics of this encounter, as history has actually exposed them but as Marx did not anticipate them.

In the encounter between an advanced and a backward society the latter finds itself in a situation in which, ostensibly, 'all aspects of modernity are up for adoption simultaneously' since they present themselves as a ready-made, available product.[86] In reality, however, only certain aspects can be adopted, others cannot, and still others are bound to be rejected. The ability or inability to adopt is a consequence of objective or 'structural' possibilities prevailing at the moment of encounter; rejection, on the other hand, is a matter of subjective, volitional choice, governed, as such choices always are, by personal or collective likes and dislikes, be they emotional, political, or cultural. The problem of objective possibilities (or limitations)

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[85] Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), pp. 6-7. Albert Hirschman knew Gerschenkron well from their time at Berkeley in the 1940's and thereafter (see Adelman, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-206). Hirschman discusses Gerschenkron's views on backwardness in 'The Political Economy of Import-Substituting Industrialization in Latin America', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Feb. 1968, 82(1), pp. 2-32. On Hirschman's views on the possibilities of development in general, see Jeremy Adelman (ed.), *The Essential Hirschman* (Princeton, 2013), in particular the first section of this collection of Hirschman's writings.

[86] Reinhard Bendix, 'What is Modernization?', in Beling and Totten (eds.), *op.cit*., p. 8.

arose for backward societies in the light of the fact that some aspects of modernity, for instance, secularism, are dependent on such preconditions – the collapse of religious authority – as cannot be instituted or decided upon but can only evolve over time. In a general sense, all aspects of modernity are interdependent so that each is a precondition for the other; but if this were strictly true in practice, then no aspect of modernity could be adopted without the simultaneous adoption of all and this is inconceivable. Some aspects are in fact more easily adoptable than others: it is easier to put up a factory than to spread literacy, for example, or propagate such norms of social behavior, individualism, a competitive spirit, rational goal-oriented action, etc., as are normally associated with modernity. But even the establishment, and maintenance, of a factory is dependent on such preconditions – management, know-how, capital, marketing – as are for the most part absent in the backward society. Since these cannot arise spontaneously, for lack of *their* preconditions, alternative ways of providing them must be found if the factory is to be maintained. The most common, sometimes the only, alternative is the agency of government which, being the most coherently organized of all institutions in a backward society, can take upon itself what no other body can: the direction and mobilization of resources, their rational application, and the supervision in general of economic development. Little wonder, then, that the more backward a society the greater, more central, and more powerful the role of government.[87] In effect, what is thereby created is a 'substitute' precondition: government instead of private enterprise, bureaucratic rather than individual or local management (or administration), public not private capital, and so on.[88] From the perspective of the modern society, the result appears to be a conjoining of incompatibles, an artificial combination of elements, the exact opposite of the combination characterizing the modern society. And, indeed, from *that* perspective, it is. But if it works reasonably well – and if it is, after all, the only possible arrangement given the objective

[87] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[88] On the notion of 'substitutions' in the process of the modernization of backward societies, see Gerschenkron, *op.cit*. and Hirschman, 1968.

obstacles to the original model – it merely suggests that the road to modernization as it was followed in the advanced country was itself historically conditioned, that it is not the only alternative that history, under different circumstances, can throw up, and that the combination of social, economic and political elements can be more flexibly varied than has hitherto been supposed.

If, therefore, the modernizing process takes on a character different from the original Western historical model because of substitute preconditions, the *results* of the process also follow a unique pattern. That is to say, since only such aspects of modernity are adopted at any one stage as *can* be adopted given objective limitations, the sequence of change, the order in which society changes, will be unlike that which characterized the experience of the advanced country. In the West, industry emerged at the latter end of the sequence; in the non-European societies it has appeared at the very beginning. An interesting, if paradoxical, by-product of this is that in some ways the backward society is more modern than the modern in that it will 'borrow', in those areas that it can, the most advanced forms of technology and industrial organization. This is to say that the 'advantages of backwardness' are such that the late-comer, beginning as if from nothing, is not impeded by those institutionalized obstacles which, in an advanced society, were created in the course of its more protracted road to the modern world.[89] But does it matter, in the long run, what the sequence is? Perhaps, even if the order of change is different, the backward society will in the end arrive at the same result? This is what Marx, though not Lenin and Trotsky, thought, but everything points to the conclusion that it cannot be so, and the experience of modernizing societies such as Russia or China in the 20th century confirms the fact that the sequence of change largely determines the outcome. If backward societies are able to escape institutional structures and obstacles created in the West, they will not be able easily, if at all, to rid themselves of the structures, norms, and organizations which *their* sequence has created. A monolithic, centralized government, an enormous bureaucracy, the absence of intermediate and independent groups, regimentation,

[89] The term 'advantages of backwardness' figured prominently in the writings of Trotsky.

and so on, such aspects of modernity, which are to be found even now in so many of the backward societies that have undertaken modernization, are not passing phenomena but the very foundations on which these societies come to rest.

Yet no less important than the results generated by objective possibilities are the consequences of subjective choice and conscious rejection. In this connection it is necessary to recall that the role of an intellectual-political élite has been far more central in the transformation of non-European than European societies. The absence of a middle class, the general cultural poverty of the population, the low level of traditions of political participation, these and other factors explain the ideological and political leadership mission which devolved upon an emerging educated stratum in backward societies. This stratum was the most sensitive to Western influences and the most consciously aware of their implications. Through it, European imperialism was able to 'export', if for the most part inadvertently, its ideological and cultural 'superstructure', that layer of ideas, attitudes, values which were associated with modernity. In a sense it is this dimension of modern capitalism that was most successful in penetrating into societies subject to European influence of one form or another. But the capitalist ideological superstructure, at the time of its penetration, already consisted of ideas and values that were critical of capitalism, in some cases constituted a complete rejection of it. This may in part account for the phenomenon of the appearance of 'beyond capitalism' ideologies, above all Marxism, in pre-capitalist societies such as Russia and China. There is an additional reason for this, however: while the intellectual élites of these societies were fascinated by the West and became themselves Westernized, their relationship towards the culture they adopted was ambivalent, a mixture of love and hate, the one growing out of an admiration for Western progress and a sense of inferiority towards it, the other out of resentment at the brutal manner in which it imposed itself upon its subject peoples. Admiration for Western achievements was also tempered by a deep hostility towards their social by-products: the loss of communal intimacy, the harsh and anonymous conditions of urban life, the elimination of spontaneous behaviour. Since all aspects of the West could not, in any case, be adopted, this hostility could be both a psychological defence-mechanism against feelings of

inferiority and frustrated ambition, and a basis for self-assertion against an alien power or influences.[90] From this perspective it appears natural that aspirations to change society, on the one hand, and nationalist sentiments, on the other, should join hands.

It is a perspective that also helps to clarify the seemingly incomprehensible alliance that was soon effected between Marxism and nationalism. At once the most openly committed to the idea of the modern, to progress, to the wonders of science and technology, to universal values, Marxism was also the most thoroughgoing critique of contemporary Western civilization, of the iniquities and evils of capitalism and of the social disruptions and hardships created by industrialization. It is perhaps not wholly surprising that its appeal in the West itself had been strongest during the initial periods of industrialization and in countries, such as Germany, going through this process relatively late. It could be seen to combine, however uneasily, both attraction to and protest against the modern world.[91] This was a combination that fitted in well with the ideological needs of backward societies, and their intellectual-political élites, now aroused by modernity and national identity simultaneously, and thus seeking an anti-Western, anti-capitalist way to modernization.

There is in this already an indication of the historical syndrome according to which social thought, translated into ideology and political movement, may itself become an intervening historical force affecting the course of events in ways it did not anticipate. But this phenomenon is even more strikingly evident in another aspect of Marxism, the manner in which it conceived, or could be interpreted to have conceived, the role of volitional, instrumental action. Political events and results can neither be predicted nor even retrospectively derived from social or historical analysis. The latter can point to possible options or outcomes; it cannot deterministically decree which option will emerge triumphant. The actual outcome of

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[90] On the psychological effects of colonialism and their relation to the emergence of nationalism, see O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban* (London, 1956), especially pp. 132-141.

[91] See Adam Ulam, *The Unfinished Revolution* (New York, 1960), and Eugene Kamenka, 'The Relevance - and Irrelevance - of Marxism', in Kamenka (ed.), *A World in Revolution*? (Canberra, 1970), pp. 53-70.

social tendencies belongs to the realm of the political proper, to decisions and actions taken by political 'actors', to voluntary determination. While it may not always be clear what doctrinal weight Marx attributed to political voluntarism, there can be little doubt about its overriding importance in the attitudes of such 'actors' as Lenin and Mao. Whether such attitudes constituted a 'deviation' from Marx is a moot point but of little historical interest; more significant is the fact that they could at least be derived from Marx's notions of the inevitability of progress and its expression in the self-assertive action of human beings upon their history. Marxist social thought, at any rate, was quickly translated into a *Weltanschauung* and then into a systematic doctrine of political action. The doctrine proved ineffective in advanced societies but was remarkably well-suited to the amorphous and unstable conditions prevailing in backward societies, and in particular in those of the latter where the modernizing impulse was strongest and either implicitly or explicitly, initially or eventually, buttressed by nationalist and anti-imperialist (understood in the broad Leninist sense) sentiments. [92]

Antonio Gramsci once identified the relationship of Lenin to Marx with that of St. Paul to Christ. The relationship expressed, he wrote, two historical phases: 'science and action, which are homogeneous and heterogeneous at the same time . . . Christ – *Weltanschauung*, and St. Paul – organizer, action, expansion of the *Weltanschauung* – are both necessary to the same degree and therefore of the same historical stature.'[93] The Leninist-Maoist dimension of Marxism may indeed be seen as having itself become a force in the peculiar transformation of the non-European world in the 20th century. It was not, as is sometimes assumed, an artificially created force for it had deep roots in the very conditions which characterized the backwardness of non-European societies; but in so far as the future of these societies was also to be determined by beliefs about history, by ideology, by conscious choice and rejection, the

[92] Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Harmondsworth, 1969), chapter 6, argues that in India a western form of government has been maintained only at the price of the suppression of the modernizing impulse.

[93] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (London, 1971), p. 382.

role of Marxism assumed a 'historical stature' of its own. Like the real consequences of imperialism in general, this too is a consequence that Marx did not anticipate. It therefore remains only to reflect upon the irony that while in the aftermath of European imperialism, one world historical crucible, in the eventual form of contemporary globalization, has indeed emerged, the realities, not to say notions, in it of progress and modernity have turned out to be so contradictory and divergent as to make universal history more elusive than ever.*

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*The final paragraph of Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests* reads as follows (*op. cit.*, p. 135): 'I conclude that both critics and defenders of capitalism could improve upon their arguments through knowledge of the episode in intellectual history that has been recounted here. This is probably all one can ask of history: not to resolve issues, but to raise the level of the debate.