

THE MARXIST VIEW OF RUSSIAN SOCIETY AND REVOLUTION

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I

“THE victory of communism is inevitable.” This claim has been made since the consolidation of the Soviet Union, and it has been restated with relish by the Kremlin’s supreme spokesman during his recent visits abroad. It rests on the argument that Russian society, in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, has advanced from feudalism to capitalism and socialism, blazing a trail along which all other countries are bound to go. Thus the superiority of the Communist regime is asserted not merely on the basis of operational successes, but with reference to historical considerations which are ascribed to the “classics” of communism, and ultimately to Marx and Engels.

How legitimate is this claim? How did the fathers of “scientific socialism”—and the Russian Marxists, including the pre-1917 Lenin—view the developmental position of Russia? A critical study of the facts reveals Marxist concepts of Russian society and revolution that are far more complex than, and profoundly different from, the socio-historical views offered by the Soviet ideologists.

Marx and Engels drew for their ideas upon many philosophical and socio-economic concepts whose political intent was by no means uniform. Some are actually or potentially totalitarian; some are politically indifferent; and some are actually or potentially anti-totalitarian. This last group of ideas played a decisive role in creating the “manure of contradictions” (*Dünger der Widersprüche*)¹ that characterizes original Marxism.

Immensely significant in this respect is the contradiction between the goal of a total managerial socialist order envisaged by Marx and Engels and their insight into the atomizing and self-perpetuating quality of uncontrolled despotic power. They gained this insight as a by-product of a multilinear concept of development which they arrived at under the influence of the classical economists² in the early 1850’s. This multi-

¹ Marx used this formula to characterize what he considered the stimulating confusion in the ideas of Ricardo (Karl Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, 3 vols., Stuttgart, 1921, III, p. 94).

² See Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, New Haven, Conn., 1957, pp. 372ff. (hereafter cited as Wittfogel 1957).

linear concept led them to doubt a necessary progress from ancient ("slaveholding") to medieval ("feudal") society,³ the first step in the allegedly Marxist unilinear scheme. It led them to consider "Asiatic" or "Oriental" society as a self-perpetuating order headed by a peculiar type of absolutism, Oriental despotism. And it led them to class Tsarist Russia as a semi-Asiatic country dominated by an Orientally despotic state.

Before taking this position, Marx and Engels had fitted Russia into a concept of universal development built primarily upon Fourier's sequence of social epochs: savagery, patriarchalism, barbarism, and civilization.⁴ In 1848 Engels described Russia as a "patriarchal-feudal barbarism,"⁵ and Germany as a "civilized" nation at an early stage of bourgeois prominence.⁶ Both countries were dominated by a "patriarchal-feudal absolutism."⁷ Engels obviously considered such a regime compatible with a predominantly agrarian as well as with a predominantly "bourgeois" society, the former eventually evolving into the latter. At the close of 1848 Marx viewed the "West" as representing "civilization" and the "East" (mainly Russia) as representing "barbarism."⁸ In February 1849 Engels invoked the concept of "different stages of culture" as the criterion for judging the relation between Russia and the Western Slavs.⁹ In the same context he declared that the historical position of a nation was determined by "the stage of its societal development" (*gesellschaftliche Entwicklungsstufe*).¹⁰ This unilinear approach explains why, despite Russia's suppression of the Hungarian revolution (in 1849), Engels in 1851 considered Russia more progressive than Poland: "There is not a single moment when Poland, even compared with Russia, successfully represents progress."¹¹

³ Engels saw the classes of medieval Europe emerge not from the "swamp" of the decaying slaveholding society of antiquity, but from a barbarian tribal "gens" society, which, avoiding any elaborate system of slavery, advanced directly toward medieval society with its relatively mild form of servitude (Friedrich Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*, Stuttgart, 1921, pp. 160-62). See also Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin, 1953, pp. 382f. (hereafter cited as Marx 1953); cf. Wittfogel 1957, p. 416, note d.

⁴ In 1846 Engels praised this sequence as far superior to Hegel's four *Weltreiche*, "to say nothing of the post-Hegelian constructs" (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Werke-Schriften-Briefe, Marx-Engels-[Lenin] Institute, Berlin-Moscow, 1927, I, 4, p. 450 [hereafter cited as MEGA]; cf. also p. 413). For instances of Marx's and Engels' use of Fourier's categories, see Wittfogel 1957, p. 385, note d.

⁵ MEGA, I, 7, p. 302. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342. ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 302f.

⁸ *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lasalle*, ed. by Franz Mehring, 4 vols., Stuttgart, 1902, II, p. 231.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 248; cf. p. 251.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

¹¹ MEGA, III, I, p. 206. For Engels, Russia's civilizing quality was due largely to its "more developed bourgeois elements" (*ibid.*, p. 207).

Thus, during their Continental period and for some years thereafter,¹² Marx and Engels appraised Russia's historical position within the framework of a unilinear concept of development. But in 1853 their position underwent a radical change. Marx, who since the summer of 1851 had intensely reread the classical economists,¹³ figured prominently in this development. But Engels, who was devoting most of his spare time to the study of military matters,¹⁴ was in close communication with his friend through letters and visits.¹⁵ He shared significantly in this re-orientation, which determined Marx's and Engels' view of Asiatic society and Russia for the rest of their lives.

II

It was probably Engels who, in an article published in the *New York Daily Tribune* on April 19, 1853, first called Russia "semi-Asiatic." But although he was thinking of Russia's "condition, manners, traditions and institutions,"¹⁶ he did not specify their Asiatic peculiarities. In an article published two days later, he described Russia's regime, "wherever it is not mixed up with feudal institutions," as representing "a military occupation, in which the civil and judicial hierarchy are organized in a military manner, and where the people have to pay for the whole."¹⁷

The new Asiatic concept that Engels was groping for emerged in a discourse that occurred during the summer of 1853. It crystallized in three letters (two by Marx and one by Engels) and in three articles (all by Marx).

On June 2, 1853, Marx, commenting on remarks of Engels on Oriental cities and religion,¹⁸ called the absence of landed property "the real

¹² Cf. Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels, *Revolution und Konterrevolution in Deutschland*, Berlin, 1953, p. 81. This series of articles, which appeared in the *New York Daily Tribune* from September 1851 to December 1852 under the name of Marx, was actually written by Engels (MEGA, III, I, pp. 241f., 244, 259f., and *passim*). The above-cited juxtaposition of the "civilized West" and the "barbarian East" was dated February 1852.

¹³ See Wittfogel 1957, p. 373, note b.

¹⁴ MEGA, III, I, pp. 169, 177, 180, 184.

¹⁵ Engels, who was then living in Manchester, and Marx, who was living in London, met frequently and sometimes were together for weeks at a time: ca. November 5-15, 1851; December 20, 1851, to January 4, 1852; April 11-13, 1852; ca. May 26 to June 26, 1852; ca. December 23, 1852, to January 10, 1853; and ca. April 30 to May 16, 1853 (*Karl Marx Chronik seines Lebens in Einzeldaten*, Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, Moscow, 1934, pp. 114-39 [hereafter cited as KMCL]).

¹⁶ The article was sent to the *New York Daily Tribune* by Marx, but again was written by Engels (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Gesammelte Schriften 1852 bis 1862*, ed. by N. Rjasanoff, 2 vols., Stuttgart, 1920, I, p. 475 [hereafter cited as Marx and Engels 1920]).

¹⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, April 21, 1853.

¹⁸ Engels' letter of May (ca. 18th) 1853 (MEGA, III, I, pp. 471f.).

key even to the Oriental heaven."¹⁹ In his answer on June 6, Engels stated approvingly that "the Orientals did not arrive at landed property, *not even in its feudal form.*"²⁰ In his opinion this was due to the "desert"-like conditions prevailing "from the Sahara across Arabia, Persia, India, and Tartary and the most elevated Asiatic highland. Here artificial irrigation is the first condition of agriculture, and this is a matter either for the communes, the provinces, or the central government." Hence the Oriental governments always had a department of public works.²¹

In an article dated London, June 10, 1853, Marx included Engels' ideas on the relation of aridity to irrigation and public works in the Orient. But he went further. He mentioned two "circumstances" as characteristic of Oriental society: "the Hindoo, on the one hand, leaving, like all Oriental peoples, to the central government the care of the great public works, the prime condition of his agriculture and commerce," and the population "dispersed, on the other hand, over the surface of the country, and agglomerated in small centers by the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits." The resulting village communities had "*always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism.*"²²

In his letter of June 14 to Engels, Marx restated the two "circumstances": "The public works the business of the central government" and "besides them the whole realm, not counting a few large cities, dissolved into *villages* which have a completely separate organization."²³ Commenting on the role of these villages, he added: "I think one cannot imagine a more *solid foundation for the stagnation of Asiatic despotism.*"²⁴ In these formulations Marx was shifting his emphasis from the property aspect (he had noted that private landownership probably existed in certain regions of Asia²⁵) to the isolation of the villages as the decisive reason for the "stagnation of Asiatic despotism."

In an article dated July 19, 1853, and devoted to international aspects of the "Eastern question," Marx contrasted certain "semi-Eastern" developments that involved Russia and certain "completely Eastern" de-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 480; italics added.

²¹ *Ibid.* Engels' argument suggests his familiarity with the pertinent ideas of at least one classical economist, Richard Jones, whom Marx had studied as early as June 1851 (KMCL, p. 107). In a pioneer work on Asiatic society written in 1831, Jones pointed to the significance of "that great tract of sandy desert" that stretches across the "old world." His list of these desert areas begins with the Sahara, Egypt, Syria, Persia, India, and ends with "Tartary" and northernmost China. It concludes with the sentence: "This soil can be made fruitful only by irrigation" (Richard Jones, *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth, and on the Sources of Taxation*, London, 1831, pp. 119ff.).

²² *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853; italics added.

²³ MEGA, III, 1, p. 486; italics in original.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 487; italics added.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

developments that involved China.²⁶ In view of the two circumstances which Marx on June 10 and 14 had called characteristic of "all Oriental peoples," the conclusion seems warranted that he considered Russia "semi-Eastern" because, unlike China, where both circumstances were present, Russia knew only the second. This conclusion is confirmed by Marx's and Engels' continuing insistence that the dispersed village communities were the solid foundation of Oriental despotism. Obviously, in their opinion, the second circumstance did not *create* the specific order called "Asiatic society"—this was the function of the hydraulic factor—but it was sufficient to *perpetuate* its dominant institution, Oriental despotism.

In a third article, dated July 22, 1853,²⁷ Marx again discussed India as a representative of the "old Asiatic society." Speaking of "village isolation," he mentioned "the absence of roads," which left the individual rural community "almost without intercourse with other villages." Such a situation meant "the dissolution of society into stereotype and disconnected atoms." In 1854 Marx further elaborated upon the organizational atomization of the Asiatic peoples by stating that the Asiatic forms of domination differed from European absolutism in that they prevented "the growth of common interests" among their subjects. "Oriental despotism" tolerated municipal self-government only insofar as it was convenient and not opposed to the regime's direct interests.²⁸

From 1853 on, Marx and Engels interpreted the Tsarist regime as an Oriental despotism. In 1855 they began to consider its possible origin. The hydraulic factor being absent in Russia—they do not even mention it—introduction from outside was suggested as the likely explanation. In 1855 Engels referred to Moscow's "Russian-Mongol barbarism."²⁹ In February 1856 Marx contemplated writing on the foreign policy of eighteenth-century Russia;³⁰ and this he did in a series of articles entitled "Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the 18th Century," the first appearing in *The Free Press*, London, in August 1856,³¹ and the last four on February 4, 18, 25, and April 1, 1857. These final installments, which drew on Engels' views of Peter the Great,³² presented Marx's "preliminary remarks on the general history of Russian politics." In 1899 the entire series was republished in book form as *The Secret*

²⁶ *New York Daily Tribune*, August 5, 1853.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1853.

²⁸ Marx's article was published in the *New York Daily Tribune*, September 9, 1854 (Marx and Engels 1920, II, p. 417). This politically irrelevant form of self-government, which is typical of Oriental society, I have called a "Beggars' Democracy" (Wittfogel 1957, pp. 125f.).

²⁹ Marx and Engels 1920, II, p. 231.

³⁰ MEGA, III, 2, p. 109.

³¹ Cf. KMCL, p. 159.

³² MEGA, III, 2, p. 183.

Diplomatic History of the Eighteenth Century. In consistence with the Soviet endeavor to hide Marx's "Asiatic" interpretation of Tsarist Russia, this series, which constitutes his only sketch of Russian history, has not been included in the official Soviet edition of Marx's and Engels' works.³³

Marx's analysis ran as follows: The Mongol conquest destroyed Russia's proto-feudal society by compelling the Muscovite Tsars to "tatarize" Muscovy.³⁴ The Tatar Khans and their Russian agents combined the ruthless expansion of despotic power with an internal system of "enslavement."³⁵ According to this interpretation, the Mongols introduced the two-pronged policy;³⁶ the early Tsars implemented it in Muscovy;³⁷ Peter the Great "generalized" it.³⁸ And in Marx's time Russia's political attitude was in substance still what it had been at the end of the Mongol period: "A simple substitution of names and dates will prove to evidence [*sic*] that between the policy of Ivan III and that of modern Russia, there exists not similarity, but sameness."³⁹

In these "preliminary remarks" Marx treated certain aspects of a "marginal" Oriental society⁴⁰ that have great relevance for the study of Russian history and total power. Recent investigations confirm that among the three major Oriental influences—Byzantium, the Mongols, and Ottoman Turkey—it was the second that imposed on Russia a non-Western, absolutistic service state.⁴¹ Early Chinese, Mongol, and Russian sources permit us to identify the methods of Chinese statecraft with which the Mongols were familiar when they conquered and reorganized Russia.⁴²

For some years after 1857 Marx concentrated on the analysis of Western industrial society, but in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867) he again called the self-sufficient village communities "the key to the secret

³³ This is the case in the first edition (1923-1948) and in the second (1955-1958). Cf. also Maximilien Rubel, *Bibliographie des Oeuvres de Karl Marx*, Paris, 1956, p. 131.

³⁴ *The Free Press*, April 1, 1857.

³⁵ Marx used this term as connoting not the private slavery of antiquity, but a system of state-imposed political slavery. In 1857-1858 in the first draft of *Das Kapital*, he referred to the traditional Eastern pattern of subordination as "the general slavery of the Orient" (Marx 1953, p. 395; cf. Wittfogel 1957, p. 377).

³⁶ *The Free Press*, February 4, 1857.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, February 4 and 18, 1857.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, February 25 and April 1, 1857.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, February 25, 1857.

⁴⁰ For this concept and its application to Russia, see Wittfogel 1957, pp. 173ff., 219ff.

⁴¹ The idea of a service state was outlined by Kliuchevsky and conceptualized by Sumner (see Wittfogel 1957, pp. 220ff.).

⁴² Because of the growing interest in Russia's Orientalization, I have elaborated this point in the third printing of *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, Conn., 1959), p. 220, note j-bis.

of the unchangeability (*Unveränderlichkeit*) of Asiatic societies." "The structure," he continued, "of the economic key elements (*der ökonomischen Grundelemente*) remains untouched by the storms in the political sky."⁴³ And in the 1870's the two friends, who had closely followed the Russian Emancipation, commented with growing frequency on Russia's societal order. In 1875 in an article, "Soziales aus Russland," which criticized the Russian revolutionist Tkachev, Engels repeated the key Marxian thesis that "the complete isolation of the individual village communities from each other [was] the natural foundation of *Oriental despotism*." He continued: "From India to Russia this societal form, where it prevailed, has always produced it, and has always supplemented it."⁴⁴ In the *Anti-Dühring*, which Engels wrote from 1876 to 1878 and which he read in full to Marx,⁴⁵ he again asserted that the old (tribal and rural) communities had been "over millennia the foundation of the crudest type of state, Oriental despotism, from India to Russia."⁴⁶

Thus Russia was part of the Eastern and not the Western world. In 1877 in a letter to the editors of the magazine *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, Marx admonished his Russian readers to remember that the socio-historical development described in *Das Kapital* pertained only to Western Europe. He warned them against attempting "to transform my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophic theory of the *marche générale* imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circumstances in which it finds itself."⁴⁷

In 1881 Marx repeated this warning in a letter to Vera Zasulich. He again described the isolated village communities as "always" constituting the basis for a "centralized despotism."⁴⁸ And he remarked that in pre-Mongol Russia such communities were already present, apparently "imposed by the vast extension of the land," but, he added, they were "largely consolidated by the political fate Russia had to endure after the Mongol invasion."⁴⁹

⁴³ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, 3 vols., Hamburg, 1919, I, p. 323 (hereafter cited as Marx 1919).

⁴⁴ Friedrich Engels, "Soziales aus Russland (Volksstaat, 1875)," in *Internationales aus den Volksstaat (1871-75)*, Berlin, 1894, p. 56 (hereafter cited as Engels 1894); italics in original.

⁴⁵ See Friedrich Engels, *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft. Dialektik der Natur, 1873-1882*, Moscow, 1935, p. 9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx-Friedrich Engels, *Ausgewählte Briefe*, Berlin, 1953, p. 367 (hereafter cited as Marx-Engels 1953).

⁴⁸ *Marx-Engels Archiv*, Zeitschrift des Marx-Engels-Instituts, ed. by D. Rjazanov, I, Frankfurt, 1927, pp. 324, 333.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

After Marx's death Engels continued to equate Russian and Indian Oriental despotism. He did so on February 16, 1884, in a letter to Kautsky in which he first expressed his desire to popularize Morgan's *Ancient Society*.⁵⁰ And he did so again in a passage he inserted in the third volume of *Das Kapital*, published in 1894.⁵¹ In this same year he republished his 1875 article on Russia with a new postscript which cited Marx's letter of 1877 and repeated his warning against identifying the social history of Russia with that of Western Europe.⁵²

III

The ideas of Marx and Engels on Russian society entered Russia through various channels. Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), which in the preface distinguished the "Asiatic" from the "ancient," "feudal," and "bourgeois" modes of production, was known from 1860.⁵³ *Das Kapital*, Volume I, which called the isolated village community "the key to the secret of the changelessness of Asiatic societies," appeared in a Russian translation in 1872.⁵⁴ Plekhanov's translation of the *Communist Manifesto*, with a special preface by Marx and Engels which contained a crucially important statement on Russia's socio-historical perspective, was published in 1882. Engels' 1875 article, "Soziales aus Russland," with the 1894 postscript, was translated into Russian by Vera Zasulich and published with a preface by Plekhanov in 1894, one year before the young Lenin visited these two famous revolutionaries in Switzerland. Marx's letter of 1877 circulated in Russian, first in handwritten copies and then in printed form.⁵⁵ From it Plekhanov cited Marx's warning against universalizing the Western European experience in his book, *The Development of the Monist View of History*,⁵⁶ which first appeared in 1895 and which, Lenin approvingly noted, "helped to educate a whole generation of Russian Marxists."⁵⁷ Engels' *Anti-Dühring* was soon known to the Rus-

⁵⁰ Marx-Engels 1953, p. 437. Manifestly Engels did not abandon his multilinear view of development or the concept of Asiatic society when he wrote *The Origin of the Family* in 1884. For further evidence on this point, see Wittfogel 1957, pp. 383ff., 398.

⁵¹ Marx 1919, III, 2, p. 259.

⁵² Engels 1894, pp. 68f.

⁵³ W. N. Kotow, *Eindringen und Verbreitung der Ideen von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels in Russland*, Berlin, 1956, p. 16.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁵ Engels 1894, p. 68. In 1893 Engels expected every Russian visitor to question him on this letter ("A. Voden, Talks with Engels," *Reminiscences of Marx and Engels*, Moscow, n.d., p. 329).

⁵⁶ G. Plekhanov, *The Development of the Monist View of History*, Moscow, 1956, pp. 298ff. (hereafter cited as Plekhanov 1956).

⁵⁷ Vladimir Ilych Lenin, *Sochinenia*, 4th ed., 35 vols., Moscow, 1941-1950, x, p. 58 (hereafter cited as Lenin, S).

sian Marxists;⁵⁸ Lenin quoted it from 1894 on. From the late 1890's he also quoted *Das Kapital*, Volume III, which was translated into Russian in 1896 and which, in addition to numerous observations on the "Asiatic" state, includes Engels' comments on the fiscal oppression of the Russian and Indian village communities by the despotic state. In 1913 Lenin studied Marx's and Engels' correspondence. In his abstracts from Marx's 1853 letters on India, he reproduced Marx's thesis on the lack of private landed property as the key to the "Oriental order," and he paraphrased the two "circumstances" as follows: "The Asiatic villages closed and self-sufficient (natural economy)—the *basis* of the Asiatic order + public works of the central government."⁵⁹

The dean of Russian Marxism, Plekhanov, readily accepted the Marxian concept of an Asiatic society and its application to Russia.⁶⁰ And although Marx's letter of 1877 somewhat embarrassed him and his comrades, because the *narodniki* used it to bolster their thesis that in Russia, unlike the West, a primitive agrarian communism might directly evolve into modern socialism,⁶¹ he steadfastly adhered to the idea that the economic order of Muscovy resembled that of "all great Oriental despotisms"⁶² and that Petrinean Russia "completed and systematized what Muscovy began."⁶³ The Russian counterpart of the feudal survivals that shaped the restoration after the French Revolution he took to be "our old attachment (*krepост*) of land and peasants to the state."⁶⁴ Under such conditions, Plekhanov said, citing Kliuchevsky, the landowners were essentially a group of "serving" men,⁶⁵ and as long as these conditions were unshaken⁶⁶ social upheavals only led to the restoration of the old political and economic order.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ In 1889 a résumé and excerpts were published by N. Ziber in the magazine *Slovo*. A full translation by V. J. Yakovenko appeared in 1904.

⁵⁹ M. Trush, "Lenin's Abstract of Marx's and Engels' Correspondence," *Kommunist* (Moscow), No. 2 (1960), p. 50; italics in original. Professor Leonard Schapiro of London kindly drew my attention to this passage, which shows that Lenin, if he was not familiar with it earlier, at least by 1913 knew Marx's most precise formulation concerning the managerial functions of the Asiatic state (see Wittfogel 1957, p. 389).

⁶⁰ An illuminating study of his discussion of Russia's Oriental despotism has been made by Samuel H. Baron in "Plekhanov's Russia: The Impact of the West upon an 'Oriental' Society," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, xix, No. 3 (June 1958), pp. 388-404.

⁶¹ See Plekhanov's 1894 Preface to Engels' "Soziales aus Russland," in G. Plekhanov, *Sochinenia*, ix, Moscow, 1923, pp. 30f.; *idem*, 1956, pp. 361ff.

⁶² G. V. Plekhanov, "On the Agrarian Question in Russia," *Dnevnik Sotsial-Demokrata* (Diary of a Social Democrat), No. 5 (March 1906), p. 12 (hereafter cited as Plekhanov 1906).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Plekhanov in *Protokoly Obydinitelnago Syezda Rossyskoi Sotsialdemokraticheskoi Rabochei Partii* (Protocols of the Unification Congress of the R.S.D.R.P., held in Stockholm in 1906), Moscow, 1907, p. 116 (hereafter cited as Protocols).

⁶⁵ Plekhanov 1906, p. 14.

⁶⁶ According to Plekhanov (*ibid.*, p. 12), these conditions were increasingly undermined in nineteenth-century Russia.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

In the same context as that in which Plekhanov propounded these ideas, the Menshevik leader, Martinov, declared that Russia's peculiar economic order, including the nationalization of the land, was "the foundation of our Asiatic despotic order of society."⁶⁸

Parvus' views of Russia's semi-Asiatic conditions became conspicuous on the eve of the 1905 Russian revolution.⁶⁹ In 1906 Trotsky began to speak of Russia's "semi-Asiatic societal conditions," of a state that seemed closer to Asiatic despotism than to Western absolutism, and of the cities of old Russia that resembled "the cities of Asiatic despotism."⁷⁰

Lenin cited Marx's four antagonistic modes of production—the first among them being the Asiatic—when he entered upon his career as a Marxist in 1894,⁷¹ and he again cited them when he wrote his biography of Marx in 1914.⁷² During these twenty-one years Lenin expressed his awareness of Russia's "Asiatic system" (the *Aziatchina*) with varying consistency and usually in connection with his criticism of Tsarist "absolutism." After a somewhat vague beginning, he sharply stressed the Oriental despotism character of Tsarism. He pointed to the "Asiatic" quality of Russia's institutions.⁷³ He denounced Russia's rural order as representing a state of "bondage" (*krepostnichestvo*); and he warned against calling this order "feudal."⁷⁴ It was at this time that Lenin applied to Russia such designations as "political slavery,"⁷⁵ the "politically enslaved state,"⁷⁶ and the "monster" government.⁷⁷ These were designations that Marx had used in his "Diplomatic History."

After the 1906 discussion of the dangers of an "Asiatic restoration," Lenin employed the "Asiatic" concept more sparingly, but he did not discard it.⁷⁸ In February 1914, debating the problem of national self-determination with Rosa Luxemburg, he defined the "Asiatic despotism" of contemporary Tsarism as a "totality of traits" with specific

⁶⁸ Protocols, p. 90.

⁶⁹ Parvus called "the Russian state system . . . an Asiatic kind of absolutism supported by an army of the European type" (Parvus, "War and Revolution, II: The Fall of Autocracy," *Iskra*, No. 61, March 5, 1904).

⁷⁰ L. Trotsky, *Die Russische Revolution 1905*, Berlin, 1923, pp. 18 and 38 (hereafter cited as Trotsky 1923).

⁷¹ V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, 12 vols., New York, 1943, xi, p. 418 (hereafter cited as Lenin, SW).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷³ W. I. Lenin, *Sämtliche Werke*, Wien-Berlin (later Moscow-Leningrad) 25 vols., iv, 1, p. 74, cf. pp. 14, 65, 197, 212; iv, 2, pp. 16, 67, 155f. (hereafter cited as Lenin, SWG).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, iv, 1, p. 212. In this and many other instances, the Comintern translators mislead the reader by frequently rendering *krepostnichestvo* as "feudalism," instead of "bondage" or "serfdom" (cf. Wittfogel 1957, pp. 378f. and note i).

⁷⁵ Lenin, SWG, i, 1, p. 14; iv, 2, pp. 155f.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, iv, 2, p. 149, note.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, v, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Wittfogel 1957, pp. 394f.

"economic, political, and sociological characteristics." And he added: "As everybody knows, such a type of state shows great persistence where the economy of the country in question is entirely patriarchal and where there is almost no commodity economy and class differentiation."⁷⁹

IV

Obviously then, and contrary to the official Soviet claim, Marx, Engels, and the prewar Lenin did not view Russia as having the same socio-historical background as the West. Nor did they equate the Russian "bourgeois" revolution with the bourgeois revolutions of Western Europe. On the eve of a Western bourgeois revolution, as Marx saw it, the dominant contradiction was the conflict between the ruling, but decaying, feudal-absolutistic order and the rising bourgeoisie. In contrast, the dominant contradiction in Tsarist Russia was the conflict between the ruling, but decaying, Orientaly despotic order and its enemies: oppositional nobles, the peasants, and the incipient bourgeoisie.

In this sense, Engels in 1875 described Russia as "held together by an Oriental despotism whose arbitrariness we in the West simply cannot imagine," and which "from day to day comes into more glaring contradiction with the views of the new enlightened classes."⁸⁰ Ten years later he spoke of the "contradictions" in Russian society as "forcibly held together by an unexampled despotism."⁸¹

When Engels in 1875 pointed to these contradictions, he believed that the anti-despotic forces were gaining strength and that Russia was moving toward a social revolution. How could this happen in an institutional order that, according to Engels and Marx, was stationary, "the structure of the economic key elements" remaining untouched by any political revolution? As a matter of fact, neither Marx nor Engels conceptualized his thoughts on this extremely important problem; but their comments on India and Russia (and Turkey) imply that such a "diversive revolution"⁸² might result from the impact of outside forces. With regard to India, Marx saw the Asiatic order as loosened by a non-Asiatic type of foreign rule—British colonialism. "English interference . . . produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only *social* revolution ever heard of in Asia."⁸³

In Marx's and Engels' opinion, Russia's advance to a social (in con-

⁷⁹ Lenin, SWG, xvii, p. 548.

⁸⁰ Engels 1894, p. 49.

⁸¹ Marx-Engels 1953, p. 460.

⁸² For this concept, see Wittfogel 1957, p. 419.

⁸³ *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853; italics in original.

trast to a purely political) revolution would be initiated by two factors: a catastrophic military defeat and the proximity of the West. When, after the Crimean War, both factors were combined, the frightened Tsarist bureaucracy introduced far-reaching technical changes (an increase in railroad building and an intensification of industrialization) and equally far-reaching social reforms (pre-eminently, the emancipation of the serfs).⁸⁴

In 1859 and 1860 Marx listed as revolutionary forces the peasants and the oppositional nobles who wanted a constitution.⁸⁵ He expected—and his analysis proved correct—that the Emancipation would strengthen both the autocratic state and peasant hostility to it.⁸⁶ In 1875 Engels found the revolutionary spirit growing among the peasants and the young bourgeoisie, and from this time on both he and Marx were convinced that the Russian revolution was in the making.⁸⁷ He was not certain in 1875 whether the Russian anti-despotic or the Western socialist revolution would break out first.⁸⁸ But in 1877 Marx felt that the Russian revolution was imminent;⁸⁹ and from then on the two friends argued that the trail-blazing Eastern revolution might spark the Western proletarian revolution, and that the latter might lead to the preservation—and communist development—of the Russian village community. In 1882, in their preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels put it this way: “If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that each complements the other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist revolution.”⁹⁰

In 1894, when the village community was disintegrating rapidly, Engels again voiced the hope that “the overthrow of Tsarist despotism” would stimulate “the victory of the modern industrial proletariat” in the West.⁹¹ He expected the victorious socialist West to show the Russians *wie man's macht* (how to do it)—that is, how to use the remnants

⁸⁴ Engels 1894, p. 67; cf. also Engels' “The Foreign Policy of Russian Czarism” (1890), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe*, Glencoe, Ill., 1952, p. 51.

⁸⁵ MEGA, III, 2, pp. 448 and 453.

⁸⁶ Karl Marx, *Herr Vogt*, Berlin, 1953, p. 144.

⁸⁷ Engels 1894 [1875], pp. 58ff.; Marx [1876], MEGA, III, 4, p. 435.

⁸⁸ Engels 1894, pp. 57f., 59f.

⁸⁹ Marx's letter to Sorge, September 27, 1877 (Marx-Engels 1953, p. 363); Marx's letter to Engels, September 24, 1878 (MEGA, III, 4, p. 484).

⁹⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1958, I, p. 18 (hereafter cited as Marx and Engels 1958). The idea that the Western socialist revolution might accomplish such a development in the Russian countryside had already been expressed by Engels in his 1875 article (Engels 1894, pp. 57f.).

⁹¹ Engels 1894, p. 72.

of the old communal property "greatly to abbreviate the development toward a socialist society."⁹²

This then is the original Marxian model (Model I) of the Russian revolution. Because the Tsarist regime was increasingly weak and increasingly oppressive, the Russian anti-despotic revolution would probably precede the Western socialist revolution. Unfolding its strength, it might give the signal to the Western revolutionists, who in turn might show the Russians *wie man's macht*. To repeat: the outbreak of the Russian revolution did not depend on a preceding Western revolution. And although a subsequent ("complementary") Western revolution would be highly desirable, it was not a necessary condition for the success of Russia's anti-despotic bourgeois revolution.

V

The role of Tsarism has been recognized by most historians of the Russian revolution.⁹³ Tsarist absolutism shaped the character of the entire revolutionary movement; in a peculiar way it affected its Bolshevik wing, which emerged under Lenin's leadership in 1903. Thought and action going hand in hand, the advance toward a Bolshevik policy expressed itself in significant "Leninist" modifications of the Marxist doctrine.

These modifications ought to be the concern of any immanent critique of Marxism-Leninism. Hence we turn eagerly to Herbert Marcuse's study of Soviet Marxism, which includes the rise of Leninism and which, as the author tells us, proceeds by means of an immanent critique in that it "employs the conceptual instruments of its object, namely, Marxism."⁹⁴ It hardly needs saying that any analysis of Soviet society and ideology which restricts itself to the method of the immanent critique is inconclusive. Nevertheless, such an approach can provide extremely valuable insights. It is for this reason that *Soviet Marxism* is so disappointing. Although Marcuse recognizes history as the core of the Marxist position,⁹⁵ he fails to use, as his conceptual instruments,

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 72.

⁹³ Bertram D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, New York, 1948, pp. 20f. (hereafter cited as Wolfe 1948); cf. also pp. 161, 366; Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia*, New York, 1952, pp. 12f.; *idem*, *From Lenin to Malenkov*, New York, 1953, pp. 6f.; Leopold H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1955, pp. 4f.; Donald W. Treadgold, *Lenin and His Rivals*, New York, 1955, pp. 5, 15; Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1955, pp. 3, 7, 9; Alan Moorehead, *The Russian Revolution*, New York, 1958, pp. 10f.

⁹⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*, New York, 1958, p. 1 (hereafter cited as Marcuse 1958).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

the socio-historical ideas of original Marxism. Instead, and without enlightening his readers on this point, he employs the altered concepts by which the Soviet ideocrats are hiding Marx's, Engels', and the prewar Lenin's views of Russian society and revolution.

Marcuse's supposedly Marxist formula of "consecutive social systems" suggests a unilinear scheme of development,⁹⁶ and his three examples—capitalism, the feudal system, and the Roman Empire⁹⁷—all happen to be Western types of societies. In keeping with this conceptual framework, he describes pre-1917 Russia as "backward" without qualifying this term.⁹⁸ To him, Russia's backwardness was what decisively differentiated it from the modern industrial West. And he discusses the problems of the Russian bourgeois revolution in terms of Marx's critique of the Gotha Program of the German Social Democrats⁹⁹—that is, in terms of a developmental pattern (a capitalist society with a feudal past)¹⁰⁰ which, according to Marx and Engels, was not Russia's pattern.

Having thus misrepresented the Marxist socio-historical tenets, Marcuse goes on to claim that Lenin made the first step toward Leninism in 1902 (by means of a new concept of the revolutionary party) and the second step in 1905 (by means of a new peasant strategy) because the rise of monopoly capitalism and imperialism had brought about a "decline in the revolutionary potential in the Western world."¹⁰¹ This explanation fits Stalin's thesis that Leninism, as the "Marxism of the eve of imperialism and the proletarian revolution," arose during the "period of undivided domination of the opportunism of the Second International."¹⁰² But it does not fit either Lenin's original concept of the Russian revolution—which was that of Marx and Engels—or his appraisal of the Western proletariat, which until 1914, and despite certain reformist-revisionist tendencies, he admired for its proper political attitude.¹⁰³

By 1900, and continuing earlier trends,¹⁰⁴ the Russian Social Democratic Party had turned from a predominantly economic struggle for

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3f.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35; cf. pp. 29, 44.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20ff.

¹⁰⁰ Marx and Engels 1958, II, pp. 18f. and 25.

¹⁰¹ Marcuse 1958, pp. 7, 27ff.

¹⁰² J. Stalin, *Works*, 13 vols., Moscow, 1952-1955, VI, pp. 73f.

¹⁰³ See Lenin's perspective of the coming Western proletarian revolution of August 1901 (Lenin, SWG, IV, I, pp. 204ff.), his opinion that the Western European comrades were combating the reformists better than were the Russian socialists (*ibid.*, IV, 2, pp. 70f.; cf. also pp. 155, 264), and his respectful remarks about the German Social Democrats in 1906 (*ibid.*, VIII, p. 91, notes 314 and 318f.). In 1917 Lenin stated retrospectively that, although in 1903 imperialism already existed, it did not as yet appear in the arguments of the Party (*ibid.*, XX, I, p. 369).

¹⁰⁴ See Plekhanov's Preface to Engels' "Soziales aus Russland" (Plekhanov, *Sochinenia*, IX, p. 32); cf. also Lenin, SW, I, pp. 371ff. (1897), p. 396 (1899).

day-to-day improvements to an essentially political struggle against the Tsarist regime.¹⁰⁵ From then on, and for definitely internal reasons, Lenin began agitating for the creation of a vanguard party in which an elite of professional militants would stand above the proletariat.¹⁰⁶

Lenin was in line with the Marxian concept of Russian society when he distinguished between the most oppressive Western government and Tsarist absolutism.¹⁰⁷ And he was in line with the Marxian concept of the Russian revolution when he expected it to give the "signal" to the Western workers,¹⁰⁸ who then might show the Russians *wie man's macht*.¹⁰⁹ In these matters Lenin and most of his orthodox Marxist comrades were in agreement. But he parted company with many of them when, to justify his proposals for an authoritarian party organization, he stressed the peculiarity of Tsarist despotism¹¹⁰ and demanded that the party operate under a quasi-military discipline and a bureaucratic centralism.¹¹¹ He thus was recommending the organizational methods of the very despotic regime that he and his comrades were combating.

VI

Lenin's innovations of 1902-1903 did not involve a change in the original Marxist model of the Russian revolution. But such a change did occur in 1905-1906, during and immediately after the first Russian revolution.

Russia's defeat by Japan and the revolution of 1905 weakened the Tsarist regime profoundly, without, however, causing its collapse. Lenin, who early in 1905 had re-emphasized Russia's "virginal" Asiatic despotism,¹¹² at the close of the year found Russia's "purely capitalistic contradictions still to a very large extent covered by the contradiction between 'culture' and the Aziatchina, between Europeanism and the Tatarshchina, capitalism and bondage."¹¹³ And early in 1906 he saw "the autocracy entirely restored."¹¹⁴

But while the revolution failed to attain its goal, it revealed explosive tensions in the villages. And the possibility of uniting the small, but organized, proletarian forces and the potentially revolutionary peasantry led Lenin and Trotsky to present new schemes for revolutionary procedure.

¹⁰⁵ For the details of this development, see Wolfe 1948, pp. 148ff.

¹⁰⁶ Lenin, SWG, IV, 2, pp. 159f., 170, 250ff. ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 2, pp. 155f.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 382; cf. pp. 81, 110f., 466. ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 573.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, IV, 2, pp. 264, 267, 280, 284f.; VI, p. 24.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, VI, pp. 380f., 412f., 416, 418, 423, 427.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, VII, p. 249. ¹¹³ Lenin, S, x, p. 58.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, x, p. 75.

Trotsky's starting point, like Lenin's, was the recognition of Russia's semi-Asiatic background. Trotsky specifically followed Parvus, who, early in 1905, had "shed light on those social peculiarities of backward Russia, which, true enough, were already well known, but from which no one before him had drawn all the necessary inferences."¹¹⁵ In pre-capitalist Russia, Parvus argued, the "cities developed on the Chinese rather than on the European model." They constituted "administrative centers, purely official and bureaucratic in character." Hence the Russian middle class was weak, and the workers could and should take the lead in the revolution, ultimately establishing "a workers' democracy."¹¹⁶ Trotsky, who wholeheartedly accepted Parvus' Asiatic interpretation of the Russian state and city,¹¹⁷ went beyond his friend politically when he proposed that under these conditions the Russian workers, supported by the peasants, could and should advance from the democratic to the socialist revolution. However, he held that when this was done, they could avoid being overwhelmed by the peasants only if their forces were joined "with the forces of the socialist proletariat of Western Europe."¹¹⁸ It was in this context, which involved the interpretation of the Russian state as "semi-Asiatic" and of Russia's precapitalist cities as entirely "Asiatic," that Trotsky introduced his version of the concept of the "permanent revolution."¹¹⁹

Lenin likewise became convinced of the necessity of the Western revolution, but he arrived at his conclusion in a different way. He urged that the revolutionary peasants be made the "allies" of the small Russian working class in a new type of bourgeois-democratic revolution which would lead to the establishment of a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry."¹²⁰ To attract, and control, the peasants, Lenin from 1906 on advocated a revolutionary land distribution based on state ownership—that is, he advocated the nationalization of the land.

Supported by the Mensheviks, Plekhanov strongly objected to this program. Lenin's new policy, he believed, would create an untenable revolutionary position, and the nationalization of the land would again

¹¹⁵ Leon Trotsky, *Stalin*, ed. and tr. by Charles Malamuth, New York and London, 1951, p. 430 (hereafter cited as Trotsky 1941). According to Trotsky, the preface to Trotsky's pamphlet "Until the Ninth of January," in which Parvus expressed these ideas, "entered permanently into the history of the Russian Revolution" (*ibid.*, pp. 429f.). Cf. Lenin's respectful reference to this preface in April 1905 (Lenin, SWG, VII, p. 265).

¹¹⁶ Parvus, "Preface to Trotsky's 'Until the Ninth of January,'" dated München, January 31, 1905 (N. Trotsky, *Do deviatavo yanvarya*, Geneva, 1905), pp. vi f.; cf. Trotsky 1941, pp. 430f.

¹¹⁷ Trotsky 1923, p. 38.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* ¹²⁰ Lenin, SWG, VIII, p. 80.

make the state the master of the rural economy as it had been in the heyday of Russia's "old semi-Asiatic order."¹²¹ Thus, if the Western revolution did not take place—and only a stupid general would base his plans on a coincidence of all favorable conditions¹²²—there would surely be a restoration of Russia's old order. Such a catastrophe, Plekhanov stated at the Stockholm Party Congress, could be avoided only if the land, instead of being nationalized, were entrusted to self-governing "municipal" bodies.¹²³

Lenin tried to minimize the threat of the "Asiatic restoration."¹²⁴ But reluctantly he admitted its existence: "Does the word 'nationalisation' facilitate the restoration of the semi-Asiatic conditions, or is this done by certain economic changes?" And he added: "It is precisely nationalisation that far more radically eliminates the economic foundations of Asiatic despotism [the *Aziatchina*]."¹²⁵

Pressed by Plekhanov, Lenin admitted the danger inherent in his new strategy, but he was willing to take the risk to gain his end—a revolutionary dictatorship controlled by his party. He contended that a restoration could be held off temporarily by the *relative* guarantee of a radical democracy that tolerated no bureaucracy and no standing army.¹²⁶ There existed, however, only one *absolute* guarantee against the restoration: the Western revolution that would follow and aid the aimed-at Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution. "A socialist revolution in the West . . . is the only absolute guarantee against restoration in Russia."¹²⁷

Thus, alongside the Marxian model (Model I) of the Russian revolution, which fundamentally was upheld by Plekhanov and the Mensheviks, there emerged in 1905-1906 a new model (Model II) of the Russian revolution. Its two main variants, one presented by Lenin and one by Trotsky, differed in important details, but both sought the creation of a dictatorial regime, which for its ultimate success depended on a victorious Western socialist revolution. If this "absolute guarantee" failed to materialize, then the restoration was inevitable.

In the October revolution of 1917 the Bolsheviks established a dictatorial regime. They immediately nationalized the land; and soon they also gained control of industry. They quickly nullified Lenin's *relative* guarantees by introducing a bureaucracy, a standing army, and

¹²¹ Protocols, p. 116. ¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹²³ *Ibid.* See Wolfe 1948, pp. 365f.; Wittfogel 1957, pp. 392ff.

¹²⁴ For an analysis of Lenin's erratic argument, see Wittfogel 1957, pp. 391-94.

¹²⁵ Lenin, SW, III, p. 240.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

a police.¹²⁸ And they failed to stimulate Lenin's only *absolute* guarantee: the socialist revolution in the West. According to Lenin's premises of 1906-1907, such a situation could result only in a restoration. And according to the Marxist analysis of Russian history which Lenin had upheld for over twenty years, this restoration could be only an "Asiatic" restoration.

VII

From 1906 to 1914 Lenin was embarrassed by certain implications of the Asiatic concept; hence he employed it hesitatingly. With the rapidly increasing chances for a revolution in Russia and Europe as World War I advanced, he abandoned this concept, which tended to dampen the revolutionary ardor of his followers. In *State and Revolution* (1916-1917) he discussed "the revolution" in terms of Marx's Gotha comments as if Russia had had no (semi-) Asiatic past and was not threatened with an "Asiatic" future. In fact, this book, which had the avowed purpose of presenting "all the most essential passages in the works of Marx and Engels on the subject of the state,"¹²⁹ contains no references to the type of state that Lenin for over twenty years had denounced and combated in Russia: Oriental despotism. Consequently *State and Revolution* does not once cite Marx's main work, *Das Kapital*, or *The Theories on Surplus Value*, both of which analyze aspects of Asiatic society, Asiatic production, and the Asiatic state. After the Bolshevik victory of October 1917, Lenin did not openly reject Marx's ideas on "Asia," but in his 1919 lecture on "The State" he listed not four, but three, exploitative class societies, "slavery, feudalism, and capitalism."¹³⁰

Manifestly, for Lenin the implementation of a new policy (new compared with the previously professed principles of a popularly controlled democracy) necessitated this break with his earlier Marxist position. But in Russia, where the writings of Marx and Engels and the prewar Lenin were widely known, such an about-face was more easily initiated than completed. Objections by veteran Marxists had to be silenced. This was done effectively by a conference on the Asiatic mode

¹²⁸ Lenin's 1906 rejection of the bureaucracy probably also included the police. In 1916-1917, without referring to his earlier argument on the restoration but in conformity with Marx's 1871 comment on the Paris Commune, Lenin expressly listed the police among the institutions that should not be present in the aimed-for revolutionary state. While Lenin's proposals for establishing popular control over the state were as unrealistic as were those of Marx and Engels, they did underline the critical importance of popular control. In 1876-1878 Engels emphasized this point in his *Anti-Dühring*, which Marx read before its publication: the ineffectively controlled government, instead of being the "servant" of society, becomes its "master" (Engels 1935, p. 183).

¹²⁹ Lenin, SWG, XXI, p. 468; SW, VII, p. 8.

¹³⁰ Lenin, SW, XI, p. 646.

of production held in Leningrad in 1931. At this conference the main spokesman of the Stalin-controlled Politburo bluntly declared: "What is really important is to unmask it politically, and not to establish the 'pure truth' as to whether the 'Asiatic mode of production' existed or not."¹⁸¹

In 1938 Stalin settled the disconcerting problem in a somewhat unusual manner. In Chapter IV of *The History of the CPSU* he cited Marx's "famous" preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*. But instead of reproducing the core passage in full, he stopped just before the sentence in which Marx lists the Asiatic mode of production as the first of his four major antagonistic societal conformations.¹⁸² The new *Outline of Marxist Philosophy* (1958) follows the post-October Lenin and the 1938 Stalin by speaking of only three antagonistic class societies: slavery, feudalism, and capitalism.¹⁸³

The Soviet ideologists have not stated openly that their appraisal of Russia's developmental position differs from the one given by Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, and the prewar Lenin. Rather they create the impression that here as elsewhere they are adhering in an orthodox fashion to the Marxist position. Basing our argument on the doctrinal standards to which they pay lip service, we may say that the masters of the USSR are forging their socio-historical pedigree. According to the original Marxian views, the Soviet Union did not advance from a feudal to a capitalistic order; and according to the 1906 elaboration of these views, the Russia of 1917 did not move progressively toward socialism, but retrogressively, from a weakened semi-Asiatic society and an ephemeral capitalism to a reinvigorated system of Oriental despotism.

Furthermore it is improper to assert with reference to Marxism—as the professedly immanent critics, Deutscher¹⁸⁴ and Marcuse,¹⁸⁵ have

¹⁸¹ *Diskussia ob Aziatskom Sposobe Proizvodstva* (Discussion of the Asiatic Mode of Production), Moscow and Leningrad, 1931, p. 89.

¹⁸² J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow, 1953, p. 745.

¹⁸³ J. M. Bochenski, *Die Dogmatischen Grundlagen der Sowjetischen Philosophie*, Dordrecht, 1959, pp. 37, 44f.

¹⁸⁴ According to Trotsky, the Soviet bureaucracy, being neither homogeneous nor secure, was not yet a ruling class (Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, New York, 1937, pp. 139f.). After having temporarily played a progressive role (*ibid.*, p. 275), it became increasingly reactionary (*The Case of Leon Trotsky: Report of Hearings on the Charges Made Against Him in the Moscow Trials*, by the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry, New York, 1937, p. 440). Deutscher follows Trotsky part of the way in maintaining that the Soviet bureaucracy, being neither unified nor secure, was only a "privileged and ruling minority" (Isaac Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades*, London, 1955, p. 203), but he insists that its special privileges "coincided with a broader national interest" (*ibid.*, p. 204). "The primitive magic of Stalinism," he writes, despite its nauseating features, had a definitely progressive function (*ibid.*, pp. 213f.); and "the economic progress made during the Stalin era" should make possible "a gradual

done—that in the USSR technical improvements compel democratization. Marx and Engels established their correlation of technical and socio-political change essentially for the multicentered societies of the West. Although they cannot have been unaware of the many technical innovations in Asiatic society, they maintained that, under Oriental despotism, the people were economically and politically atomized, and therefore incapable of overthrowing this type of power structure from within.

VIII

The fact that I have reviewed here in some detail the Marxist analysis of Asiatic society and Russia does not mean that I consider it sufficient for the purposes of today's research. True, the developmental concept of the classical economists, which Marx and Engels adopted, ranked among the greatest ideas of the nineteenth century; but it was crude and deficient, and it remained so in the Marxist version, which elaborated several of its economic features but shied away from its class aspect. Marx's two "circumstances"—especially the second, the dispersed villages—do not adequately define the core institutions of Oriental (or, as I call it, "hydraulic") society; and the notions of Marx and Engels regarding the "semi-Asiatic" variant of this conformation sense rather than describe the underlying problem. Their discussions of the transition of both "Asiatic" and "semi-Asiatic" society to a multicentered (Western) society are suggestive but unsatisfactory. And their deterministic position obscures the existence of a genuine choice in such open historical situations as that presented by Russia's democratic revolution in 1917. Even the idea of an Asiatic restoration, which Plekhanov and Lenin quite legitimately derived from their Marxist premises, is valuable only to the degree to which we realize that the contemplated restoration was bound to result in a modern, industry-based, totalitarian order which was more than a replica of Oriental despotism. As we know now, this new order shares several essential features with the old institutional conformation, especially the despotic state and the ruling bureaucracy. But the new regime with its total managerial economy

democratic evolution" (Isaac Deutscher, *Russia: What Next?*, New York, 1953, p. 221).

¹⁸⁵ Marcuse uses his own type of dialectical argument; yet his conclusions closely approach those of the Neo-Trotskyites. He calls the Soviet bureaucracy "a separate class," but avoids calling it a ruling class—it is neither homogeneous nor secure (Marcuse 1958, p. 111) and it "represents the social interest in a hypostatized form" (*ibid.*, p. 118). Soviet theory has a "magic" quality; it thus assumes "a new rationality" (*ibid.*, p. 90); eventually "technical progress will overtake the repressive restrictions imposed at earlier stages" (*ibid.*, p. 188).

involves patterns of social, personal, and ideological control that are qualitatively different from, and operationally far more oppressive than, the old semi-managerial despotism.¹³⁶

But whatever their deficiencies, we must become familiar with the Marxist concepts of Asiatic society and Russia's Oriental despotism. Contrary to a widely held view, Marx's and Engels' comments on these matters are much fuller and much more numerous than their comments on the revolutionary transition from capitalism to socialism. And contrary to the cynical opinion that these comments are meaningless—anyone can prove anything with quotations from Marx and Engels—there is a definite pattern in the Marxist ideas on Russia and Asia, a clearer and more consistent pattern in fact than the one that underlies Marxist ideas on the transition to socialism.

Adequate knowledge of the "Asiatic" aspects of the Marxist doctrine enables us to make a truly critical appraisal of the socio-historical claims of the Communist ideologists. It also enables us to recognize significant contradictions in the views of Lenin and Trotsky. Not a few Aesopian utterances of the post-October Lenin indicate his awareness of an approaching "Asiatic restoration": after Kronstadt he described the new Soviet economy in terms almost identical with those he had used in 1914 to characterize Russia's Asiatic despotism.¹³⁷ These utterances give a Dostoevskian meaning to Lenin's efforts to uphold at all costs the totalitarian order which had come into being under his guidance.

Trotsky's case is even more pathetic. In 1930 and as late as 1940 Trotsky repeated his earlier views on Russia's Asiatic background,¹³⁸ but he refrained from applying the Asiatic argument to Stalin's regime because, obviously, he was afraid that it might hit not only his immedi-

¹³⁶ See Wittfogel 1957, p. 440. Cf. also *idem*, "A Stronger Oriental Despotism" (the editors' title; I would have preferred "Beyond Oriental Despotism"), *China Quarterly* 1, No. 1 (January-March 1960), pp. 29ff.

¹³⁷ Lenin's argument runs as follows: "Socialism is better than capitalism, but capitalism is better than medievalism, small production, and a *bureaucracy connected with the dispersed character of the small producers*" (Lenin, S, xxxii, p. 329; italics added). The economic root of this bureaucracy was "the fragmented and dispersed character of small production, its poverty, lack of culture, absence of roads, illiteracy, absence of *exchange* between agriculture and industry, the absence of connection and interaction between them" (Lenin, SW, ix, pp. 187f.; italics in original).

¹³⁸ In his last book, Trotsky still spoke of the Russian peasantry as "dispersed over the surface of an immense country"; and after a description of the futile character of the peasant revolutions in old China, which represented nothing but "hopeless rotations" in an unchanging society, he concluded: "Such was the basis of ancient Asiatic, including ancient Russian, history" (Trotsky 1941, p. 425). But when he referred to Lenin's thesis that without the aid of the proletarian revolution in the West restoration was unavoidable in Russia, he added: "He was not mistaken: the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing else than the first stage of *bourgeois* restoration" (*ibid.*, p. 429; italics added).

ate target, but the whole power system which he had helped to create and which, until his death, he hoped to rejoin.

There were moments of ambivalence in the careers of Lenin and Trotsky when, for the sake of power, they avoided or discarded the "Asiatic" concept they had upheld for so long. The present masters of the USSR, unhampered by any such memories, see in it nothing but a nightmarish threat to the central myth of their "progressive" state and destiny.