

81-7.45

MARX and the PROLETARIAT

Paul Sweezy

Paul Sweezy is a leading marxian political economist and an editor of Monthly Review. This article was originally published in the December 1967 issue of MR, which included three articles commemorating the 100th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of Das Kapital.

MARX AND THE PROLETARIAT

BY PAUL M. SWEEZY

Marx's theory of capitalism, which was sketched with broad and sweeping strokes in the *Communist Manifesto* and achieved its most comprehensive and polished form in the first volume of *Capital*, published just a hundred years ago, holds that capitalism is a self-contradictory system which generates increasingly severe difficulties and crises as it develops. But this is only half the story: equally characteristic of capitalism is that it generates not only difficulties and crises but also its own grave-diggers in the shape of the modern proletariat. A social system can be ever so self-contradictory and still be without a revolutionary potential: the outcome can be, and in fact history shows many examples where it has been, stagnation, misery, starvation, subjugation by a stronger and more vigorous society. In Marx's view capitalism was not such a society; it was headed not for slow death or subjugation but for a thorough-going revolutionary transformation. And the reason was precisely because by its very nature it had to produce the agent which would revolutionize it. This is the crucially important role which the proletariat plays in the Marxian theoretical schema.

In the eyes of many people, including not a few who consider themselves to be essentially Marxists, this theory of the revolutionary agency of the proletariat is the weakest point of the whole system. They point to the fact that the English and other Western European proletariats, which Marx considered to be the vanguard of the international revolutionary movement, have actually developed into reformist forces which, by accepting the basic assumptions of capitalism, in fact strengthen it. And they note that the proletariat of what has become the most advanced and powerful capitalist country, the United States of America, has never developed a significant revolu-

This is the text of a paper delivered at the Third Annual Socialist Scholars Conference held in New York on September 9-10, 1967.

tionary leadership or movement, and shows fewer signs of doing so today than at any time in its history.

I do not believe that the empirical observations which support this type of criticism of Marx's theory can be seriously challenged. And yet it certainly will not do to jump from there to the conclusion that Marx's theory is "refuted" and must be abandoned. A more legitimate procedure, I suggest, is to inquire into the inner logic of the theory to discover *why* Marx assigned the role of revolutionary agent to the proletariat. In this way I believe we shall find that it is not the theory itself which is at fault so much as its misinterpretation and misapplication.

First, we must be quite clear that Marx's theory of the revolutionary agency of the proletariat has nothing to do with an emotional attachment to, or blind faith in, the working class as such. He believed that objective forces, generated by the capitalist system, were inexorably molding a revolutionary class, i.e. one which would have both the ability and the will to overthrow the existing order. The ability stemmed from its numerical strength and its indispensable role in the capitalist production process, the will from its being deprived not only of material possessions but of its essential and ultimately irrepressible humanity. Marx's position is perhaps most clearly stated in the following passage from *The Holy Family*:

When socialist writers ascribe this world-historical role to the proletariat, this is not at all . . . because they take the proletarians for gods. Quite the contrary. Because the abstraction of all humanity, even the appearance of humanity, is practically complete in the fully developed proletariat, because the living conditions of the proletariat represent the focal point of all inhuman conditions in contemporary society, because the human being is lost in the proletariat, but has won a theoretical consciousness of loss and is compelled by unavoidable and absolutely compulsory need (the practical expression of necessity) to revolt against this inhumanity—all these are the reasons why the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. However, it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions which give it life, and it cannot abolish these conditions without abolishing all those inhuman conditions of social life which are summed up in its own situation.

It does not go through the hard and hardening school of

labor fruitlessly. It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the proletariat as a whole, may imagine for the moment to be the aim. It is a question of what the proletariat actually is and what it will be compelled to do historically as the result of this being. The aim and the historical action of the proletariat are laid down in advance, irrevocably and obviously, in its own situation in life and in the whole organization of contemporary bourgeois society.*

The next question is this: What were the processes which molded a proletariat with these particular characteristics? One answer, which I suppose many Marxists would subscribe to, would hold that the revolutionary proletariat is inherent in capitalism and is therefore the creation of the very same processes which originally brought the system into existence and which have subsequently propelled its development. The first step, in this view, was what Marx called primitive accumulation which in one aspect was essentially the violent and bloody process of separating the working people from ownership of their means of production. After that, the expansion of the proletariat to its ultimate position of numerical dominance in capitalist society was the natural result of expanded reproduction on a capitalist basis. Expanded reproduction, as you know, consists of the appropriation by capitalists of surplus value created by wage laborers, and the continuous conversion of part of the surplus value into additional capital.

Now there can be no question that this is an accurate account of Marx's theory of the birth and *quantitative* expansion of the proletariat. But does it explain why he regarded the proletariat as the revolutionary agent destined to overthrow the system? If we say that it does, we necessarily imply that the proletariat was revolutionary from its birth and that only quantitative predominance was required for it to be able to perform its revolutionary function; for there is nothing in the mere mechanics of the expanded reproduction process to bring about a *qualitative* transformation of the proletariat. At this point it is therefore of first importance to recognize that in Marx's view

* Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 2, p. 38. Except for the first two sentences, the translation is that of the English edition of Franz Mehring's *Karl Marx*, pp. 130-131.

the proletariat was *not* a revolutionary force from its birth but on the contrary acquired this quality in the course of its capitalist development.

In this connection it is necessary to recall an aspect of Marx's theory of capitalism which is of course known to all students of the subject but which, I believe, is generally considered to have mostly historical interest. This is his division of the capitalist epoch into what Engels, in his editor's preface to the first English edition of the first volume of *Capital*, called "two great and essentially different periods of economic history: the period of manufacture proper, based on the division of manual labor, and the period of modern industry based on machinery." What separated the two periods was the Industrial Revolution, a term much used by Marx, the beginning of which he dated from Wyatt's spinning machine of 1735, and which had worked its transforming effects by 1825, a year of economic crisis in which "modern industry . . . for the first time opens the periodic cycle of its modern life." (*Capital*, Kerr ed., Vol. I, p. 18.)

From our present point of view there are two fundamental differences between these phases of capitalist development. One relates to the dynamics of the production process itself, the other to the changed character of the proletariat brought about by the transition from the earlier phase to the later. (It should be noted in passing that the formal concepts of Marxian economic theory—constant and variable capital, surplus value, expanded reproduction, etc.—are equally applicable to both phases. At the level of abstraction implied by this conceptual apparatus, there is therefore no difference between the two phases, which is perhaps why many Marxist economists have failed to appreciate the importance of distinguishing between them.)

Manufacture is an extension and adaptation of age-old handicraft methods of production. The chief innovation is the assembling of many craftsmen in a single enterprise, which permits forms and degrees of specialization unthinkable under the medieval guild system. This specialization of crafts—or division of labor, as it was called by Adam Smith, the theorist *par excellence* of the manufacture phase—results in an enormous increase in labor productivity and in this sense marks a great

stride forward in human progress. However, it is important to recognize that, technologically, manufacture is still an essentially conservative mode of production. The increase of productivity for which it is responsible stems from the more rational utilization of existing technologies, not from the introduction of new technologies. The latter process, often called invention, is no part of the logic of manufacture. Hence, in Marx's words, "History shows how the division of labor peculiar to manufacture, strictly so called, acquires the best adapted form at first by experience, as it were behind the backs of the actors, and then, like the guild handicrafts, strives to hold fast that form when once found, and here and there succeeds in keeping it for centuries." (*Ibid.*, p. 399.) This naturally does not mean that invention was absent or that the culture and ideology of this phase of capitalism did not favor the inventive arts. If such had been the case, there would have been no industrial revolution at the time and in the place where it actually occurred. What it does mean is that invention was not an integral part of the process of production and indeed was often strongly resisted by the practitioners of existing methods of production. This special combination of circumstances, both favoring and inhibiting the progress of invention, found an interesting reflection in Adam Smith who, as Nathan Rosenberg has shown,* regarded major inventions as the work of neither laborers nor capitalists but rather of "philosophers" who are totally separated from the productive process.

The labor force of the manufacturing phase corresponded to the requirements of this particular mode of production. It consisted of a multitude of craftsmen possessing a great variety of specialized skills which were characteristically passed on from father to son. Craft consciousness rather than class consciousness was the hallmark of a proletariat so composed. The skilled handworker tended to be bigoted, proud, undisciplined, contentious, capable of waging a bitter and often violent struggle against the constraints of capitalist production and the employer who imposed them upon him. But his vision was necessarily

* Nathan Rosenberg, "Adam Smith on the Division of Labor: Two Views or One?", *Economica*, May 1965.

limited: he could not see the system as a whole nor understand his place in it, and he was therefore incapable of sustained revolutionary activity to change it. Capitalism in its manufacturing phase, in addition to being technologically conservative was also highly resistant to political and social change.

The introduction of machinery—which, according to Marx, takes place “from the moment that the tool proper is taken from man and fitted into a mechanism” (*Ibid.*, p. 408)—changed all that. Having once occurred in one important branch of industry, it literally forced itself on other branches until it finally came to dominate the mode of production as a whole. Marx’s account of this process is worth quoting at some length :

A radical change in the mode of production in one sphere of industry involves a similar change in other spheres. This happens at first in such branches of industry as are connected together by being separate phases of a process, and yet are isolated by the social division of labor in such a way that each of them produces an independent commodity. Thus spinning by machinery made weaving by machinery a necessity, and both together made the mechanical and chemical revolution that took place in bleaching, printing, and dyeing imperative. So too, on the other hand, the revolution in cotton spinning called forth the invention of the gin for separating the seeds from the cotton fibre; it was only by means of this invention that the production of cotton became possible on the enormous scale at present required. But more especially, the revolution in the modes of production of industry and agriculture made necessary a revolution in the general conditions of the social process of production, i.e. in the means of communication and transport. Hence, apart from the radical changes introduced in the construction of sailing vessels, the means of communication and transport became gradually adapted to the modes of production of mechanical industry by the creation of a system of river steamers, railways, ocean steamers, and telegraphs. But the huge masses of iron that had now to be forged, to be welded, to be cut, to be bored, and to be shaped, demanded, on their part, cyclopean machines for the construction of which the methods of the manufacturing period were utterly inadequate.

Modern industry had therefore itself to take in hand the machine, its characteristic instrument of production, and to construct machines by machines. It was not till it did this that it built up for itself a fitting technical foundation, and stood on its own feet. Machinery, simultaneously with the increasing use of it, in the

first decades of this century appropriated, by degrees, the fabrication of machines proper. But it was only during the decade preceding 1866 that the construction of railways and ocean steamers on a stupendous scale called into existence the cyclopean machines now employed in the construction of prime movers. (*Ibid.*, pp. 419-420.)

Whereas capitalism in its manufacturing phase was technologically conservative and immune to the threat of revolutionary change, modern industry based on machinery is the opposite in both respects. Technological progress no longer depends on the ingenuity of the skilled worker or on the genius of the great inventor; it now becomes the province of the rational sciences. This is one of the major themes of Marx's masterful chapter entitled "Machinery and Modern Industry" which alone would be enough to mark the first volume of *Capital* as an epoch-making work. Here we must be content with a couple of brief quotations which convey the gist of his thought:

The principle, carried out in the factory system, of analyzing the process of production into its constituent phases, and of solving the problems thus proposed by the application of mechanics, of chemistry, and of the whole range of the natural sciences, becomes the determining principle everywhere. (p. 504.)

Modern Industry rent the veil that concealed from men their own social process of production, and that turned the various spontaneously divided branches of production into so many riddles, not only to outsiders but even to the initiated. The principle which it pursued of resolving each into its constituent parts without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man, created the new modern science of technology. The varied, apparently unconnected, and petrified forms of the production process now resolved themselves into so many conscious and systematic applications of natural science to the attainment of given useful effects. (p. 532.)

From this the conclusion flowed logically: "Modern Industry never looks upon and treats the existing form of a process as final. The technical base of that industry is therefore revolutionary, while all earlier modes of production were essentially conservative." (p. 532.)

With respect to its social base, Marx regarded modern in-

(continued on page 34)

(continued from page 31)

dustrial capitalism as no less revolutionary—once again in sharp contrast to capitalism in its manufacturing phase. Machinery progressively abolishes the crafts which are the basis of manufacture and thereby renders obsolete the multitudinous special skills of the craftsmen. In this way it cheapens the labor power of adult males by obviating the need for prolonged and expensive training programs. At the same time, by putting a premium on dexterity and quickness it opens the door to the mass employment of women and children. There followed a vast expansion of the labor supply which was augmented and supplemented by two further factors: (1) Once solidly entrenched in the basic industries, machinery invades ever new branches of the economy, undercutting the old handworkers and casting them onto the labor market. And (2) the progressive improvement of machinery in industries already conquered continuously eliminates existing jobs and reduces the employment-creating power of a given rate of capital accumulation.

The effects of machinery, in short, are on the one hand to extend, homogenize, and reduce the costs of production of the labor force; on the other, to slow down the rate of increase of the demand for labor power. This means a fundamental change in the economic power relation between capital and labor, to the enormous advantage of the former. Wages are driven down to, and often below, the barest subsistence minimum; hours of work are increased beyond anything known before; the intensity of labor is stepped up to match the ever increasing speed of the machinery. Machinery thus completes the process, begun in the period of primitive accumulation, of subjecting labor to the sway of capital. It is the capitalistic employment of machinery, and not merely capitalism in general, which generates the modern proletariat as Marx conceived it.

But the coin has two sides. Economically, the power of the proletariat under modern industry is much reduced compared to that of its predecessor in the period of manufacture. But politically, its potential power is infinitely greater. Old craft and geographical divisions and jealousies are eliminated or minimized. The nature of work in the modern factory requires the

organization and disciplining of the workers, thereby preparing them for organized and disciplined action in other fields. The extreme of exploitation to which they are subjected deprives them of any interest in the existing social order, forces them to live in conditions in which morality is meaningless and family life impossible, and ends by totally alienating them from their work, their products, their society, and even themselves. Unlike the skilled craftsmen of the period of manufacture, these workers form a proletariat which is both capable of, and has every interest in, revolutionary action to overthrow the existing social order. These are the ones of whom Marx and Engels had already declared in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." In the first volume of *Capital* this bold generalization is supported by a painstaking analysis of the immanent features and tendencies of capitalist "modern industry" as it emerged from the industrial revolution.

So far I have tried to show that Marx's theory of capitalism encompasses two quite distinct phases, separated by the industrial revolution, which can be characterized as follows:

Manufacture

| | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| Technology | Conservative |
| Proletariat | Non-revolutionary |

Modern Industry

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| Technology | Revolutionary |
| Proletariat | Revolutionary |

It must be immediately added, however, that the word "revolutionary" applied to technology has a somewhat different meaning from what it does when applied to the proletariat. A revolutionary technology is one which by its very nature changes continuously and rapidly; a revolutionary proletariat, on the other hand, is one which has the *potential* to make a revolution but which can actually make it only once under favorable conditions (the so-called revolutionary situation). Here a question obviously arises: If, for whatever reason, the emergence of a revolutionary situation is long delayed, what will be the effect

in the meantime of modern industry's revolutionary technology on the composition and capabilities of the proletariat?

Marx never asked this question, perhaps because it never occurred to him that the revolution might be long delayed. And yet it is a question which arises quite naturally within the framework of his theory. He had explicitly recognized that modern industry "is continually causing changes not only in the technical basis of production, but also in the functions of the laborer and in the labor-process" (*Ibid.*, p. 533); and no one knew better than he that it is the functions of the laborer and the nature of the labor process which determine the character of the proletariat. In the absence of a revolutionary situation, would the proletariat tend to become more or less revolutionary? It would have been a perfectly logical question for Marx to ask when he was writing *Capital*; a hundred years later it seems to be not only a logical but an inescapable question for Marx's followers.

This is obviously not the occasion to attempt a comprehensive answer, and I have to admit that my knowledge of the interrelation between technology and the labor process is far too limited to permit me to speak as an expert on the subject. I will therefore restrict myself to indicating in a very general way why it seems to me that the advance of modern technology must tend to shape a proletariat which is less rather than more revolutionary than that which emerged from the industrial revolution in the middle of the 19th century.

I would not put the main emphasis on the consequences of technological change for the workers who actually mind the machines and do functionally similar work, much of it virtually unknown in Marx's time, such as manning assembly lines. These are still for the most part dehumanizing jobs requiring little skill; and speed-up of machinery and increasing work loads certainly do not make them more bearable, not to say attractive. A proletariat dominated by operatives of this general description might well have as great a revolutionary potential as its mid-19th-century predecessor. The point is that relative to the total work force there are so many fewer jobs of this kind than there used to be. Progressive mechanization of particular

processes, and more recently the perfection of generally applicable methods of partial or full automation, have reduced this traditional blue-collar segment of the proletariat from what was once a large majority to what is today in the most industrialized societies a small minority. Since the output of this minority has at the same time enormously increased, it is clear that modern technology has multiplied the productivity of labor many times over and put within society's grasp a potential surplus of vast proportions.

The obverse of this development is that a great variety of new categories of jobs has been created. Some of these are integrally related to the new technology—scientists, researchers, engineers, technicians, highly skilled maintenance and repair men, etc.—but many more (both absolutely and relatively) are concerned in one way or another with the manipulation and absorption of the surplus made possible by the increased productivity of the underlying production workers. Under this heading one could list government workers of all kinds, including teachers; those employed in the many branches of the sales apparatus, including most of the personnel of the mass communication media; workers and salaried personnel in finance, insurance, and real estate; and the providers of many different kinds of personal services from beauty treatment to sports spectacles. In the United States today these job categories, taken all together, probably account for close to three quarters of the employed non-agricultural labor force.

In terms of the occupational composition of the labor force, then, the two chief consequences of modern industry's revolutionary technology have been (1) a drastic (and continuing) reduction in the production-worker component, and (2) a vast proliferation of job categories in the distribution and service sectors of the economy. At the same time there has taken place a slow but cumulatively substantial increase in the real wages of both production and non-production workers. In part this reflects an increase in the cost of production of labor power as the educational and training requirements of the new employment categories have risen. And in part it reflects the fact that the workers—and here we mean primarily production workers—

have been able through non-revolutionary class struggle to wrest from the capitalists a part of the fruits of increasing productivity.

To sum up: The revolutionary technology of modern industry, correctly described and analyzed by Marx,* has had the effect of multiplying by many times the productivity of basic production workers. This in turn has resulted in a sharp reduction in their relative importance in the labor force, in the proliferation of new job categories, and in a gradually rising standard of living for employed workers. In short, the first effects of the introduction of machinery—expansion and homogenization of the labor force and reduction in the costs of production (value) or labor power—have been largely reversed. Once again, as in the period of manufacture, the proletariat is highly differentiated; and once again occupational and status consciousness has tended to submerge class consciousness.

It might be thought that despite these changes the blue-collar proletariat would remain a revolutionary element within the working class as a whole. No doubt there is a tendency for this to happen, and it would be short-sighted in the extreme to overlook the revolutionary potential still remaining in this large body of workers. But one must not go too far in isolating them from the rest of the labor force. As James Boggs says: "Today most workers in the plant [i.e. blue-collar workers] have been to high school and quite a few have even been to college. All either plan or wish to send their sons and daughters to college—their sons so they won't have to work in the factory on what they call a dull and automated job; their daughters . . . so they won't have to marry some bum but can make their own living and be free to decide whether they want to marry or not marry. . . ." (*The American Revolution*, p. 14.) In other words, blue-collar workers, being a diminishing minority of the whole working class, do not think of their families as permanently stuck in the stratum which they occupy. As long as this is so, their attitudes and ideology are not likely to be radically dif-

* As a matter of fact Marx's treatment of the relations among industry, technology, and science was far ahead of his time and has only become fully realistic and applicable a hundred years later.

ferent from those of the non-revolutionary majority of the working class which surrounds them.

If we accept these general propositions about the direct and indirect effects of modern technology on the composition and character of the working class, must we conclude that Marx's theory of the proletariat has been refuted? I do not think so. His theory in fact dealt with the early impact of machinery on the proletariat, not with the longer-run consequences of the machine technology for the proletariat. One might perhaps complain that Marx did not attempt to develop a more comprehensive theory; and one could argue, I think persuasively, that he certainly could have done so. Indeed from many remarks scattered throughout his writings, it would probably be possible for a follower of Marx to construct a more or less systematic theory of what the future held in store for the proletariat if capitalism should survive the revolutionary threat inherent in the early period of modern industry. But this is not the occasion for such an effort, and the fact that Marx himself did not make it provides no justification for denying the validity of the theory he did put forward within the limits of its applicability.

In this connection I would go further and argue that the Russian Revolution of 1917 provides extremely strong empirical evidence for the validity of Marx's theory. This revolution occurred in a capitalist country where modern industry was in the process of establishing itself and where it had already created a large and highly revolutionary urban proletariat. Under these circumstances, when the revolutionary situation matured (as it had not done in the Western European countries at a comparable stage of development), the proletariat played precisely the role attributed to it in Marx's theory. In the social sciences, a theory rarely receives a more striking confirmation.

Here, however, a much more serious question arises: Does the fact that capitalism in Western Europe and North America survived the initial period of modern industry and that its new technology then went on progressively to reduce the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, mean that as of the second half of the 20th century we have to abandon the whole idea of a revolutionary agent destined to overthrow the capitalist order?

Again, I do not think so.

The belief that the *industrial* proletariat is the only possible revolutionary agent under capitalism stems from focusing attention too exclusively on the advanced capitalist countries where modern industry got its start and where the new technology has had a chance to develop under favorable conditions. But capitalism as a social order has never consisted only of industrialized countries. In fact, as Marx explicitly recognized, the industrialization of some countries had as its counterpart from the outset the non-industrialization of others, with the two sets of countries being integrally tied together in a single system.

So soon . . . as the general conditions requisite for production by the modern industrial system have been established, this mode of production acquires an elasticity, a capacity for sudden extension by leaps and bounds that finds no hindrance except in the supply of raw material and in the disposal of the produce. On the one hand, the immediate effect of machinery is to increase the supply of raw material in the same way, for example, as the cotton gin augmented the production of cotton. On the other hand, the cheapness of the articles produced by machinery, and the improved means of transport and communications furnish the weapons for conquering foreign markets. By ruining handicraft production in other countries, machinery forcibly converts them into fields for the supply of its raw material. In this way East India was compelled to produce cotton, wool, hemp, jute, and indigo for Great Britain. . . . A new and international division of labor, a division suited to the requirements of the chief centers of modern industry springs up, and converts one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part which remains a chiefly industrial field. (*Capital*, Vol. I, pp. 492-493.)

Once it is recognized that capitalism is not and never has been confined to one or more industrializing countries, but is rather a global system embracing both the (relatively few) industrializing countries and their (relatively numerous) satellites and dependencies, it becomes quite clear that the future of the system cannot be adequately analyzed in terms of the forces at work in any part of the system but must take full account of the *modus operandi* of the system as a whole.

Lenin was the first Marxist to see this and to begin work on the theoretical extensions and reformulations which it made

necessary. His major contribution was his little book *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* which, having been published in 1917, is exactly half as old as the first volume of *Capital*. There he argued that "Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of 'advanced' countries. And this 'booty' is shared between two or three powerful world pirates armed to the teeth. . . ." He also argued that the capitalists of the imperialist countries could and do use a part of their "booty" to bribe and win over to their side an aristocracy of labor. As far as the logic of the argument is concerned, it could be extended to a majority or even all the workers in the industrialized countries. In any case it is clear that taking account of the global character of the capitalist system provides strong additional reasons for believing that the tendency in this stage of capitalist development will be to generate a less rather than a more revolutionary proletariat.

But once again the coin has two sides. If imperialist exploitation brings wealth to the industrialized countries and enables them to raise further the standard of living of their working classes, it brings poverty and misery to the great mass of the working people—agricultural as well as industrial—in the dependencies. These masses now become an agent of revolutionary change in precisely the sense that Marx believed the industrial proletariat of the mid-19th century to be. Let me quote again what he wrote in the *Holy Family*: "Because the abstraction of all humanity, even the appearance of humanity, is practically complete in the fully developed proletariat, because the living conditions of the proletariat represent the focal point of all inhuman conditions in contemporary society, because the human being is lost in the proletariat, but has won a theoretical consciousness of loss and is compelled by unavoidable and absolutely compulsory need . . . to revolt against this inhumanity—all these are the reasons why the proletariat can and must emancipate itself."

These words certainly do not apply to the working classes of the United States and Western Europe today. But do they

not apply all the more obviously and forcefully to the masses in the much more numerous and populous underdeveloped dependencies of the global capitalist system? And does not the pattern of successful socialist revolutions since the Second World War—highlighted by Vietnam, China, and Cuba—demonstrate beyond any doubt that these masses do indeed constitute a revolutionary agent capable of challenging and defeating capitalism?

Allow me in conclusion to present a very brief summary of my thesis: In Marx's theory of capitalism, the proletariat is not always and necessarily revolutionary. It was not revolutionary in the period of manufacture, becoming so only as a consequence of the introduction of machinery in the industrial revolution. The long-run effects of machinery, however, are different from the immediate effects. If the revolutionary opportunities of the early period of modern industry are missed, the proletariat of an industrializing country tends to become less and less revolutionary. This does not mean, however, that Marx's contention that capitalism produces its own gravediggers is wrong. If we consider capitalism as a global system, which is the only correct procedure, we see that it is divided into a handful of exploiting countries and a much more numerous and populous group of exploited countries. The masses in these exploited dependencies constitute a force in the global capitalist system which is revolutionary in the same sense and for the same reasons that Marx considered the proletariat of the early period of modern industry to be revolutionary. And finally, world history since the Second World War proves that this revolutionary force is really capable of waging successful revolutionary struggles against capitalist domination.



Published by
New England Free Press
60 Union Square
Somerville, Mass. 02143

Write for free catalogue of
radical literature.

