

Symposium: Was U.S. slavery

Slaves were not proletarians

By Martin Glaberman

The pamphlet on *Marx on American Slavery* presses to make one basic point: that the slaves were proletarians. I think it does this by stretching the meaning of a number of quotations from Marx as far as they can conceivably go in that direction — and sometimes further than they can go.

Before going into the specific quotations, a general observation is necessary. Marx spends a lot of time, in *Capital* and elsewhere, to distinguish the form of labor under capitalism from all other forms of labor as "free" labor or wage labor. Disputes about the meaning of par-

ticular quotes cannot change that or the crucial importance of that definition of wage labor to the law of value and to the laws of motion of capitalist society. The law of value depends on the sale of labor power as *opposed to* the sale of the laborer. See, in particular, Chapter XXVI of *Capital*.

The opening quotation, from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, says that "Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc." The problem is the ambiguity of the word "pivot." This obviously does not mean that slavery is necessary to the normal functioning of capitalism — otherwise, how explain that

capitalism has gotten along without slavery for over 100 years. Pivot, therefore, does not imply that it is *internal* to the system in the same way that machinery and credit are. Historically, slavery related to capitalism in two ways at two somewhat different periods. First, as primitive accumulation (in the slave trade and the sugar plantations). Second, a bit later, the *product* of cotton culture was crucial to the textile industry. There was a relatively short period, roughly 1820 or so to the Civil War, when cotton was both important for industry and dominated by slavery. But neither capitalism in general nor (continued on page 38)

Review of "Marx on American Slavery"

by Theoretical Review

Marx on American Slavery is a short pamphlet written by Ken Lawrence and supported by the Sojourner Truth Organization, a small Marxist organization based in Chicago. The basic thesis of Lawrence is that the slave system of the ante-bellum South was actually capitalist. The southern social formation was capitalist because the "slave owners are capitalist, the slaves are proletarians," and because, according to Lawrence, the capitalist mode of production always "consumes and dominates and transforms various other modes of production, including slavery, *through its mode of circulation*." (Our emphasis) Although the viewpoint presented in this pamphlet is only that of a small organization, it is generally accepted by other communist groups and by certain Marxist historians who have attempted to apply this analysis to parts of the "Third World" such as Latin America.

Lawrence's analysis of Southern

slavery suffers from two fundamental flaws. First, he assembles quotations from different works of Marx in an unsystematic and uncritical way; and second, there is a complete lack of a historical materialist analysis of the development of the southern social formation.

Concerning his assemblage of quotations from Marx, he is unable to prove his position since there is no critical reading of those passages quoted and there is no systematic integration of the writings of Marx on the subject into a scientific understanding of what determines the character of a social formation, or of a mode of production, either slave or capitalist.

For example, in order to show that "slaves are proletarians" he must quote from the *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), a work written before Marx's scientific study of capitalism which he published in *Capital*. In the *Poverty of Philosophy* Marx writes "feudalism had its proletariat — serfdom." From this single imprecise statement the con-

clusion is drawn that slaves too are "proletarians" since, according to Lawrence, "it does not matter which period we are discussing." This is the exact opposite of a conclusion which a Marxist would draw since the proletariat is not just the oppressed class of any mode of production, but the oppressed and exploited class which is specific to capitalism. He also misreads other quotations from Marx such as the one from *Theories of Surplus Value*, where Marx clearly states that the South was capitalist "only in the formal sense, since the slavery of Negroes precludes free wage-labor, which is the basis of capitalist production."

The second flaw of Lawrence's approach is that he does not develop a historical materialist analysis of the Southern social formation; but rather in a typically dogmatist style, he states his proposition (in this case, the capitalist nature of the South) with only the necessary quotations from the "classics" as support for his thesis. Of course his excuse is that this pamphlet is on

capitalist?

Marx on American slavery, not on the South. But this use, or rather misuse, of Marx certainly does no justice to Marx himself nor to Marxist science — historical materialism.

Lawrence does not even attempt to analyse the modes of production, relations of production, level of development of the productive forces, social relations, political relations or ideological structures of the ante-bellum South. He fails completely to grasp the complexity of the Southern social formation in which there co-existed both slave and capitalist modes of production; under the domination of the slave mode of production. The existence of these two modes of production in the same social formation accounts for the development of contradictory relations, and capitalist forms of production and distribution.

Lawrence tries to establish that, since the commodities produced by

the slave system were sold on the international capitalist market, this external exchange relationship somehow transformed the slave mode of production into a capitalist one. What he fails to understand is that, although the slave-produced commodities may have sold on the international capitalist market, this *exchange* relationship did not alter the nature of *production* relationships in the South. The domination of slave relations of production meant the domination of the slave mode of production.

The basis of that mode is that the slaves themselves were bought and sold as commodities by the slave owners. Their labor-power was not the commodity, as was the case of the wage-laborers in the capitalist North. The slave mode of production had its own relations of production, an underdeveloped level of productive forces, and specific political and ideological

structures. The contradiction between the totality of these relations and that of the capitalist North in the end led to the Civil War. Marx clearly recognized this development since he characterized the Civil War as a "struggle between two social systems, between the system of slavery and the system of free labor (capitalism)."¹

Although there exists a need for Marxists to study the development of pre-capitalist modes of production and societies in general and their historical forms in the USA in particular, this pamphlet by Lawrence and the STO does not begin to fill the gap in this area nor does it provide the correct approach to reading Marx's work on these subjects.

Notes

¹Karl Marx, *On America and the Civil War*. (McGraw Hill, 1972), p. 93.

Reply, and a challenge to Left historians

By Ken Lawrence

I

For some time Professor Eugene D. Genovese has proclaimed himself a Marxist and has achieved a substantial reputation in the historians' profession under that mantle. Such a claim ordinarily would not merit a great deal of attention in the revolutionary movement. After all, we are concerned with Marxism as a guide to action, not primarily as an academic exercise. As for historians, few of them possess the training necessary to judge Genovese's claim, and why should they?

At a symposium on slavery at the University of Mississippi in 1975, I discovered that Genovese offered only scant evidence that

he's a Marxist — mainly that he believes class (not racial or national) struggles are the motor force of history (sometimes, as we shall see below), and that he is familiar with some of the better-known writings of Antonio Gramsci.

Normally Marxists would not consider this very meaningful evidence. Marx himself noted that it was bourgeois political economy which discovered class struggles while his own contribution had been the understanding that these struggles necessarily lead to the revolutionary overthrow of class society and, in the case of bourgeois society, its replacement by a proletarian dictatorship.

Nearly all of Genovese's writings about Marx — the few he has published, and some he hasn't — are antagonistic to Marx's views. De-

spite this odd situation, he has achieved some influence in the left movement generally and among Marxists in particular, and he currently edits a weighty and expensive academic quarterly called *Marxist Perspectives*.

It was to this concern that I addressed myself in 1975 when I first drafted my essay "Karl Marx and American Slavery." While I had admired Genovese's courage for opposing the Vietnam War even to the extent of being fired by Rutgers University, I felt that his influence on the left was unwarranted and possibly dangerous (as when he provided a "left" cover for the Canadian government to expel radical West Indian students from Sir George Williams University and to deport them for protesting against (continued on page 40)

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was absolutely dependent on slavery. Cotton came from other parts of the world without slavery (Egypt, India, etc.) and came from the U.S. after slavery.

The next paragraph begs the question to be proved. A quote from the *Communist Manifesto*, which applies to all social systems, is assumed to apply to "modern" slavery in spite of the fact that Marx is later quoted as calling modern slavery under capitalism an "anomaly." In any case, if modern slavery is an independent complete social system which rose, stagnated and declined — independent of capitalism — then it becomes even more difficult to see how labor under this system could be the same as under capitalism.

I don't understand what the quote from the *Grundrisse* on page 2 is supposed to mean. It seems to mean that slavery is the "antithesis" of bourgeois society and appears only as "vanishing moments," that is, as exceptions. Nor do I see how the footnoted quote from *Theories of Surplus Value* qualifies the other quote in any way that is meaningful to the point of the pamphlet. I note in passing that Marx seems to ignore, here and elsewhere, the existence of tribal societies (primitive communism) in North America before the advent of capitalism.

The middle paragraph on page 3 repeats the misinterpretation of pivot discussed above. ". . . He nevertheless devoted more of his writing to machinery," seems to imply that slavery, machinery, etc. should be given equal space in discussing the functioning or laws of motion of bourgeois society. It is hard to see why. The explanation of why Marx didn't give slavery equal space with other things is in the next two sentences: "That is probably because he thought that 'the history of the productive organs of man' would be the history 'of organs that are the material

basis of all social organization.' Yet, at the time he wrote *Capital*, Marx lamented that 'Hitherto there is no such book.'" When we examine these selections in their context, however, we find that it has nothing to do with why Marx did not devote more space to slavery. The full quote is as follows:

A critical history of technology would show how little any of the inventions of the 18th century are the work of a single individual. Hitherto there is no such book. Darwin has interested us in the history of Nature's Technology, i.e., in the formation of the organs of plants and animals, which organs serve as instruments of production for sustaining life. Does not the history of the productive organs of man, of organs that are the material basis of all social organizations, deserve equal attention? And would not such a history be easier to compile . . .?" *Capital*, I, 406, footnote.

The points 4), 5), and 6) on pages four and five seem to imply that the quote from Marx in the middle of page four refers to slave plantations as large-scale capitalist agriculture. In fact it does not refer to slavery at all but to the period following the end of slavery. The paragraph from which that quote comes has two additional sentences: "2. In particular however: Mechanics, the really scientific basis of large-scale industry, had reached a certain degree of perfection during the eighteenth century. The development of chemistry, geology and physiology, the sciences that *directly* form the specific basis of agriculture rather than of industry, . . . does not take place till the nineteenth century and especially the later decades." And the last half of the nineteenth century is, of course, when the transformation of

agriculture into large-scale, capitalist agriculture took place, in the U.S., England, etc.

Point 5), page five: that machinery is an ingredient of modern industry is a tautology but point (b) is confused. New World slavery — in sugar plantations — was an ingredient in the industrial revolution as primitive accumulation. The importance of cotton followed the industrial revolution — to feed the textile mills.

Point 6), page 5: slavery in the southern U.S. was "commercial" before the rise of the cotton industry. Sugar, rice, tobacco, and cotton were all grown on slave plantations for sale. The rise of the cotton industry in England did not transform slavery in the U.S. into a form of "commercial exploitation." It expanded the demand for cotton and therefore determined that that would become the main cash crop of the south. What made that expansion possible on a large scale was the development of the cotton gin.

The quotation that begins Section II, page five, is interpreted in point 1) on page six as meaning that "In the early period, merchants, not industrialists, dominate the rise of capitalism. This relationship generally results in a slave society." The antique world (the ancient world) is not the world that gives rise to or leads to capitalism. The sentence which follows the quote as given makes that distinction evident. "However, in the modern world, it [that is, commerce] results in the capitalist mode of production." So that the quote from Marx does not deal with "the rise of capitalism" but with the effects of commerce and how these effects differ in ancient and in modern times. To say that "this relationship generally results in a slave society" wipes out that distinction.

In the quote on page six beginning with, "as soon as people . . ." Marx is clearly distinguishing slave labor from wage labor. He does not say more than that the product is

drawn into the capitalist market. The interpretation of point 2) on that page is not warranted. The international market transforms all *products* into commodities. Marx says absolutely nothing about transforming *forms of labor*. A query: when was Negro labor in the U.S. directed to immediate local consumption? The intensity of exploitation increases after the cotton gin and the cotton manufacturing industry, but production was for cash crops long before.

The quote on page six beginning 'causes violent crises ...' relates only to completely non-capitalist societies that are invaded by the international market. The example used by Marx is India. The implication here and in the interpretation of point 4) that this somehow applies to the U.S. South is not warranted.

evident that this means that slavery is possible, not as a form of labor consistent with wage labor, but as an anomaly. Second it seems evident that the only sense that slavery can be considered as a "pivot" of industrial capitalism is in terms of its product, not in terms of its mode of labor.

The second quote on page eight needs to be amplified: "Still, this error is in no way greater than that of e.g., all philologists who speak of *capital* in antiquity, of Roman, Greek capitalists. This is only another way of expressing that labor in Rome and Greece was *free*, which these gentlemen would hardly wish to assert. The fact that we now not only call the plantation owners in America capitalists, but that they *are* capitalists, is based on their existence as anomalies within a world market based on free la-

labor which produced them.

The quote which follows does not give the meaning that Marx intended. Here is the section expanded: "No matter whether a commodity is the product of slavery, of peasants (Chinese, Indian ryots), of communes (Dutch East Indies), or of state enterprise (such as existed in former epochs of Russian history on the basis of serfdom), or of half-savage hunting tribes, etc., commodities and money of such modes of production, when coming in contact with commodities and money representing industrial capital, enter as much into its rotation as into that of surplus-values embodied in the commodity-capital. The character of the process of production from which they emanate is immaterial. They perform the function of commodities on the market, and enter into the

...anomalies within a world market based on free labor...

The quotation that begins Section III, page seven, starts with the words, "In real history, wage labor arises, . . ." etc. To change in real history to generally speaking seems to me to modify Marx's meaning by allowing for exceptions that are not indicated.

The next quote (page seven) follows a long paragraph which discusses wage labor as the condition for capital. Then comes the full paragraph which contains the quote: "So long as *both* sides exchange their labor with one another in the form of *objectified* labor, the relation is impossible; it is likewise impossible if *living labor capacity* itself appears as the property of the other side, hence as not engaged in exchange. (The fact that slavery is possible at individual points within the bourgeois system of production does not contradict this. However, slavery is then possible there only because it does not exist at other points; and appears as an anomaly opposite the bourgeois system itself.)" First, it seems

bor." This seems to mean that U.S. slave owners are capitalists because of an anomaly, an exception, because they sell their products on the world market. But the labor that produces that product is slave labor, not wage labor.

In saying that slaves are proletarians, a quote is footnoted which clearly uses proletarian or proletariat in a general and not in a scientific sense, in which Marx makes no distinction between any forms of labor. Would anyone want to argue that it made no difference to Marx what the form of labor was? That slave, serf, free or tribal labor were all interchangeable? This use of the word proletariat cannot be equated with the specific use of proletariat to mean wage labor.

The next quotation is somewhat misleading. The first sentence comes a long paragraph before the rest and relates to *capitalist* production, not production in general. The rest of the quote refers to the physical appearance of commodities and does not relate to the mode of

cycles of industrial capital as well as into those of the surplus-value carried by it. It is true universal character of the commodities, the world character of the market, which distinguishes the process of rotation of the industrial capital."

The meaning seems pretty clear: wealth, from any other social system, can be incorporated into the "rotation" of capital through the world market — without, in itself, changing the nature of these other social systems, labor forms, etc. Slaves, peasants, communards, etc. remain slaves, peasants, communards, etc. They do not become wage laborers, proletarians. The interpretations of points 3) and 4) are unjustified. Whatever Marx says about slave owners or the products of slaves, he *never* equates slave labor with wage labor and the stretching of his meaning in that direction serves no valid purpose.

There is also a problem with the short quotation on page ten about spoliation of the soil, but since it does not relate to my main point,

I will simply urge readers to go to the original quotation and interpret it for themselves.

What is the point to this extended exercise in quotations from Marx? There are several points:

1. Fundamental to all of Marxism is Marx's analysis of capitalism, in particular the law of value. This depends on his definition of labor under capitalism as "free" labor, wage labor, etc. The nature of capitalism and the nature of the proletarian revolution stem from that. Anything which distorts or waters down the meaning of those concepts makes the whole structure of Marxism meaningless.

2. There has been a tendency, stemming from the New Left, to identify virtually all sections of society as proletarians — middle-class students, college professors, etc., etc. There is nothing in Marxism that excludes non-proletarians from being radical or even, in certain circumstances, revolutionary. National revolutions, for example, in Lenin's view, even when led by the bourgeoisie, were justifiable and should be supported. There is no need to redefine every section of society as proletarian in order to justify giving support or to understand it as revolutionary.

3. The Marxian definition of

wage labor and the law of value has been eroded in other directions, for example, by the wages for housework people, who define housework as value-producing. Exploitation is not equivalent to wage labor.

4. Finally, although this is not contained in the pamphlet under discussion, there is the problem of the consequences of the theory. Was Black Reconstruction in the South the most radical form of bourgeois democracy or was it the dictatorship of the proletariat? Is there any point in heading in the latter direction? I don't think so.

Reply, and a challenge

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a racist professor, or when he aimed his fire at radicals who organized against the banning of Herbert Aptheker by the history faculty and administration of Yale University).

I had planned to write a book-length polemic against Genovese, exposing his bogus Marxism in theory and practice. Since his reputation derives mostly from his writings on slavery, primarily in the Southern United States, my first chapter was an affirmative statement summarizing Marx's views on that subject. I intended to follow with a chapter contrasting Genovese's views with Marx's. After that, with his credentials shattered, I would have proceeded to dissect his political views on subjects ranging from his interpretation of Gramsci to his defense of fascists, and on the anti-communism that informs his hidden agenda, neatly covered by cleverly worded asides supporting Stalin and criticizing supposedly dogmatic or sectarian leftists.

I circulated, in draft form, the first chapter. I sought comments and criticisms from a broad range of Marxists, some friends and some strangers, before proceeding with the rest of the work. Several encouraged me to publish the essay

by itself — the most insistent of these was George Rawick. Eventually I decided to publish the second draft, incorporating several of the criticisms but still seeking more, as an article in *Political Discussion* number two, and then in pamphlet form, under review here.

As often happens to many of us, the course of revolutionary events established different priorities for me, and I never returned to the book. (But see the *Urgent Tasks* editors' response to a letter from the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective in *Urgent Tasks* number one, page 32, for the direction of my argument.) The problem I intended to address has faded in importance: on the left Genovese's influence has narrowed considerably and is currently generally confined to academic Marxists and advocates of the rightwing variants of Eurocommunism. He has on several occasions in private correspondence and in person promised to reply to my essay, but hasn't ever done so. More recently he has begun to retreat from some of his own worst political and historical declarations of past years.

Many others have offered criticisms which definitely would have been incorporated had I ever final-

ized the work. Herbert Aptheker regretted that I had neglected to include Marx's letter on the importance of a slave revolt in Missouri to American political developments in 1859, and Marx's insistence on the special importance of the use of Black troops in the Civil War; Noel Ignatin made a similar observation on my omission of the significance Marx attached to John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. These critics and many other correspondents — Philip Foner was another — were all warmly encouraging.

I knew this series of one-sided, generally favorable responses would not continue unchallenged, however. Even if Genovese himself maintained his silence, someone was bound to come forward to defend the position I was attacking — after all, it had gained broad acceptance in the years since his book *The Political Economy of Slavery* was first published, and up until my pamphlet appeared he had this field pretty much to himself. (Of course elements of Genovese's position had been discredited. For example, Aptheker and others smashed him when he denied the importance of slave revolts. But the polemics against him had generally been limited to proving that slaves in the United States, like all other oppressed classes in history, did engage in revolutionary struggle. It was never necessary to address

Genovese's argument that U.S. slavery was feudal or seigniorial in order to defeat him.)

II

The first answer to my pamphlet was presented by the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective (TMLC) in an unsigned review in issue one of *Theoretical Review*, it is reprinted here. It suffers from the popular vulgarization of Marxism that characterizes so much of the left in the U.S. today. As such it deserves no comment whatever, and stands entirely refuted by contrast to Martin Glaberman's critique, which is a serious and thoughtful attempt to accomplish the same political end.

Before proceeding to my reply to Glaberman, however, one point in the TMLC review does merit an aside. Since the topic of the pamphlet is Marx's view of American slavery, not someone else's (i.e., not Genovese's, not mine, nor any latter-day Marxist's — these would have been addressed in subsequent chapters which never appeared), it was necessary for the anonymous reviewer to take a stab at tying her/his view to Marx's own. This was done by a single, forged quotation:

[Marx] characterized the Civil War as a "struggle between two social systems, between the system of slavery and the system of free labor (capitalism)."

The "(capitalism)" which TMLC's polemicist places ahead of the period and inside the quotation marks does not appear in Marx — indeed it is precisely the point at issue. Naturally, if such a statement *could* be found in Marx it *would* tend to refute my interpretation of his position, but I have never found such an assertion. The very opposite is true — every reference to U.S. slavery I have found in Marx's writings tends to support the view that he saw it as agrarian capitalism — a historical successor

to mercantile capitalism, and furnishing the foundation for its own successor (not inevitably, but in the course of real events), *industrial* capitalism. This is the other social system to which Marx refers.

(On the other hand, those who wish to oppose my argument by resorting to the Marxist Talmud can find some support in Frederick Engels' "Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith," written in June of 1847. In it, Engels asked, "In what way does the proletariat differ from the slave?" He answered:

The slave is sold once and for all, the proletariat has to sell himself by the day and by the hour. The slave is the property of one master and for that very reason has a guaranteed subsistence, however wretched it may be. The proletariat is, so to speak, the slave of the entire bourgeois *class*, not of one master, and therefore has no guaranteed subsistence, since nobody buys his labour if he does not need it. The slave is accounted a *thing* and not a member of civil society. The proletariat is recognised as a *person*, as a member of civil society. The slave *may*, therefore, have a better subsistence than the proletariat but the latter stands at a higher stage of development. The slave frees himself by *becoming a proletarian*, abolishing from the totality of property relationships *only* the relationship of *slavery*. The proletariat can free himself only by *abolishing property in general*. [Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 6:100.]

A revised version of this essay was published later the same year as "Principles of Communism." Engels repeated the question and slightly

expanded his answer. [6:343-4.] This text is the strongest support I can find in Marxist gospel for the position my critics argue; I consider it to be an oversimplification at best, and inconsistent with the view developed by Marx.)

We are now well past the arguments with Genovese; no doubt he would be embarrassed by the defense of his position advanced by TMLC. (Ironically, one of Genovese's most hated critics on the left, Staughton Lynd, shares his general understanding of the class nature of slavery.) From here on I'll address the specific points at issue, a debate which now has a significant life of its own, rather than the politics which prompted 'the debate initially, which is no longer of interest.

III

Martin Glaberman's critique, published here for the first time though actually written some time ago, is undoubtedly the most persuasive defense of the Genovese line.*

He begins by referring to Chapter XXVI of *Capital*, the chapter on primitive accumulation. Interestingly, whereas Glaberman views this as Marx's statement of a universal law, Marx himself specifically denied this intent:

The chapter on primitive accumulation does not pretend to do more than trace the path by which, *in Western Europe*, the capitalist order of economy emerged from the womb of the feudal order of economy. [Marx and Engels, *Selected*

*In personal correspondence, Hal Draper has effectively argued many of the same points presented here by Glaberman, though their views are not precisely the same. On the other hand, some of the arguments I present here were strengthened by Draper's insights. I mean this article to be a long-overdue reply to all my critics, all of whose remarks were gratefully received.

Correspondence, Moscow: 1965, page 312. Emphasis added.]

Of course free wage labor is of crucial importance to capitalism, but that is not to say that all of capitalism's labor is free. ("Free," of course, in Marx's double sense: both slaves and corvee workers are "free" of ownership of the means of production, and therefore "freer," in Marx's meaning, than serfs, though less "free" than wage laborers.) We will return to this matter later, in a discussion of its revolutionary implications.

Glaberman seems to think that Marx's reference to slavery as "the pivot of bourgeois industry" was ambiguous, perhaps even careless, and that it does not imply an essential quality. Actually, this is an argument which Marx had developed earlier in a December 28, 1846 letter to P. V. Annenkov, which he left almost verbatim in *The Poverty of Philosophy*. [See Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pages 40-41.]

Although *Poverty of Philosophy* was an early work, it appeared in later editions with changes by both Marx and Engels. In those editions, precise economic terminology was added. For example, "labor power" is substituted for "labor." Both original and revised versions are indicated in the new *Collected Works*. The passage I quoted was not changed, but Engels did add a footnote to it in 1885, saying that it was perfectly correct when it was written, but it was no longer true when the North became industrialized and when the South's cotton monopoly faced competition from India, Egypt, Brazil, etc. Then, says Engels, the abolition of slavery became possible. I quoted the entire Engels footnote on page 13 of the pamphlet.

As it happens, we need not rely on this Engels footnote for a reading of Marx's mind. Writing in 1850, Marx himself spelled out his meaning explicitly, leaving no room for misinterpretation:

If just a moderate loss in one year's cotton crop and the prospect of a second has been enough to excite serious alarm amidst the rejoicing over prosperity, a few consecutive years in which the cotton crop really does fail are bound to reduce the whole of civilized society to a temporary state of barbarism. The golden age and the iron age are long past; it was reserved for the nineteenth century, with its intelligence, world markets and colossal productive resources, to usher in the *cotton age*. At the same time, the English bourgeoisie has felt more forcefully than ever the power which the United States exercised over it, as a result of its hitherto unbroken monopoly of cotton production. It has immediately applied itself to the task of breaking this monopoly. Not only in the East Indies, but also in Natal, the northern region of Australia and all parts of the world where climate and conditions allow cotton to be grown, it is to be encouraged in every way. At the same time, that section of the English bourgeoisie kindly disposed towards the Negro has made the following discovery: "That the prosperity of Manchester is dependent on the treatment of slaves in Texas, Alabama and Louisiana is as curious as it is alarming." (*Economist*, 21 September 1850). That the decisive branch of English industry is based upon the existence of slavery in the southern states of the American union, that a Negro revolt in these areas could ruin the whole system of production as it exists today is, of course, an extremely depressing fact for the people who spent 20

million pounds a few years ago on Negro emancipation in their own colonies. However, this fact leads to the only realistic solution of the slave question, which has recently again been the cause of such long and violent debate in the American Congress. American cotton production is based on slavery. As soon as the industry reaches a point where it cannot tolerate the United States' cotton monopoly any longer, cotton will be successfully mass-produced in other countries, and it is hardly possible to achieve this anywhere today except with *free workers*. But as soon as the free labor of other countries can deliver sufficient supplies of cotton to industry more cheaply than the slave labour of the United States, then American slavery will be broken together with the American cotton monopoly and the slaves will be emancipated, because they will have become useless as slaves, [Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848* (edited by David Fernbach), Vintage: 1974, pages 296-297.]

As things turned out in real history, however, the sequence of events did not meet Marx's expectation. Slavery was overthrown in the United States long before the U.S. monopoly on cotton production was broken. (Glaberman is simply mistaken in his assumptions about Egypt and India. Egypt's cotton exports to Britain did not reach 100,000 bales annually until after the U.S. Civil War, while U.S. production for Britain in the antebellum decade ranged from 1.1 to 2.5 million bales per year; furthermore, half of Egypt's production was the silky long-staple variety primarily used for luxury goods. India's export level reached 680,000 bales in its best ante-

bellum year — very exceptional — and this was mostly short-staple cotton of a much harsher quality than that from the U.S. The only other important competitor was slave-grown Brazilian cotton, whose best ante-bellum yield was 138,000 bales. The U.S. monopoly was so secure that British imports fell from 3.3 million bales in 1860 and 3 million in 1861 to 1.4 million in 1862 — an economic disaster. Britain's crash program to develop alternative sources of raw cotton and to break the Union blockade of the South resulted in a gradual increase to 2.7 million bales in 1865, leaping to 3.7 million the following year.)

Further confirmation of my interpretation is found in another statement, written in 1861. Though U.S. slavery was a fetter to American capitalism, it remained an essential of British capitalism. Marx wrote, "The second pivot of English industry was the slave-grown cotton of the United States. The present American crisis forces them to enlarge their field of supply and emancipate cotton from slave-breeding and slave-consuming oligarchies. As long as the English cotton manufacturers depended on slave-grown cotton, it could be truthfully asserted that they rested on a two-fold slavery, the indirect slavery of the white man in England and the direct slavery of the black man on the other side of the Atlantic." [*American Journalism of Marx and Engels*, The New American Library: 1966, page 227.]

It is difficult to understand Glaberman's quibble with the quote from the *Communist Manifesto*. Indeed, slavery was an anomaly to capitalism, but that does not mean it was characterized by an absence of revolutionary class struggle, as he seems to imply. (And my entire argument is that modern slavery, though an anomaly, was *not* independent of capitalism despite its distinct history.**) In 1847 Marx wrote that the slave economy "will provoke the most fearful conflicts in the southern states of republican

North America." [Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 6:325.] In 1860 he wrote to Engels that "the biggest things that are happening in the world today are on the one hand the movement of the slaves in America started by the death of John Brown, and on the other the movement of the serfs in Russia." He cited a slave revolt in Missouri as confirmation, and Engels agreed. [Marx and Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, page 221.] He called the struggle against slavery the moving power of U.S. history for half a century, as I indicated in the pamphlet on page 14, and on the same page I cited his old-age opinion that the struggle "reaches its maximum in the slave system." It is clear that the quote from the *Manifesto* is particularly appropriate, and that, if anything, one of the most anomalous aspects of U.S. slavery was its revolutionary potential.

The point of the quote from the *Grundrisse* and the qualifying footnote from *Theories of Surplus Value* is that U.S. capitalism did not evolve from feudalism. The footnoted qualifier could be developed to show that although this is literally true, there were some pre-capitalist restraints on U.S. development. What appears at "vanishing moments" isn't slavery (! I'm astonished that someone as versed in Marx as Glaberman is could suggest such a thing), but primarily refers to things like the tendency of the yeomanry to sell its surplus product "below cost" on the capitalist market. I am showing, in this passage, that not only did Marx say that slavery was capitalist; he also said that the U.S. did not pass through a pre-capitalist stage of development.

As for the Native American societies, it is true that Marx does not do them justice — as societies in themselves, or whose land was stolen by European conquest — but he does discuss their role in primitive accumulation, referring in passing to the entombment of the aboriginal population in the mines.

Judging by what is currently available in English, Marx seems to have devoted about as much attention to slavery as he did to machinery, perhaps more, from his early works through the mid-1850's, by which time he believed that slavery had gone from being an essential of U.S. capitalism (1847) to a fetter on it (roughly 1857). Thereafter he devoted more attention to machinery. I believe this is because his priorities were determined not primarily to interpret the world, but to change it. As to the cotton gin, it has been reified into slavery's *bete noire* primarily by bourgeois historians and technocrats who seek to remove responsibility for the unspeakable cruelties of slavery from the ruling class and blame Eli Whitney instead. Actually the gin was one of many almost simultaneous inventions — the spinning jenny, the power loom, the steam engine, etc. — which gave birth to the industrial revolution. The principle of the gin was known and used in antiquity. Whitney's refinement, the saw gin, was widely duplicated (and improved) by others who had never seen his invention. All these technological developments taken together were essentials of the industrial revolution. One cannot imagine anything comparable to the modern age

**Though it isn't directly pertinent to this debate, it may be helpful to some readers to realize that the interpretation of history I share with Ted Alien and others is considerably more complex than the argument here. We contend that the English colonial (later-to-be-U.S.) bourgeoisie in Virginia introduced and maintained slavery along racial lines as a specific means of controlling labor — white as well as Black — through the institution of white supremacy. Again, what may have been anomalous in one context may still have been essential to the bourgeoisie in another. The existence of a bourgeois society consisting of free laborers racially distinct from slaves allowed the bourgeoisie to develop its hegemonic power to a degree unmatched in the world in subtlety, complexity, and effectiveness — and whose legacy of enduring white supremacy still burdens us all.

based on the production of linsey-woolsey or silk. So Glaberman's statement that the "importance of cotton followed the industrial revolution — to feed the textile mills" has no useful meaning for me. If he means to suggest that the industrial revolution could have been based on anything that might have been mechanized, I do not agree. On the other hand, ginning was still an essentially agrarian task: i.e., it was limited to natural (annual) cycles whose productivity could not be substantially altered by a technological revolution — and has not been to the present day. Carding, spinning, weaving, and sewing were all susceptible to exponential increases in productivity. It is this distinction that ultimately subordinated the former to the latter. "Industrial" describes the mechanically advanced process; agricultural production cannot meet this standard no matter how "large scale."

The quote from *Capital* which differentiates mercantile and industrial capitalism is much more general than Glaberman believes. It does not simply juxtapose antiquity with modern times, but instead contrasts pre-capitalist times (from antiquity on) with capitalism.*** One would have to ignore real history, in which the domination of merchants' capital *did* result in slavery well into the nineteenth century, in order to permit Glaberman's reading. Above all, Marx was a realist, and the quoted statement was an observation of fact, not a promulgation of an economic principle.

Glaberman believes I exaggerate the thoroughgoing changes wrought on all forms of production once industry has become dominant. He thinks Marx says nothing more than that the products of agriculture become commodities. But here is how Marx analyzed a comparable situation in 1852:

Under the Bourbons, *big landed property* had governed, with its priests and

lackeys; under the Orleans, high finance, large-scale industry, large-scale trade, that is, *capital*, with its retinue of lawyers, professors and smooth-tongued orators. The Legitimate Monarchy was merely the political expression of the hereditary rule of the lords of the soil, as the July Monarchy was only the political expression of the usurped rule of the bourgeois *parvenus*. What kept the two factions apart, therefore, was not any so-called principles, it was their material conditions of existence, two different kinds of property, it was the old contrast between town and country, the rivalry between capital and landed property. That at the same time old memories, personal enmities, fears and hopes, prejudices and illusions, sympathies and antipathies, convictions, articles of faith and principles bound them to one or the other royal house, who denies this? Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity. While Orleanists and Legitimists, while each faction sought to make itself and the other believe that it was loyalty to their two royal houses which separated them, facts later

proved that it was rather their divided interests which forbade the uniting of the two royal houses. And as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves, from their reality. Orleanists and Legitimists found themselves side by side in the republic, with equal claims. If each side wished to effect the *restoration* of its *own* royal house against the other, that merely signified that each of the *two great interests* into which the *bourgeoisie* is split — landed property and capital — sought to restore its own supremacy and the subordination of the other. We speak of two interests of the bourgeoisie, for large landed property, despite its feudal coquetry and pride of race, has been rendered thoroughly bourgeois by

***Hal Draper called to my attention an important flaw in my discussion of ancient slavery:

. . . your statement that "almost all peoples" developed through slavery is ethnocentric; the statement applies only to "almost all peoples" of the Occident. At any rate, Marx's studies led him to the opinion that the "archaic formation of society" bifurcated into two main lines of development, one of which was characteristic of the East and led through Oriental despotism and the "Asiatic" mode of production, while the other led through slavery, typically in Europe.

Draper has elaborated on this point in his multi-volume work, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*.

the development of modern society. [Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Moscow: n.d., pages 47-48.]

Even had Marx not elaborated on his thinking, it is difficult to see how his statement that "the civilized horrors of over-work are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery" thus transforming a patriarchal labor system into one which calculated the "using up of his life in 7 years' of labor" can be read as a mere statement that "the *product* is drawn into the capitalist market." Yes, the world market transforms all products into commodities, but cheap commodities, in turn, break down all social barriers and force social transformations everywhere "under penalty of death," Marx wrote.

One of the lines I elided in the earlier quote Glaberman objected to says, "Commerce therefore has everywhere more or less of a dissolving influence on the producing organizations, which it finds at hand and whose different forms are mainly carried on with a view to immediate use." As to slavery in the U.S., it was devoted to cash crops long before the rise of the cotton industry (in the South, that is; not in the North). But the important distinction to be made is that during the earlier period the plantations were virtually self-sufficient in food, fodder, clothes, lumber, household goods, etc. Later, and especially with the rise of the Cotton Kingdom, these items were largely imported, as an increasing proportion of land was devoted to fiber production. Contrary to what Glaberman writes, this shift did in fact cause violent crises in the U.S. South. (Marx made a general statement, which I quoted, and then turned to India as one illustration, "for example.") The Panic of 1837 could not have been so devastating at the time 2 to 3 decades earlier when nearly every plantation was food-sufficient. But with every available acre devoted to cotton,

the collapse meant economic ruin. This situation is a nearly exact parallel to the situation in India during the U.S. Civil War that Marx uses as his example.

My use of "Generally speaking" to introduce Marx's quote on the origin of wage labor does no violence to his meaning. He introduces it with "In real history" because he is arguing against Bastiat's fairytale that has modern society arising out of nomadic society. Marx did not intend his statement to be immutable, as any number of qualifying statements drawn from his writings would show, but he did mean it to be the usual historic process. Here is how Marx himself responded to a critic who interpreted *Capital* in the same way Glaberman does:

Now what application to Russia could my critic make of this historical sketch? Only this: If Russia is tending to become a capitalist nation after the example of the West-European countries — and during the last few years she has been taking a lot of trouble in this direction — she will not succeed without having first transformed a good part of her peasants into proletarians; and after that, once taken to the bosom of the capitalist regime, she will experience its pitiless laws like other profane peoples. That is all. But that is too little for my critic. He feels. he absolutely must metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into an historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself, in order that it may ultimately arrive at the form of economy which ensures, together with the greatest expan-

sion of the productive powers of social labour, the most complete development of man. But I beg his pardon. (He is both honouring and shaming me too much.) Let us take an example.

In several parts of *Capital* I allude to the fate which overtook the plebeians of ancient Rome. They were originally free peasants, each cultivating his own piece of land on his own account. In the course of Roman history they were expropriated. The same movement which divorced them from their means of production and subsistence involved the formation not only of big landed property but also of big money capital. And so one fine morning there were to be found on the one hand free men, stripped of everything except their labour power, and on the other, in order to exploit this labour, those who held all the acquired wealth in their possession. What happened? The Roman proletarians became not wage labourers but a *mob* of do-nothings more abject than the former "poor whites" in the South of the United States, and alongside of them there developed a mode of production which was not capitalist but based on slavery. Thus events strikingly analogous but taking place in different historical surroundings led to totally different results. By studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by using as one's master key a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being

super-historical. [Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, page 313]

Glaberman has mystified a quote from the *Grundrisse* in which Marx says that the planters are capitalists. Lengthening the quote does not serve any purpose in clarifying that observation. Curiously, he ignored the quote from *Theories of Surplus Value*, cited in the footnote to the passage, that says substantially the same thing in yet another context. There is nothing here or anywhere else that suggests that because a thing is anomalous (atypical) it cannot be essential (pivotal). Similarly, it ought to be obvious that an essential ingredient in one era may be obsolete and detrimental in another.

Next Glaberman objects to my quote from the *Poverty of Philosophy* about feudalism's proletariat. I will again state that the book was later revised by both Marx and Engels. The reference to a feudal "proletariat" appears twice in it. Marx did not change either reference. Engels left one alone, and changed the other to "the working class of feudal times." I will accept both formulations as acceptable and interchangeable. The passage from Marx's correspondence just cited above provides one example of his use of the term proletariat that Glaberman wouldn't approve. He also wrote, "It is characteristic that, in general, real forced labor *displays in the most brutal form, most clearly the essential features of wage-labor.*" [*Theories of Surplus Value*, III, page 400] In *Capital* III, page 394 [Kerr edition], Marx writes of "wage workers and proletarians" whose surplus-labor is absorbed "on the basis of the old mode of production." *The German Ideology* also refers to the plebeians of ancient Rome as "a proletarian rabble" [page 34], and later refers to proletarians "— at any rate in the modern form —" which implies that there were others [page 416]. I am satisfied that for my purposes, at least (determining the revolution-

ary potential of U.S. slaves), I have not done violence to Marx's meaning. No doubt there are other studies which can benefit more from considering the differences between waged and slave labor, rather than the similarities. Here is the point:

As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed the old society from top to bottom, as soon as the labourers are turned into proletarians, their means of labour into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, then the further socialisation of labour and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the labourer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many labourers. This expropriation is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralisation of capital. One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop, on an ever extending scale, the cooperative form of the labour-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialised labour,

the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and this, the international character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. [Marx, *Capital* I (Kerr edition), pages 836-837.]

Can that passage stand as a description of the ante-bellum South? Or did it only apply to England and New England?

Marx's reference to the spoliation of the soil is pertinent to Genovese's argument, since it is clear that Marx did not consider it an essential of Southern agriculture, while Genovese does. Glaberman's final challenge, concerning the meaning of Black Reconstruction, will be addressed below.

IV

What about Lenin's views on all this? Eugene Genovese has prom-

ised to take full account of my criticisms when he reworks his political economy; we shall see. Meanwhile he has responded so far only to say, "I do wonder about your disposal of Lenin's observation of the 'feudal' (his word, not mine) significance of slavery in the development of American capitalism." [personal letter, February 2, 1976.] In a situation of this sort there is a strong temptation to respond by asking why it is necessary to shift ground to Lenin without first settling accounts with Marx.

Actually, I had confronted precisely this question the month before I drafted the article on Marx, in preparation for it. Discussing the difficulty of rendering Marx's interpretation, I wrote (to George Rawick):

The real need is to integrate Marx's observation in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that "direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. . . . Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country" with Lenin's perceptive understanding of the complexities of U.S. agriculture in *Capitalism and Agriculture in the United States of America*, where he shows that the South was feudal relative to the North and West, despite "large scale" production in the South. [Volume 22, especially pages 30 and 32].

In his notebooks for this article [Volume 40], Lenin refers to slaveholding as "Transition from feudalism to capitalism" [pages 412 and 475]. He shows that large farms growing cereal have low income, while smaller dairy farms have higher income [416-417], and concludes from this

that the latter must spend more for labor per farm, therefore are more capitalist [419]. He considers America to be the best example of capitalist agriculture, with "fewer bonds with the Middle Ages, with the soilbound laborer" [420], but he says that the South has "The lowest development of capitalism." [459] He summarizes the development in the U.S. as follows [475]: "*Displacement of all the small and all the medium ones. Displacement of the latifundia (1,000 and more). Growth of big capitalist farms (175-500; 500-1,000).*" [Lenin's emphasis; numbers are acres.]

. . . showing a particular trait of capitalism would not be sufficient. Marx himself showed that various aspects emerged early, as when he said that the first general form of wage-labor was soldiers' pay [Marx, *Grundrisse* (David McLellan, editor), page 58]. . . . He wrote, "If we now talk of plantation-owners in America as capitalists, if they *are* capitalists, this is due to the fact that they exist as anomalies within a world market based upon free labor." [Hobsbawm's *Pre-Capitalist Economic Forms*, page 119.] In *Capital* III [Kerr, page 934] he says that capitalist conceptions predominate on American plantations. Clearly there is a need to view some aspects of slavery as pre-capitalist and other aspects as capitalist. But these considerations do not all merit equal weight. Marx pointed out that the rise of the cotton industry transformed slavery in the U.S. from "the earlier, more or less patriarchal slavery, into a

system of commercial exploitation. In fact, the veiled slavery of the wage-earners in Europe needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world." (*Capital I* [Kerr], page 833). [personal letter, May 8, 1975.]

Since I had not changed my opinion on this, indeed I still haven't, I quoted it in my reply to Genovese, and added this:

Here is my present understanding: All economic categories are abstractions, and therefore, to a certain extent one-sided and false. In the last *Radical America* Marty Glaberman writes that a definition is not a fact; it's either useful or it isn't. Engels, in one of the introductions to *Capital I*, shows that dialectics sometimes requires definitions of terms to change. These ideas are involved in this discussion.

Capitalism is a lot of things: a system of production, a system of distribution, a system of labor, a system of property ownership, etc. Moreover, it is constantly developing and changing. That was also true of feudalism, though its "natural economy" rendered its development always visible, while capitalist relations are characteristically concealed.

For Lenin to peel off the rind and reveal the inner workings, not just of the momentary realities of capitalist agriculture, but of its *development*, he needed a word whose definition implied a backward, earlier stage of existence, *whether or not that stage had actually existed* in a particular place. The term he used was feudalism. (Apparently. I

wish I knew some Russian so I could understand any idiomatic subtleties that might occur in his analysis.) But he nearly always qualifies the term with a parenthetical "or, what is nearly the same thing," etc.

It should not be surprising that one area of production, cotton, which in one epoch is such a vital part of dynamic capitalism (during the industrial revolution) should fade in importance, and therefore lag in development, in another (imperialism). The latter period is the theater of Lenin's discussion; ours is the former, and the definitions, to be useful, must reflect that.

The crux of our debate centers on the importance of the class struggle to the development of the antebellum South. In order to resolve that, it is necessary to portray accurately the distinct aspects of the contending classes. . . .

In discussing the individual laborer, is it more helpful to view her/him as analogous to a serf or to an industrial proletarian? That depends on your purpose. Slaves and serfs both till the

soil; industrial workers usually don't. But serfs, who typically develop into a peasant class, own, or legitimately aspire to own, land and tools. Industrial workers typically own only their labor power. Slaves don't even own that — as Marx said, they are an anachronism. Some peasant struggles may be attenuated by those sectors of their class who fight to retain their property; slaves can only struggle for a change in the property relations (and therefore a change in the system of production). To writers of idylls, slaves will be peasants; to the rest of us, they are proletarians. On the other hand, proletarian or not, if their product loses its strategic significance then their overall social leverage tends to decline also. Though the struggle may continue to be as sharp as before (it might be measured roughly by the lynching rate), the development of other sectors may advance more rapidly, leaving the cotton kingdom relatively backward — a semi-colony, as Lenin implies. Even there, as he demonstrates, there is a

forward development of capitalism, [personal letter, February 20, 1976] These remain the terms of the debate. All the critics of my interpretation of Marx oppose the suggestion that slaves are proletarians. The implication of their position is that no matter how revolutionary slaves might have been, they were backward relative to free (white) wage earners; the latter's struggles were (objectively, at least) fights for socialism, while the slaves could only win, at best, a radical form of capitalism as the fruit of their victory. I reject this position root and branch. One must torture the facts of Reconstruction to find support for the Genovese argument, echoed here by the Tucson Marxist-Leninist Collective and Martin Glaberman.

V

Was Black Reconstruction the revolutionary proletarian dictatorship that W. E. B. DuBois thought it was?

I find his argument convincing, at least in the cases of South Carolina and parts of Mississippi, possibly elsewhere. Those Marxists who argue a different view have not directly countered his argument with evidence; rather, they have attempted to read history backward from their contemporary political needs.****

****Ironically, these arguments, like Genovese's, are a substantial departure from Marx's. Noel Ignatin wrote:

James S. Allen regards the Civil War and Reconstruction as a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Flowing from this conception, Alien dismisses any of DuBois' suggestions that the toiling masses were serious contenders for power, and views the former slaves as "allies of the bourgeoisie." The only labor opposition to bourgeois policy that Alien regards as significant were the socialist forces around William Sylvis and the National Labor Union. Consistent with his view of the period as a bour-

geois revolution, he naturally places the responsibility for its defeat on the betrayal by the bourgeoisie in 1877.

Although Allen never explicitly makes the point (and in fact says things which tend in the opposite direction), his book, written in 1937, was used to support the Communist Party's policy of alliance with Roosevelt against the "fascist" forces. In part, the Party was hoping and expecting that Roosevelt could be pressured to take the steps to complete the "unfinished tasks" of Reconstruction.

Allen was arguing, by implication, that

the Marxist policy during and after the Civil War was for the oppressed to unite with the industrial bourgeoisie against the plantation owners.

Marx's policy was the opposite. He strove to build an independent proletarian movement. When a bunch of English industrial aristocrats attacked American slavery, he wrote an article denouncing them, which appeared in the February 9, 1853 *New York Daily Tribune*:

The enemy of British wages slavery has a right to condemn Negro slavery; a Duchess of Sutherland, a Duke of Athol, a Manchester cotton lord — never! [The American Journalism of Marx and Engels, page 65]

We have to admit, however, that very little work has been done in the past 45 years to support DuBois' position. Using a novel approach, Noel Ignatin developed a study guide for evaluating DuBois and James S. Allen in terms of each other's interpretation of Reconstruction (see "A Study Guide to Reconstruction," *Urgent Tasks* number three); using this method, the superiority of DuBois' insight is apparent to most students. But this doesn't constitute proof.

Here is an area of scholarship — virtually unexplored territory — where Marxist historians could make a significant contribution to our understanding, one that would be of much greater political importance than most of their research. One likely method to approach the question is comparative history, extensively applied to answer many less important historical questions, particularly concerning New World slavery.

Several possible comparisons will come immediately to mind: Black Reconstruction in the U.S. could fruitfully be contrasted with emancipation and reconstruction in Brazil, say, or Cape Colony (South Africa). A comparison could be made with the emancipation of Russian serfs. Some scholars have already begun to explore the similarities and differences in these histories, though not yet with our questions in mind, but I think the most explicit way to address the problem is to measure the Civil War and Black Reconstruction by the revolution during those same years which Marx and Engels themselves called the proletarian dictatorship — the Paris Commune — and by Radical Reconstruction's ties to the communist movement of its day.

This will be a costly and tedious job if it is done well, and will require a careful search in many archives in Europe and America. Nevertheless, there are a few promising leads.

Many are to be found in *The First International in America* by Samuel Bernstein (Augustus M.

Kelley, New York: 1962). Some of the early members of the International were involved in the radical antislavery movement. Wendell Phillips may have been a member, [pages 26 and 82]

Also enlisted in the Council's service was Richard J. Hinton of Washington, D.C., who had been with John Brown in the raid on Harper's Ferry, and subsequently had been an officer in the Kansas Colored Regiment [page 31]

After the Civil War, some radical Republicans affiliated with the International, notably the French-speaking sections:

The part of Franco-Americans in the International Association of the fifties has been looked at. Many of them, like other exiles in the United States, had taken up the abolitionist cause and fought in the Union Army. The War over, they organized themselves in St. Louis, first as Camp Fremont for the defense of republican institutions, should they be threatened, and subsequently as the French Radical Club, [page 40]

In November 1868 they formed the Union republicaine de langue francaise. "It held, for example, that the labor question could never be settled without full equality for Negroes." [page 41]

(Other International members in the U.S. were against Reconstruction and opposed the radical Republicans with a call for a labor party. Thus the National Colored Labor Convention in December 1869 voted to send a delegate to the fifth congress of the First International, but in 1871 the (Black) National Labor Union withdrew from affiliation after the International voted to convene a labor

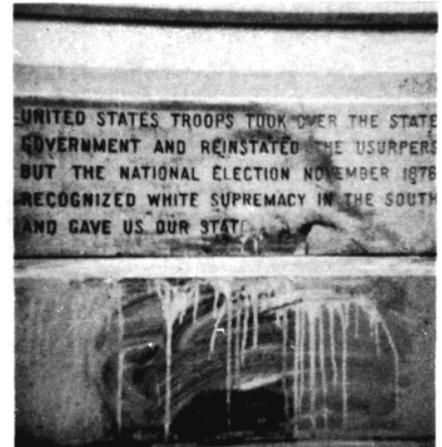
party convention in 1871.)

Perhaps the most explicit and conscious link between the two revolutions was Section 15, admitted to the International in July 1871, which had grown out of the International and Republican Club of New Orleans. The Club's newspaper, *La Commune*, vigorously defended the Communards. Minutes of the First International's General Council refer to the paper and to correspondence with the Club. On October 10, 1871, Benjamin LeMoussu, a French worker and member of the Paris Commune, was appointed the General Council's corresponding secretary for the French-speaking sections in America. [See *The General Council of the First International (Volume 4) 1870-1871 — Minutes*, Moscow: 1974, and *The Hague Congress of the First International, September 2-7, 1872 — Minutes and Documents*, Moscow: 1976.]

One thing is certain: Black Reconstruction and the Paris Commune shared a similar fate — both



This monument to white supremacy still stands in New Orleans.



drowned in blood. Today, at the foot of Canal Street in New Orleans stands a tall monument to white supremacy, commemorating the members of the Crescent City White League who participated in the coup d'etat of September 14, 1874. Inscriptions on the statue say:

In the signal victory of the 14th of September, we must acknowledge with profound gratitude the hand of a kind and merciful God . . . McEnery and Penn having been elected governor and lieutenant governor by the white people, were duly installed by this overthrow of carpetbag government

ousting the usurpers, Gov. Kellogg (white), Lt. Gov. Antoine (colored).

United States troops took over the state government and reinstated the usurpers but the national election November 1876 recognized white supremacy and gave us our state.

(A plaque on the ground beside the obelisk added as a footnote in 1974 says that although the battle and the monument are "important parts of New Orleans history," its message is "contrary to the philosophy and beliefs of present-day New Orleans." Nevertheless it still stands.)

It is difficult for me to believe

that intelligent Marxist scholars really believe that the bourgeoisie backed these right-wing terrorists simply to overthrow bourgeois democracy; the rulers must have perceived a real threat to their authority. The real problem is the "American blindspot" of which DuBois wrote. Few white Marxists seem willing to accept the notion that newly emancipated Black Southerners could have embarked on a revolution far in advance of their white fellow workers of the industrial North. More than a century has passed since the final overthrow of Black Reconstruction; it is high time someone examined in detail its full revolutionary implications.

Robert Sayre, 'Goldmann and Modern Realism: Introduction to the Balcony Article'
Lucien Goldmann, 'Genet's The Balcony: A Realist Play'
Stefan Morawski, 'Historicism and the Philosophy of Art'
Alan W. Bamett, 'Jose Hernandez Delgado: The New Art of the Mexican Revolution'
Marc Zimmerman, 'Exchange and Production: Structuralist and Marxist Approaches to Literary Theory'
Ariel Dorfman, 'The Invisible Chile: Three Years of Cultural Resistance'
Marc Ferro, 'La grande illusion: Its Divergent Receptions in Europe'
Andrew Turner, 'Ballads Moribundus' (28 drawings)
William Hartley, 'Lambras: A Vision of Hell in the Third World'
James Goodwin, 'The Object(ive)s of Cinema: Vertov (Factography) and Eisenstein (Ideography)'
G. L. Ulmen, 'Aesthetics in a "Disenchanted World"'

Louis Aragon, 'John Heartfield and Revolutionary Beauty'
Kenneth Coutts-Smith, 'The Political Art of Klaus Staack' (with over 60 reproductions)
The Image as Weapon: Interview with, and Photomontages by, Christer Themptander'
Gregory Renault, 'Over the Rainbow: Dialect and Ideology in The Wizard of Oz'
Alberto Asor Rosa, 'Gramsci and Italian Cultural History'
Stegan Heym, 'The Indifferent Man' (short story)
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