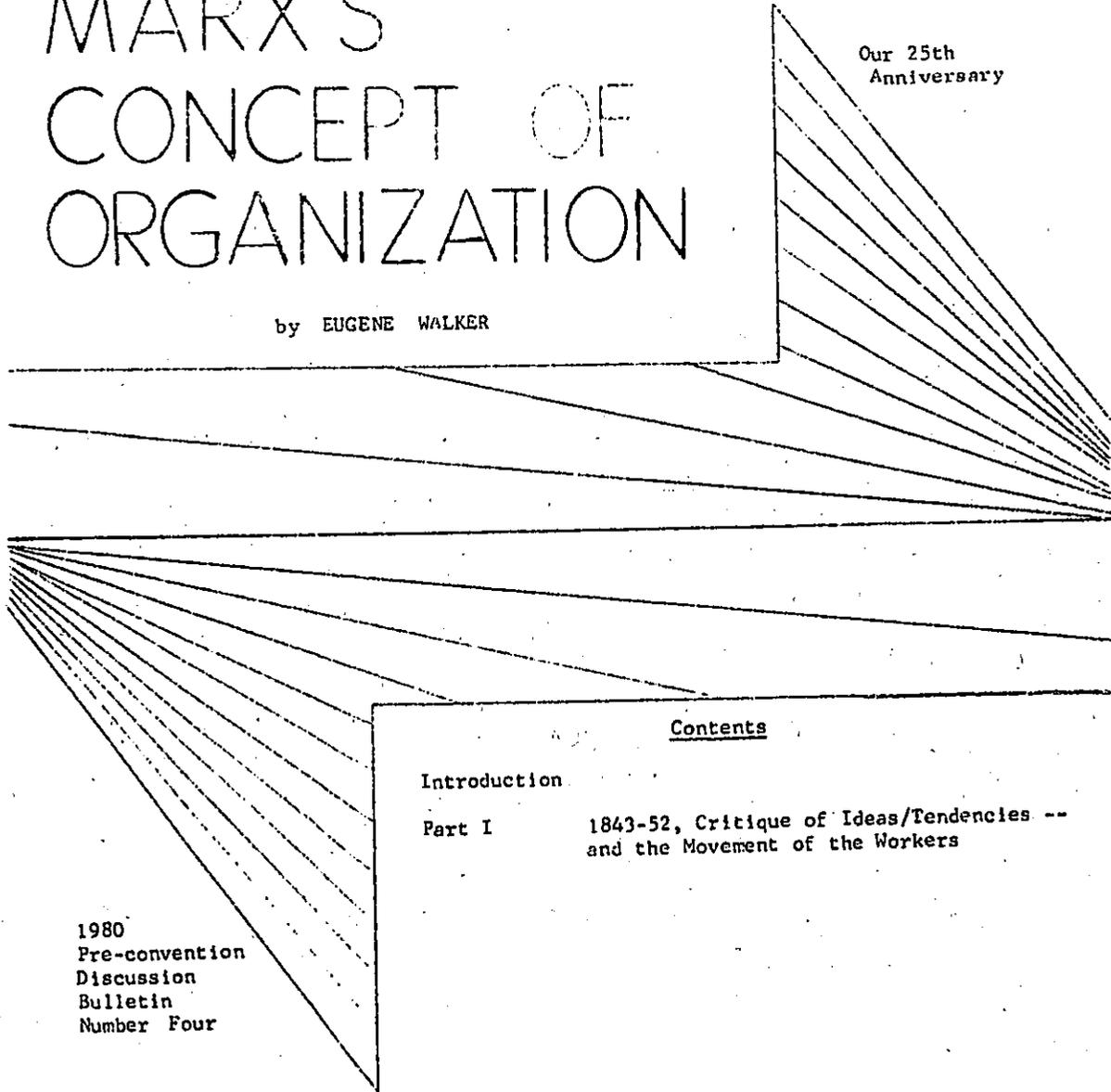


MARX'S CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATION

by EUGENE WALKER

Our 25th
Anniversary



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and the Movement of the Workers

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Introduction

The fact that Marx had no explicit theory of organization, and supposedly was not an "organizational person," has, ever since Marx's own day, served as convenient reason for the formation and practice of "Marxist" organizations far afield from the philosophical-theoretical and organizational ground of Marx. Thus the practice of Lassalle and his German General Workers Association was held forth as the Marxist model, not only for the reformist elements that became dominant in the Second International, but even for the revolutionary Russian Marxists. In turn, Lenin made his own original contribution to form of organization, the vanguard party, which, in his hands, underwent numerous changes over the course of some twenty years, 1902-1922.¹ However, since his death, it has been the original 1902 formulation that has been fetishized in the Marxist movement and turned into quite the opposite of what Lenin had formulated for specific historical circumstances of Tsarist Russia.

Our purpose here is not to enter into the decidedly sterile debates on form of organization that have been occurring in the organized Marxist movement of whatever variety since the 1930s. In contrast to that sterility has been the living revolutionary movement and the forms of struggle, forms of organization, it has time and again created -- the mass strike, the Soviet, the decentralized council form of Hungary 1956, the sit-ins and wildcats of the American working class, the self-organization of the Black movement in the 1960s, the non-partyism of Portugal 1974-75, the work boycott and student strike of Soweto and Johannesburg 1976 -- to mention only the tiniest fraction of conscious action and thought of masses in motion.

This is not at all to say that a revolutionary grouping does not have to create forms to meet the revolutionary movement from below. Quite the contrary -- that movement from below which in our age has taken on the fully mature form of a movement from practice toward theory and a new society, demands from revolutionaries the most serious grappling with the forms of organization which can meet that movement

from practice with a movement from theory, a movement from theory which expresses itself in an organized manner. As it was formulated in the News & Letters Draft Perspectives of 1979-80, the question is, "the form of a revolutionary Marxist organization as well as the relationship of it to the spontaneous new forms that arise from below, as well as the continuous working out of new relations of theory to practice."²

It is precisely for that reason that we want in this essay to return to Marx and organization. For though Marx did not have a theory of organization, he did have a concept of organization, a concept which he both wrote about and practiced.

Three periods in Marx's development are crucial here: 1843-1852, from the break with bourgeois society through the Communist League; 1864-1870, the formation and development of the First Workingman's International; 1871-1881, from the Paris Commune and the "Critique of the Gotha Program," to the Circular Letter of 1879 and the Letters to Vera Zazulitch, 1881.

1. See Raya Dunayevskaya's Marxism and Freedom, chapter 11.
2. News & Letters, July, 1979.

Part I 1843-52. Critique of Ideas/Tendencies — and the Movement of the Workers

In their struggle against the existing state of affairs the proletarians can claim the progressive spirits, the great philosophers, as their leaders.

— Heinrich Heine, 1844

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses....The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be made a reality without the abolition of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be abolished without philosophy being made a reality.

— Karl Marx, 1843-44

Introduction

For Marx critique was a most crucial concept. Very often it was in the form of a critique of others, their ideas and their attempts to practice. It focused also on the proletarian movement as Marx pushed it to come to a deeper, fuller understanding of itself and thereby further revolutionize its practice.

Critique began Marx's thoroughgoing break from bourgeois society, when as early as his editorship of Rheinische Zeitung, 1842-43, he had written articles on many of its laws, especially those of press censorship. By 1843-44 that critique included the highest expression of bourgeois thought— Hegelian philosophy — as Marx wrote "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" (1843) and "Critique of Hegelian Dialectic" (1844), in his famous humanist Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts where such Marxists as Herbert Marcuse and Raya Dunayevskaya have recognized the very "Birth of Historical Materialism."¹ Even his monumental work, Capital, was subtitled, "A Critique of Political Economy", while in the last decade of his life he challenged the actually existing Marxist party with his Critique of the Gotha Program.

From Critique of Young Hegelians to Organizing Activities in Paris

In the Spring and Summer of 1843 Marx's critique had included not only Hegel (to whom he nevertheless held fast, calling Hegel's dialectic, "the source of all dialectic") but his former colleagues — the Young Hegelians. When Bruno Bauer

made a narrow theological presentation of the Jewish question, Marx in his response called, not for bourgeois, political emancipation, but for revolutionary, human emancipation. It was his first salvo against a full tendency, the thought of the Young Hegelians. Later, in the Holy Family and then in The German Ideology, his revolutionary critique of the Young Hegelians brought forth not only what he opposed, but what he believed in.

During this same period, in a series of Letters to Arnold Ruge, published in their journal Deutsch-Französische Jahrbucher, Marx developed his critical concept:

...it is all the more clear what we have to accomplish at present: I am referring to ruthless criticism of all that exists. Ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of conflict with the powers that be...nothing prevents us from making criticism of politics, participation in politics, and therefore real struggles, the starting point of our criticism, and from identifying our criticism with them... we can formulate the trend of our journal as being: self-clarification (critical philosophy) to be gained by the present time of its struggles and desires.

It is in these Letters that Marx also began his critique of those who proclaimed themselves the opposite of bourgeois society -- "actually existing communism":

Communism, in particular, is a dogmatic abstraction; in which connection, however, I am not thinking of some imaginary and possible communism, but actually existing communism as taught by Cabet, Dezamy, Weitling, etc. This communism...is still infected by its antithesis -- the private system...is itself only a special one-sided realization of the socialist principle.

In contrast, Marx presented the beginning of his human -- freedom -- vision:

The self-confidence of the human being, freedom, has first to be aroused again in the hearts of these people. Only this feeling...can transform society into a community of human beings...the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality.

In the pages of this same journal, Marx, in his "Introduction to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law", concretized the "community of human beings" and the "dream" by putting forth the relation of the proletariat and philosophy:

As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapons in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people the emancipation of the Germans into human beings will take place.

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But it was Marx's move to Paris, Oct. 1843, which brought into sharp focus the living human proletarian forces who were to become the life blood of his philosophy of revolution-in-the-making.

* * *

Paris of the 1840s was aflame with communist and socialist ideas, with workers groups and secret societies. The communism which was put forth was for the most part abstract in nature. Its advocates hoped for the good will of the possessing class, whom they wished to convince of the need for social reform or revolution. There were, as well, voices within proletarian ranks such as Leroux and Proudhon, who argued for social transformation, but proclaimed it would not be done through the workers own organizations, the unions, nor by a revolution. And there were advocates of political reforms through universal franchise, who proclaimed for the "organization of labor", for the "right to work." But these forces, the Democratic Socialist Party of Louis Blanc and others, were neither socialist nor communist, and advocated only joint ownership of the means of production.

Marx for his part searched out radical German workers. Arnold Ruge wrote of his stay in Paris: "Marx has plunged into German communism here...Germany can stand the minor damage the artisans (particularly the baker's dozen converts here) are likely to do without much doctoring..." We will return to this "baker's dozen" shortly.

It was in Paris that Marx began developing "the antithesis between capitalist and worker," where labor "appears only as the expression of my loss of self and of my powerlessness." Marx envisioned a different labor: "My work would be a free manifestation of life, hence an enjoyment of life." Throughout the period Marx dug deeply into works on political economy, excerpting, summarizing, critiquing works of James Mill, Adam Smith, Ricardo and numerous others.

It was from the living ^{workers'} movement that he found the motive force that would transform labor from "loss of self" to the "free manifestation of life." Though living in Paris, his eyes and ears turned to the Silesian weavers' uprising

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of June 4-6, 1844. In contrast to others who saw it only as a futile revolt of despairing poor, Marx wrote in "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article by a Prussian":

The Silesian uprising begins precisely with what the French and English workers' uprisings end, with consciousness of the nature of the proletariat. The action itself bears the stamp of this superior character. Not only machines, these rivals of the workers, are destroyed, but also ledgers, the titles to property. And while all other movements were aimed primarily only against the owner of the industrial enterprise, the visible enemy, this movement is at the same time directed against the banker, the hidden enemy.

And what of the role of the revolutionary intellectual?

Confronted with the first outbreak of the Silesian workers' uprising the sole task of one who thinks and lives the truth consisted not in playing the role of schoolmaster in relation to this event, but instead in studying its specific character. This, of course requires some scientific insight and some love of mankind...

Marx drew the lessons that he had learned:

We have already seen that a social revolution is found to have the point of view of the whole because — even if it were to occur in only one factory district — it represents man's protest against a dehumanized life...socialism cannot be realized without revolution. It needs this political act insofar as it needs destruction and dissolution. But where its organizing activity begins, where its proper object, its soul,⁵ comes to the fore — there socialism throws off the political cloak.

This organizing activity for Marx in Paris was found within the "bakers' dozen" workers, especially the League of the Just, German proletarian activists who had groups in London, Switzerland and Paris. It was to their meetings that Marx went, listening, discussing, throughout 1844. A police report of the period noted, "every Sunday the German Communists assemble...sometimes 30, sometimes 100 or 200...Speeches are made advocating regicide, abolish property, down with the rich, etc; there is no longer any talk of religion...such people as Marx...continuing to lead young people to disaster."

Marx was in contact with the French workers as well. He wrote to Fouerbach:

You would have to attend one of the meetings of the French workers to appreciate the pure freshness, the nobility which burst forth from these toil-worn men...The German artisans in Paris, i.e., the Communists amongst them, several hundreds, have been having lectures twice a week throughout the summer.

And in the Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 he writes:

When communist artisans associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need -- the need for society -- and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring them together. Association, society and conversation, which again has association as its end, are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no mere phrase with them, but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work-hardened bodies.

Toward the end of his stay in Paris, with Engels' contributing several small chapters, Marx wrote the Holy Family, directed in the main at the "Critical Criticism" of the Young Hegelians who had launched a campaign against communism and socialism. The introduction begins, "Real humanism has no more dangerous enemy in Germany than spiritualism or speculative idealism which substitutes 'self-consciousness' or the 'spirit' for the real individual man..." He contrasted the proletarian associations to the abstractions of Critical Criticism:

According to Critical Criticism, the whole evil lies only in the workers' 'thinking'. It is true that the English and French workers have formed associations in which they exchange opinions not only on their immediate needs as workers, but on their needs as human beings. In their associations, moreover, they show a very thorough and comprehensive consciousness of the 'enormous' and 'immeasurable' power which arises from their cooperation. But these mass-minded communist workers, employed, for instance, in the Manchester or Lyons workshops, do not believe that by 'pure thinking' they will be able to argue away their industrial masters and their own practical debasement. They are most painfully aware of the difference between being and thinking, between consciousness and life. They know that property, capital, money, wage-labor and the like are no ideal figments of the brain but very practical, very objective products of their self-estrangement and that therefore they must be abolished in a practical objective way for man to become man not only in thinking, in consciousness but in mass being, in life.⁸

By the time Marx left Paris, February, 1845, for enforced exile to Brussels, he had put forth a new world view of historical materialism linked to the existence of class, to definite historical struggles in the development of production. He had also begun to separate himself from all other tendencies whose opposition to bourgeois society he viewed as only partial. For Marx, tendency is not sharply distinguished from ideas, philosophy. His critique of the Young Hegelians was not only of ideas, but of the manifestation of those ideas in the activities of these

working to change society.

The Communist Manifesto -- a unity of organization of / ^{thought} and organization of the working class movement

The three years in Brussels, 1845-48, were the years of The Poverty of Philosophy and the German Ideology, as well as the lectures to the Brussels German Workers Society which will lead to Marx's Wage Labor and Capital, and finally The Communist Manifesto. It was the period of Marx's and Engels' work with proletarian organizations that ended in the transformation of the League of the Just into the Communist League, revolutionary organization on the basis of class.

What we saw in Marx's writings of 1843-44 -- that the critique of tendencies such as the Young Hegelians, and even of Hegel himself, was in part tied to the newly emerging activities and consciousness of the proletariat -- became even more explicit as Marx undertook his response to Proudhon's Philosophy of Poverty and its influence on the French working class, and in the historical materialist ground set in the very first chapter of The German Ideology against both the Young Hegelians and True Socialists.

In Marx's Poverty of Philosophy, written in French, almost the entire final section, entitled "Strikes and Combinations of Workers", was devoted to the workers' own form of organization beginning with combinations, trade unions. Marx showed here how the workers create these forms in spite of the pressure of the manufacturers who say do not ask for higher wages as we have no command over wages since we have no command over prices; in spite of the economists who tell the workers do not combine as you will hinder the "regular progress of industry" and thus bring on still lower wages; and in spite of the "socialists who condemn the workers' self-organization" and instead ask them to follow utopian schemes.

He traced the workers' organizations, saying that was where research must be carried on and concluded:

The working class, in the course of its development, will substitute for the old civil society an association which will exclude classes and their antagonism, and there will be no more political power properly so-called,

since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society.

Throughout 1845-47, Marx and Engels worked on The German Ideology, their massive critique of the Young Hegelians and the True Socialists. The ground for their critique was their first chapter where they put forth the materialist conception of history that Marx had begun working out in 1843-44. What needs to be stressed here is that, in criticizing the abstract idealism of the Young Hegelians and the True Socialists, what is posed is not a vulgar materialism, a materialism without an active revolutionary force, but a materialist concept based upon a revolutionary subject -- the proletariat.

Here is how Marx presented the relationship between the self-activity of the proletariat and the stage of material life that is capitalism:

In all appropriations up to now, a mass of individuals remained subservient to a single instrument of production; in the appropriation by the proletarians, a mass of instruments of production must be made subject to each individual, and property to all. Modern universal intercourse cannot be controlled by individuals, unless it is controlled by all. This appropriation is further determined by the manner in which it must be effected. It can only be effected through a union, which by the character of the proletariat itself can again only be a universal one, and through a revolution, in which, on the one hand, the power of the earlier mode of production and intercourse and social organization is overthrown, and, on the other hand, there develops the universal character and the energy of the proletariat, which are required to accomplish the appropriation, and the proletariat moreover rids itself of everything that still clings to it from its previous position in society. Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting-off of all natural limitations. The transformation of labor into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the previously limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such.

* * *

Regular correspondence and internationalism were two aspects that Marx felt must be involved in any group of revolutionaries who wished to be together with the working class's own activities and organizations. Throughout the 1840s Engels maintained contacts with radicals in England contributing to The Northern Star, an English weekly of the Chartists. At the same time because there was no radical journal in Brussels to print their circulars, Marx and Engels sought to

establish a permanent correspondence committee across borders to different towns where there were communist groups. The Communist Correspondence Committee, with international contacts, was formed early in 1846. In August it was decided that Engels should return to Paris to try and win support for the establishment of workingmen's organizations. He met regularly with tanners, joiners and tailors to discuss historical problems and explain current economic questions. During this period there was also continuing correspondence with leaders of the League of the Just in London. The League had created a large educational society with 500 members of different nationalities, who had been reading Marx's and Engels' writings.

In January of 1847, Joseph Moll of the League came to Brussels and invited Marx and Engels to join. They agreed, persuading the League of the Just to transform itself into the Communist League. The first Congress, with Engels in attendance, was held in June of 1847. In August, the International Communist Correspondence Committee reorganized itself into a branch of the Communist League with Marx as president and a member of the League's regional directorate. The same month Marx and Engels helped to form the German Workingman's Society in Brussels which met weekly and to whom Marx would later deliver the lecture that prefigured his Wage Labor and Capital.

In November, Marx and Engels journeyed to London for the 10 day Second Congress of the Communist League. They addressed, as well, the London German Workers' Society and an International meeting held on the 17th anniversary of the Polish Uprising of 1830.

Marx and Engels began working on the Manifesto immediately after the Congress. In January of 1848 Marx worked on it alone. It comes off the press in February.¹¹ We have reached with the Manifesto, the apex of Marx's development on organization in this period 1843-48: his concept is one in which there is a unity of organization of thought — as critique of the bourgeoisie, as critique of other tendencies, as posing a new world proletarian vision — and the organization of the nascent working

class movement.

In February, 1848, actual revolution breaks out in France and Marx's anticipation of revolution, 1843-48, now becomes his actual participation, 1848-49, as the greatest test of organization of thought and of class is at hand — the praxis of revolution.

The 1848 Revolutions and Their Defeat — from new forms of organization to revolution in permanence

Expelled from Brussels in early March, Marx arrives in Paris on March 5th. ("Good and loyal Marx," wrote Ferdinand Flocon, member of the Provisional Government, "The soil of the French Republic is a field of refuge and asylum for all friends of liberty... Tyranny exiled you, now free France opens its doors to you and to all those who are fighting for the holy cause, the fraternal cause of all the peoples.") He brings with him the central office of the Communist League which had already transferred its authority to Brussels from London with the outbreak of the February Revolution. Marx immediately sets out to reestablish the central office of the League and is elected to its presidency on March 10th.

At the same time, he and others found the German Workingmen's Club to educate and prepare exiled Germans for return to the homeland. The 300-400 Germans who come around are given the Manifesto and "Demands of the Communist Party in Germany" written by Marx and Engels in late March and printed as a leaflet. The Demands are reprinted on a number of occasions in Germany during the revolution.

In early April Marx returns to Cologne to found a revolutionary daily newspaper, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, and participates with the working class of Cologne.¹¹

* * *

After one year, in May, 1849, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung was suppressed and Marx was forced to flee Cologne for France and shortly thereafter France for England. Marx in exile plunged into three tasks: 1. The establishment of a new journal, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Politisch-ökonomische Revue; 2. The building of a German political refugee committee to aid the German refugees who were stream-

ing across the Continent and to England after the defeat of the German Revolution;
3. Unseparated from these two tasks, the revitalization and reorganization of the Communist League.

The Neue Rheinische Zeitung, Politisch-ökonomische Revue published a total of six issues in 1850. Foremost among its contributions were Marx's The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850, and Engels' Peasant Wars in Germany.

Just as the Communist Manifesto had anticipated the 1848 Revolutions — and Marx's revolutionary journalism in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung had been the measure of a revolutionary intellectual's participation — so The Class Struggles in France proceeded to sum up that experience.

Lenin, writing in his State and Revolution, spoke of Marx's writing of 1848-51: "his theory is a summing up of experience, illuminated by a profound philosophical conception of the world and a rich knowledge of history."

Marx writes, "the annals of the revolution from 1848 to 1849 carries the heading: Defeat of the Revolution!" But he quickly adds "the revolution made progress by the creation of a powerful, united, counterrevolution" that forced the ripening of "a really revolutionary party." The really revolutionary party was the proletariat.

Marx, in great detail, traces the lot the Paris proletariat through ^{out} the period of February, 1848 to the June insurrection, then to June of 1849. In looking at the clash of proletariat and bourgeois he is finding the forms of struggle, forms of organization, that the proletariat creates. First is their February demand for Organization of Labor and the creation of a Ministry of Labor "a socialist synagogue" but with "no budget, no executive authority at their disposal."

Nothing is more understandable, then, than that the Paris proletariat sought to assert its own interests side by side with the interests of the bourgeoisie, instead of enforcing them as the revolutionary interest of society itself, that it let the red flag be dipped before the tri-color. The French workers could not take a step forward, could not touch a hair of the bourgeois order, until the course of the revolution had aroused the mass of the nation, the peasants and petty bourgeois, standing between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, against this order, against the rule of capital, and had forced them to attach themselves to the proletarians as their protagonists. The workers could buy this victory

only through the tremendous defeat in June.

The bourgeoisie forces the June insurrection upon the proletariat. It is a defeat of the workers in terms of arms, but a new consciousness in terms of proletarian outlook:

In place of its demands, exuberant in form, but petty and even bourgeois still in content, the concession of what it wanted to wring from the February republic, there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class!¹²

It is the first time that Marx has used the expression, "Dictatorship of the Working Class," which he found in the experience of 1848, and which others have since vulgarized to mean the dictatorship of the party. That in no sense was Marx's meaning. For him it meant a total uprooting and not a limitation to a political revolution or a revolution of any one party speaking "for" the workers. It meant the masses thinking and acting, often in opposition to any parties speaking for them. And certainly creating their own forms of expression. "June 13 (1849) has struck off the official heads of various semi-revolutionary parties; the masses that remained won a head of their own."

In his The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Marx completed his writings on France in revolution and counter-revolution. It was here that he contrasted the method of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, especially on concept of self-criticism:

Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm swiftly from success to success, their dramatic effects outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling brilliants, ecstasy in the everyday spirit, but they are short-lived, soon they have attained their zenith, and a long crapulent depression seizes society before it learns soberly to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period. On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, and recoil again and again from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*¹³

* * *

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Though the Communist League had been disbanded in June of 1848 as the situation in Germany called for a more open type of functioning, by February of 1849, faced with much greater repression, Marx and 10 others met in Cologne with Joseph Moll, from the German refugee community in London, to discuss reorganization of the League. But it was not until late August, 1849, when Marx went into exile in London, that any concrete work was done. In September, A German Refugee Committee was set up which shortly thereafter was transformed into the Social-Democratic Refugee Committee. It provided material assistance for the refugees of '48, especially proletarians. Marx wrote an appeal for support, speaking of "thousands upon thousands of people have been wandering without shelter in foreign land" ever since "'peace and order' have been re-established in Germany"; The work with the refugees at the same time helped to reconstitute ties among members of the Communist League.

Marx joined the Central Committee of the Reconstituted Communist League which was near stagnation. What he called a "warplan against Democracy", the Address to the Central Authority of the Communist League, was delivered in March of 1850. In this address Marx set down what the League had accomplished in 1848-50, "in double fashion":

first, in that its members energetically took part in the movement in all places, that in the press, on the barricades and on the battlefields, they stood in the front ranks of the only resolutely revolutionary class, the proletariat. The League further proved itself in that its conception of the movement as laid down in the circulars of the congresses and of the Central Authority of 1847 as well as in the Communist Manifesto turned out to be the only correct one.¹⁴

Here we have Marx's concept of organizational practice in the heat of the uprising — taking part in the movement in all places and having a conception of that movement. It is here as well where he called for reorganization of the League which had become "slackened," where connections with the Central Authority had "become loose and gradually dormant", "the workers' party lost its only firm foothold" and "the general movement came completely under the domination and leadership of the petty bourgeois democrats."

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Marx responded, "the independence of the workers must be restored." But on what basis? And Marx answered: By making the Revolution permanent:

It is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians...not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one.¹⁵

Where in Class Struggles in France Marx had introduced the idea of "the permanence of the revolution,"¹⁶ he now in his address to the Communist League developed permanent revolution and the organization of a revolutionary group as a projection in anticipation of the next revolutionary period. In such a revolutionary period Marx first called upon the League to oppose unity with petty bourgeois democrats:

...the League, must exert themselves to establish an independent secret and public organization of the workers' party alongside the official democrats...They (the workers) must work to prevent the direct revolutionary excitement from being suppressed again immediately after the victory. On the contrary, they must keep it alive as long as possible...Alongside the new official governments they must immediately establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, whether in the form of municipal committees and municipal councils or in the form of workers' clubs or workers' committees, so that the bourgeois-democratic governments not only immediately lose the support of the workers but from the outset see themselves supervised and threatened by authorities backed by the whole mass of the workers.

Second, "the workers must be armed and organized":

workers must try to organize themselves independently as a proletarian guard with commanders elected by themselves under the command not of the state authority but of the revolutionary municipal councils set up by the workers.

And finally:

it is above all necessary for the workers to be independently organized and centralized in clubs...Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence.¹⁷

* * *

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The address was circulated underground back into Germany in an attempt to revitalize the Communist League. Indeed, it was the arrest of a League member in possession of both the March address to the Communist League and the Communist Manifesto which started the process toward the Communist Cologne Trial, as an attempt to defame the communist movement. Marx's response to this attempted frame-up was his "Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial in Cologne."

The communists, in prison on the basis of forged documents and false evidence, were accused of trying to destroy the existing society. Marx exposed the falsifications and responded to the charge of attempting to destroy the existing society by explaining they had a much deeper revolution in mind:

The ultimate aim of this propaganda is said to be the destruction of existing society; but the Prussian state has already perished once and could perish ten times more and indeed for good and all without the existing social order being even the slightest bit harmed...if the final goal of the League is the overthrowing of the social order, the method by which this is to be achieved is necessarily that of political revolution and this entails the overthrow of the Prussian state, just as an earthquake entails the overthrow of a chicken house. The accused, however, proceed in fact from the outrageous assumption that the present Prussian government would collapse without their having to lift a finger. They accordingly did not found a league to overturn the present government of Prussia, and were not guilty of any 'reasonable conspiracy'.¹⁸

* * *

Despite Marx's efforts in the period of 1849-50 to restore the League, the forces of counter-revolution were so strong that they had a tremendous pull within the revolutionary movement. Adventurist currents of exile members of the League came to the fore, which Marx tried to combat by arranging for the Central Authority to be transferred out of London to Cologne.¹⁹

However, the split became more permanent, the squabbling among emigres (what Marx called the "war of the frogs and mice") greater. Finally, in November of 1853, Marx moved to disband the League. He was not again to participate specifically in revolutionary organizations for more than a decade. Then, the objective situation in Europe and in America brought forth the possibility of a new organizational form -- The Workingmen's International.

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1. See Marcuse's "Foundations of Historical Materialism", written in 1932, in Studies in Critical Philosophy and Dunayevskaya's "The 1840s: Birth of Historical Materialism" in Philosophy and Revolution.

2. Marx and Engels, Collected Works, Vol. 3 pages 142, 145.

3. C.W. Vol. 3, pages 142, 143, 137.

4. C.W. Vol. 3, page 187. See as well pages 186, 187: "Where, then, is the positive possibility of...emancipation? Answer: In the formation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong but wrong generally is perpetrated against it; which can no longer invoke a historical but only a human title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the premises of the German state; a sphere, finally which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete rewiring of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat... By proclaiming the dissolution of the hitherto existing world order the proletariat merely states the secret of its own existence, for it is in fact the dissolution of that world order. By demanding the negation of private property, the proletariat merely raises to the rank of a principle of society what society has made the principle of the proletariat, what, without its own co-operation is already incorporated in it as the negative result of society..."

5. CW Vol. 3, pages 201, 202, 205, 206.

6. August 11, 1844. C.W. Vol. 3 pages 355, 357.

7. C.W. Vol. 3, page 313.

8. C.W. Vol. 4, pages 52, 53. See as well pages 36-37: "Since in the fully-formed proletariat the abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity, is practically complete; since the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form; since man has lost himself in the proletariat, yet at the same time has not only gained theoretical consciousness of that loss, but through urgent, no longer removable, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative need — the practical expression of necessity — is driven to revolt against this inhumanity, it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation. Not in vain does it go through the stern but steeling school of labor. It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do.

9. C.W. Vol 6, page 212. See entire section, pages 206-212. In particular pages 210, 211: "In England they have not stopped at partial combinations which have no other objective than a passing strike, and which disappear with it. Permanent combinations have been formed, trade unions, which serve as bulwarks for the workers in their struggles with the employers...The organization of these strikes, combinations, and trade unions went on simultaneously with the political struggles of the workers, who now constitute a large political party, under the name of Chartists...when it is a question of making a precise study of strikes, combinations

and other forms in which the proletarians carry out before our eyes their organization as a class, some are seized with real fear and others display a transcendental disdain. An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself."

10. C.W. Vol. 5, page 88. See as well his Theses on Feuerbach written in the same period: "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated." C.W. Vol. 5, page 7

11. For a discussion of Marx's revolutionary journalism and his participation with workers' groups during the Revolutions of 1848-49 see, "Revolutionary Journalism: Karl Marx, the Neue Rheinische Zeitung and the 1850 Address on permanent revolution", News & Letters, May, 1980 by Eugene Walker.

12. C.W. Vol 10, pages 57, 69.

13. C.W. Vol 11, pages 106-107. After June of 1848, "the proletariat receded into the background of the revolutionary stage". Marx does not hesitate to point out the limitations of the proletarian movement at such a period: "In part it throws itself into doctrinaire experiments, exchange banks and workers' associations, hence into a movement in which it renounces the revolutionising of the old world by means of the latter's own great, combined resources, and seeks, rather, to achieve its salvation behind society's back, in private fashion, within its limited conditions of existence, and hence necessarily suffers shipwreck." (C.W. Vol. 11, pages 110-111.) But by no means is it a permanent defeat: "But the revolution is thorough. It still journeys through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2 1851 it has completed one half of its preparatory work; it is now completing the other half. First it perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it." (C.W. Vol. 11, page 185) Thus while "all previous revolutions concentrate state power", that will not be the proletariat's aim, instead "all its forces of destruction" are concentrated against it. Here Marx prefigured what would become explicit with the Paris Commune — the smashing of bourgeois state power, and its supersession with the workers own form, the Commune.

14. C.W. Vol. 10, page 277.

15. C.W. Vol. 10, page 281.

16. C.W. Vol 10, page 127: "the proletariat increasingly organizes itself around revolutionary Socialism, around Communism, for which the bourgeoisie itself has invented the name of Blanqui. This socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations."

17. C.W. Vol. 10, pages 282, 283, 284, 287.

18. C.W. Vol. 11, page 404. Despite Marx's demonstration of the falsity of the charges, the accused not only spent many months in prison awaiting trial, but seven of the eleven were found guilty of attempted high treason and sentenced to several years in prison.

19. See minutes of the meeting of the Central Authority, Sept. 15, 1850: Marx—"In the last decade on 'the position of the Germany proletariat in the next revolution' views were expressed by members of the minority on the Central Authority which directly clash with those in the last circular but one and even the Manifesto, and the national feeling of the German artisans were pandered to. The materialist standpoint of the Manifesto has given way to idealism. The revolution is seen not as the product of realities of the situation but as the result of an effort of will. Whereas we say to the workers: You have 15, 30, 50 years of civil war to go through in order to alter the situation and to train yourselves for the exercise of power, it is said: We must take power at once, or else we may as well take to our beds.... This debate has finally laid bare the differences in principle... Our party can come to power only when the conditions allow it to put its own views into practice." (C.W. Vol 10, pages 626, 627.)