

Political Marxism: A Refutation

Alp Yücel Kaya

Introduction

Political Marxists used to focus on England to discuss the origins of capitalism and/or capitalist development; in recent years they enlarged the geographical spectrum and launched case studies to continue to do so in order to claim a universal character for their theoretical argument.¹ They resume their theoretical starting point as well as their critical perspective towards the Marxist literature examining capitalist development and bourgeois revolutions as follows:

Marx's early work, and especially the *German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto*, accepted the narrative of historical development promoted by liberal historians and political economists. With the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, however, Marx broke with the liberal paradigm, offering a radical critique of classical political

¹ Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism, Studies in Class-Structure, Economic Development, and Political Conflict 1620-1877*, Brill, 2011; Xavier Lafrance and Charles Post (eds.), *Case Studies in the Origins of Capitalism*, Springer International Publishing, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019; Xavier Lafrance, *The Making of Capitalism in France, Class Structures, Economic Development, the State and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1750–1914*, Brill, 2019; Eren Düzgün, *Capitalism, Jacobinism and International Relations, Revisiting Turkish Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, 2022; Xavier Lafrance and Stephen Miller, *Transition to Capitalism in Modern France, Primitive Accumulation and Markets from the Old Regime to the Post-WWII Era*, Brill, 2024; Javier Moreno Zacarés, *Residential Capitalism, Rent Extraction and Capitalist Production in Modern Spain (1833–2023)*, Routledge, 2024.

economy's notion of 'primitive accumulation' as the gateway to capitalism.² For nearly eight decades after the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, the theorists of the Second and Third International ignored, for [the] most part, the "late Marx's" account of the origins of capitalism. The discussion of the origins of capitalism after Marx reverted back to his earlier formulations was based on Smith's version of the "commercialization model". Most post-Marx discussions (Plekhanov, Kautsky, Lenin, Trotsky, etc.) of revolutions in the less developed regions of the world—initially Tsarist Russia and later the Global South as a whole—revolved around whether or not the "bourgeois-democratic revolution" had been completed in these areas. While drawing radically different strategic conclusions about the possibilities and limits of working class struggles in these societies, all of the participants in the discussion assumed key elements of the "commercialization model". All embraced the vision that capitalism had developed in the urban 'interstices' of the feudal (or other pre-capitalist societies), diffusing to the countryside with the growth of markets, setting the stage for a "bourgeois-democratic" revolution which would destroy the remnants of pre-capitalist social relations through a radical land reform, parliamentary democracy and (where necessary) the achievement of national independence.³

This periodization in the works of Marx and subsequent differentiation by his "young" and "mature" works has such an important place that Political Marxists prefer to call themselves "*Capital*-centric Marxists." In this article, we do not focus on Political Marxists' or *Capital*-centric Marxists' exposition of the origins of capitalism; rather, we focus on their starting point, which serves as a theoretical basis in their exposition of the origins of capitalism, that is, periodization and differentiation of Marx's works and their immediate corollary, repudiation of bourgeois revolutions by Political Marxism.

Within these limits, let us first enumerate our objections to Political Marxists: first we argue that the perspective of historical materialism that "young" Marx developed did not follow Adam Smith ("commercialization model" or four-stage theory of history) as Political Marxists argued but rather the German Historical School of Law; Marx's critical perspective led however him to supersede and conserve the formulations of the historical school of law as his critique of political economy superseded and conserved the formulations of the classical economists. By emphasizing maturation in the form of continuity and not rupture in Marx's works, we assert that thinking about the French Revolution led him to formulate the basic premises of the theory of permanent revolution and the theory of uneven and combined development. We do not concur with the view that Marx accepted the narrative of historical development promoted by bourgeois historians, as Marx's relationship with bourgeois historians is analogous to his relationship with bourgeois economists. His approach to historical materialism is founded on the critique of bourgeois historians. Furthermore, to reduce the concept of the bourgeois revolution, which gained prominence with Marx, to a simple struggle between the two classes

² Lafrance, *The Making of Capitalism in France*, p. 4-5.

³ Xavier Lafrance and Charles Post, "Introduction", in *Case Studies in the Origins of Capitalism* ed. by Xavier Lafrance and Charles Post, Springer International Publishing, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 9.

(bourgeoisie-aristocracy) is to adopt a limited perspective when examining Marx's work. Indeed, Marx considered the struggles of the working people, *sans culottes*, *bras-nus*, and *Enragés* in his analysis of the French Revolution. We also contend that post-Marx Marxists followed the "commercialization model" and consequently baptized "bourgeois revolution." As we shall observe, the concept of the bourgeois revolution that Lafrance and Post refer to here was constructed by nobody but by Plekhanov at the end of the 19th century in the context of the French Revolution. It cannot be asserted that this construction was taken over by Kautsky, Lenin and Trotsky; it has simply been the Mensheviks' linear interpretation of history constructed by Plekhanov.

In this article we first discuss the article of Robert Brenner, a prominent figure in Political Marxism, entitled "Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism" which sets up for Political Marxists the above-mentioned starting theoretical point. We study then *The German Ideology* to unearth the theoretical basis of Marx's historical materialism and Marx and Engels' works on the 1848 revolutions to expose the place of class struggle in it. Secondly, we examine Marx's relationship with the liberal historians. After recalling his familiarity with the French Revolution, we analyze his references to bourgeois historians and demonstrate his critique of bourgeois historiography, which parallels his criticism of political economy. To illustrate this point, we focus on Augustin Thierry, whom Marx refers to as "the father of the class struggle," and investigate Marx's overlooked commentary on Thierry. Subsequently, we discuss the concept of the bourgeois revolution and its political implications in Plekhanov, who, in the post-Marx era, accorded Thierry a distinctive position and presented a simplified and formalized account of historical materialism. In the concluding section we evaluate Marx's contribution to historical materialism by identifying key sources, beyond the works of bourgeois historians, that he consulted regarding the French Revolution. Through this analysis, we aim to separate the wheat from the chaff by exposing some distortions of Political Marxists.

Brenner's discussion of Marx's models on the transition to capitalism

The texts that establish the position of Political Marxism regarding periodization and differentiation of Marx's works originate from Robert Brenner.⁴ While trying to separate the wheat from the chaff here, it would be useful to address Brenner's perspective that underlines the supposedly liberal perspective that young Marx followed and rejects the concept of the bourgeois revolution. This we do especially in order to root out approaches that feed Political Marxists.

The main problematic in Brenner's research agenda is to develop a universal

4 Robert Brenner, "Marx's First Model of the Transition to Capitalism", Bernard Chavance (ed.), *Marx en perspective. Actes du colloque organisé par l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales*, Paris, January 1983, Paris, EHESS, 1985, pp. 203-230; Robert Brenner, "Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism", A.L. Beier, D. Canadine, J.M. Rosenheim (eds.), *The First Modern Society, Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 271-304. Ellen Meiksins Wood, George Comninel, Benno Teschke, Charles Post and those referred to in the first footnote are other Political Marxists who built on these texts.

narrative of the transition to capitalism. Within this framework, in his earlier works he rejected the commercial model (Neo-Smithian) in the development of capitalism in Britain by comparing it with developments in Eastern Europe, and the demographic model (neo-Malthusian) with developments in France, emphasizing that class struggle was the determining factor in all three cases.⁵ He subsequently extended this perspective to Catalonia, the Netherlands, and China.⁶ However, his attempt to explain universal development dynamics based on the comparative method revealed that bourgeois revolutions have no impact on the transition to capitalism. Within this context, it is necessary to examine the origins of Political Marxism's rejection of the concept of the bourgeois revolution and to address Brenner's claim (in the context of the debate on the bourgeois revolution in Britain) that Marx's perspective of historical materialism developed in two distinct periods and in different ways.⁷

According to Brenner, there are two incompatible models on the transition to capitalism, both arising from Marx's work. The first is the model developed by Marx in *The German Ideology* and *The Poverty of Philosophy* and set out in *The Communist Manifesto*. The origin of this model, according to Brenner, is Adam Smith's theory of historical development (four-stage theory of history).⁸ It is based on the self-development of the division of labor: the division of labor determines modes of subsistence, changing them as it develops; in other words, the division of labor determines the level of development of the productive forces, but it also develops with the expanding market, determining "the social relations of class and property." The transition from feudalism to capitalism is brought about by the development of world trade, which is constantly growing within the old feudal society, and the maturation of bourgeois society in the process.⁹

The second model is based on Marx's later works, *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, although he did not extensively expound upon them. The fundamental tenet of this model is the mode of production, elucidated by the concept of the "social-property relation," which facilitates and structures social reproduction. The transition from feudalism to capitalism emerges from the conflicted reproduction of the class of peasant producers who individually possess their means of subsistence, on the one hand, and the lordly ruling and exploiting class who reproduce themselves by

5 Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe", *Past and Present*, vol. 70, no 1, 1976, pp. 30-75; Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism", *New Left Review*, no 104, 1977, pp. 25-92; Robert Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism" *Past and Present*, vol 97, no 1, 1982, pp. 16-113.

6 Robert Brenner, "The Rises and Declines of Serfdom in Medieval and Early Modern Europe", M. L. Bush (ed.), *Serfdom & Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, Harlow: Longman, 1996; Robert Brenner, "The Low Country in the Transition to Capitalism", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, vol. 1, no 2, 2001, pp. 169-241; Robert Brenner and Christopher Isett, "England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta: Property Relations, Microeconomics, and Patterns of Development", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 61, no 2, 2002, pp. 609-662.

7 Brenner, "Bourgeois Revolution..."; "Marx's First Model...".

8 Brenner here follows the analysis of Ronald Meek in *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

9 Brenner, "Bourgeois Revolution...", p. 272.

extracting surplus from peasant producers through extra-economic compulsion, on the other. The primary objective of this model is to elucidate “the so-called primitive accumulation.” However, this happens not in the context of the accumulation of investment funds, as proposed by Adam Smith, but rather involves the dissolution of the fundamental social-property relations that constitute the feudal mode of production through a series of social processes, the transformation of feudal society by the feudal overlords’ loss of capacity to extract rent through extra-economic compulsion, and the peasants’ separation from their possession of the means of subsistence.¹⁰

Brenner posits that the first model, based on the growth of the division of labor, elucidates the self-development of bourgeois society and the dissolution of feudalism through the rise of trade and the growth of productive forces, thereby leading to the characterization of the English Civil War as a bourgeois revolution. He subsequently summarizes the causal relationship as follows¹¹:

Schematically speaking, then, we get the following theory: the development of the productive forces determines the successive stages in the evolution of the mode of subsistence, in accord with the following causal chain: development of the productive forces → development of the division of labour (specialization and co-operation) → form of division between mental and manual labour → nature of class and property relations (distribution of material, instrument and product of labour) → form of state.¹²

Brenner proposes that Marx followed liberal historians in addressing the bourgeois revolution within the framework of this model:

Finally, in the *Communist Manifesto* and other works of the later 1840s, following lines initially laid out by liberal French historians of the early part of the nineteenth century – in particular, François Mignet, Augustin Thierry and François Guizot – Marx completed the foregoing schema with his notion of the bourgeois revolution *per se*. Thus, Marx has the bourgeoisie and absolute monarchy entering into alliance in the early modern period in order to destroy their common enemy, the parasitic feudal nobility. Then, as the bourgeoisie grew in strength, the absolute monarchy gravitated back toward the old nobility... What remained of feudalism was now effectively constituted by the absolutist state itself... The state’s absolutist levies constituted a fetter upon the bourgeoisie’s free enjoyment of its property and its development of the productive forces. The bourgeois revolution thus functioned to break these external political-parasitic barriers and to facilitate the continuation of the ongoing economic evolution.¹³

According to Brenner, however, in the mechanistically-deterministic theory

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 272-273.

¹¹ Conversely, the second model addresses the limitations of the first model by emphasizing social-property relations, elucidating the specific aspect of capitalist development in England (through the evolution of agrarian capitalism) (ibid., p. 273). This discussion will not encompass the second model within the scope of our present topic. In the subsequent section, when examining the model, the reader is directed to the framework of the first model.

¹² Ibid, p. 276.

¹³ Ibid, p. 278-279.

of transition posited by Marx's model there is in fact no room for a bourgeois revolution: the model starts from the development of bourgeois society in the towns, attributes the overcoming of feudalism to the development of trade, and the question of transition from one society to another does not exist, since bourgeois society develops on its own and leads to the dissolution of feudalism, a bourgeois revolution is hardly necessary.¹⁴ Brenner argues that the root of this contradiction lies in the fact that Marx, in his historical studies of the 1840s, closely followed Adam Smith, who was fueled by the mechanical materialism of the 18th century Enlightenment.¹⁵

Brenner summarizes Adam Smith's historical analysis as follows: In Book 1 of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith addressed the specialization of individuals driven by self-interest and their engagement in exchange relations (the division of labor and the development of the market), and in his earlier works he was one of the initial proponents of the four-stage theory of history. This progressive theory traces the historical evolution of modes of subsistence (from hunter-gathering to pastoralism, to settled agriculture and commercial society). Commercial society initially manifested itself in the ancient world but was disrupted by barbarian invasions, after which human nature was able to reassert itself, order was restored, and trade and towns flourished. In this context, Smith discovers a bourgeois revolution of his own. The towns and monarchy form an alliance against nobility; the towns are liberated from the burden of feudal control and levies, and they attain their freedom. With these obstacles removed, commercial society follows its natural development. In rural areas, nobles emancipate their servants to obtain money to cover increasing consumption. Some customary tenants on land are transformed into commercial farmers under competitive leases, while others are freed to migrate to cities. Consequently, trade establishes the absolute property of land by nobility and, ultimately, capitalist property relations.¹⁶

According to Brenner, it is evident that the historical materialist perspective developed by Marx in the 1840s aligns with the theoretical framework of Adam Smith. Both Smith and Marx conceptualize the historical evolution and dynamics of economic development in terms of competition and trade, as well as the subsequent expansion of the division of labor and the evolution of modes of subsistence. Smith's bourgeois revolution marked the inception of economic development through the alliance of urban classes and the monarchy against the nobility; for Marx, the classical bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries culminated this process. Nevertheless, in both theoretical frameworks, a revolution against feudal structures is deemed necessary for the development of urban industry. In the 1840s, influenced by liberal historians, Marx emphasized the significance of the medieval communal revolution in the development of bourgeois society.¹⁷

However, how did the four-stage theory of history and the concept of the bourgeois

14 Ibid, p. 280.

15 Ibid, p. 280.

16 Brenner, "Bourgeois Revolution...", p. 280-281.

17 Ibid, p. 282-283.

revolution come together? Brenner underlines that Hume, whose connection with Smith is well known, had a strong influence on French liberal historiography (with which Marx was familiar), especially in terms of his originating of the idea of the bourgeois revolution.¹⁸

On the other hand, according to Brenner, in Marx's model, class and property relations depend on the development of the forces of production and the degree of development of the division of labor, so class relations and struggles are not independent, but rather dependent variables, playing a passive role. Therefore, Marx's narrative does not differ from that of Smith:

The crucial point, in this respect, is that Marx's understanding of the place of class and property relationship is, in these earlier works of his, explicitly *techno-functional*. Thus, the structure of roles within the labour process (co-operation within the unit) is technically determined by the nature of the productive process; in turn, the structure of roles within the labour process (co-operation within the unit), by virtue of its determining the division between mental and manual labour, itself constitutes the structure of class relations; as a result, the individuals who constitute classes do so by virtue of their occupation of technically-constituted roles within the labour process. The evolution of class and property relations is thus determined by the evolution of the labour process (co-operation within the unit). In consequence, despite appearances, class relations and class struggles occupy a passive and determined position, rather than an active and determining role, within Marx's early conception of historical evolution. Marx was, of course, at pains to bring out the nature of the class struggles which mark each stage of his evolutionary schema. But, in the end, these struggles are merely effects of the essential and inexorable development of the division of labour via the progress of the productive forces. For it is the development of the productive forces which, by virtue of its determining the growth of the division of labour, determines the evolution of class and property relations. By making class and property relations mere appendages of the division of labour, Marx ends up elaborating, rather than breaking from, Smith's historical materialism.¹⁹

At this stage, Robert Brenner appears to lack a comprehensive understanding of Marx's critique of political economy. Revisiting Sungur Savran's analysis, it is imperative to emphasize that Smith, by equating capitalist society with commercial society in the fourth stage within the framework of his four-stage theory of history, perceives and analyzes capitalism as a distinct mode of production with equivalent status to other modes of production. According to Savran, "[t]he error of political economy is that it starts out from the assumption that capitalist relations are *adequate to human nature* and therefore universal and eternal"²⁰; in their view, other forms of productive activities and livelihood systems in the four stages have become obsolete due to their incongruence with human nature and inability to fulfill human potential. "The most striking outcome of this mentality is Adam Smith's

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 283.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 284-285.

²⁰ Sungur Savran, "Critique of Political Economy" in Sungur Savran and E. Ahmet Tonak, *In the Tracks of Marx's Capital, Debates in Marxian Political Economy and Lessons for 21st Century Capitalism*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2024, p. 65.

eternalisation of capitalism by postulating that exchange is a precondition for the division of labour and is intrinsically tied to the innate inclinations of human nature.” However, the foundation of Marx’s critique of political economy rests on the treatment of capitalism not as a universal and eternal mode of production in accordance with human nature, but as a historically determined mode of production with a life process that is finite.²¹

Nevertheless, certain scholars, such as Ronald Meek, were able to interpret the four-stage theory of history of Smith (and other members of the Scottish Historical School such as Adam Ferguson, William Robertson and John Millar), along with Smith’s labor theory of value as the foundation of historical materialism. Brenner, drawing upon Meek’s work, also posited that Marx conducted an analysis following Smith’s methodology. As Savran observes, when viewed through the lens of Meek and Brenner’s interpretation, it appears that Adam Smith could be considered as a pre-Marxian Marxist.²²

Did Marx adhere to the four-stage theory of history?

At this point, we should raise the question: Did Marx indeed adhere to the four-stage theory of history?²³ To address this question, it is necessary to examine Norman Levine’s work, which provides a competent critique of Meek’s approach.²⁴ Levine posits that the intellectual origins of Marx’s historical materialism lie in the German Historical School of Law (and Barthold-Georg Niebuhr) rather than the Scottish Enlightenment. Although approaching the subject from a different angle, Levine, similar to Savran, emphasizes that Marx prioritizes the relations and mode of production over the division of labor and exchange in historical materialism. Marx’s analysis, which gives precedence to production over exchange, is evident in the following passage from *The German Ideology*:

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life.

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on

21 Ibid, p. 66-67.

22 Ibid, p. 65.

23 In this context, it is important to emphasize that like us Nygaard, in a significant study on this topic (*History and the Formation of Marxism*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2022, p. 207-221), examines Marx’s relationship with bourgeois historians in the context of critical political economy but unlike us, he adopts the same position as Brenner regarding the four-stage theory of history. It is noteworthy that although both Neil Davidson and Alex Callinicos critique Brenner (and other Political Marxists), they concur with Brenner’s assessment of the impact of the four-stage theory of history on *the German Ideology* and Marx (see Neil Davidson, *How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012, pp. 114 ff.; Neil Davidson, “How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions?”, *We Cannot Escape History: States and Revolution*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015, p. 26; Alex Callinicos, “Bourgeois Revolutions and Historical Materialism”, *International Socialism*, no 43, 1989, p. 162).

24 Norman Levine, “The German Historical School of Law and the Origins of Historical Materialism”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 48, no 3, 1987, p. 431-451.

the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce.

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production.²⁵

In this theoretical framework, the division of labor within a society characterized by production also encompasses a contradiction between individual interests:

Further, the division of labour also implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the common interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another. And indeed, this common interest does not exist merely in the imagination, as the “general interest”, but first of all in reality, as the mutual interdependence of the individuals among whom the labour is divided...

And finally, the division of labour offers us the first example of the fact that, as long as man remains in naturally evolved society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him.²⁶

Property relations lie at the root of the contradiction of interests, so focusing on the relations and modes of production leads us to the relations and modes of property. This approach, which Brenner takes within the framework of the concept of “social-property relations,” can be clearly seen not only in *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, as Brenner argues, but previously in *The German Ideology*. According to Levine:

In Marx’s *German Ideology* (1845-46) the two basic premises of historical materialism were articulated for the first time: the contradiction of the means and mode of production, and the determining influence of the “form of ownership” upon an economic formation. Of the two basic premises, my remarks will be directed exclusively to the question of the “form of ownership.”²⁷

Marx elucidates how modes of property determine social relations in *The German Ideology* as follows:

The various stages of development in the division of labour are just so many different forms of property, i.e., the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, in-

25 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “The German Ideology, Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets (1845-1846)”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works (MECW)*, vol. 5, p. 31-32.

26 Ibid, p. 45, 46.

27 Levine, “The German Historical School...”, p. 433.

strument and product of labour.²⁸

In this framework, Marx conceptualizes the first form of property as tribal property, extant at an underdeveloped stage of production; the division of labor is limited, comprising an extension of the natural division of labor within the family unit; the community consists of tribal chiefs, tribal members, and slaves. The second form of property is ancient communal and state property, which emerged when multiple tribes coalesced and established settlements in urban centers where slavery persisted. Concurrent with communal property (initially in movable property, subsequently in immovable property), private property also evolves. Class relations between citizens and slaves are relatively well-developed, as is the division of labor. The third form of property is feudal property or estate property, which, akin to tribal and communal property, is predicated on a community that is predominantly organized in rural areas; this community is opposed not by slaves, but by serf peasants in the countryside, and by the personal labor of the individual who dominates the journeymen with his own capital in the urban setting; there exists a dichotomy between urban and rural areas, accompanied by a limited division of labor.²⁹

Levine emphasizes that Marx's historical materialist perspective in *The German Ideology*, as evidenced by the provided quotations, diverges significantly from the four-stage theory of history:

The four-stage theory differed from historical materialism because it was not an analysis of different "forms of ownership." Scottish conjectural history, following the tradition of natural jurisprudence, was basically concerned with property, either as flocks, lands, commodities, capital, and how these different stages of property produced laws which acted to preserve individuality and then political institutions, which were reflections of the private self and of its right to occupancy. A reading of the passage from *The German Ideology* indicates that Marx was concerned not with property but rather with various "forms of ownership" and how they influenced an entire economic formation. *The German Ideology* demonstrates that the focus of historical materialism was placed upon comparative economic anthropology, a study of several "forms of ownership" and how the relations of ownership imparted unique structures to different economic formations.³⁰

However, what is the origin of this perspective, which focuses on the modes of property? Marx commenced his legal education at the University of Bonn in 1835 and subsequently continued at the University of Berlin in 1836. During this period, the University of Berlin was a center of jurisprudential controversy and debate. On one side, the philosophical school following Hegel, represented by Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut, proposed universal and rational codification based on natural law theory, emphasizing historical and social ruptures exemplified by the French Civil Code of 1804. On the other side, Friedrich Karl von Savigny, since the 1810s, had led the historical school of law in opposition to the philosophical school. This

28 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology...", p. 32.

29 Ibid. p. 32-34

30 Levine, "The German Historical School...", p. 436.

approach sought origins of codification in the historical development of societies, traditions, customs, and beliefs, attributing particular significance to Roman law and advancing a historical understanding of law that underscored historical and social continuity. During his education, Marx initially aligned with the historical school before shifting towards the philosophical school, developing a critique from a Hegelian perspective.³¹ Levine posits that Marx's Hegelian criticism, which he developed in the article "Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law," published in 1842, culminated in the criticism of idealism in *The German Ideology* in 1846. Subsequently, Marx distanced himself from Hegel and embarked on a materialist interpretation of history, paradoxically through the lens of the historical school of law.³²

Within this theoretical framework, it is evident that Savigny's treatise on possession³³ constitutes the foundational text of the historical law school, which underpins Marx's emphasis on modes of property in *The German Ideology*. In this seminal work, Savigny primarily addresses the rights that emanate from possession rather than those that engender possession. Specifically, possession is examined in the context of interpersonal relationships rather than the relationship between persons and things. This analysis is conducted through the lens of the distinction between civil possession, possession, and natural possession in Roman property law, as well as the concepts of acquisition by prescription (*usucapio*) and interdiction, which pertains to the protection of possession. Savigny's conceptualization of possession is manifested in *The German Ideology*, albeit in a manner that both supersedes and conserves the original formulation:

The first form of property, in the ancient world as in the Middle Ages, is tribal property, determined with the Romans chiefly by war, with the Germans by the rearing of cattle. In the case of the ancient peoples, since several tribes live together in one city, tribal property appears as state property, and the right of the individual to it as mere "possession" which, however, like tribal property as a whole, is confined to landed property only. Real private property began with the ancients, as with modern nations, with movable property. (Slavery and community) (*dominium ex jure Quiritum*).—In the case of the nations which grew out of the Middle Ages, tribal property evolved through various stages—feudal landed property, corporative movable property, capital invested in manufacture—to modern capital, determined by large-scale industry and universal competition, i.e., pure private property, which has cast off all semblance of a communal institution and has shut out the state from any influence on the development of property. To this modern private property corresponds the modern state, which, purchased gradually by the owners of property by means of taxation, has fallen entirely into their hands through the national debt, and its existence has become wholly dependent on the commercial credit which the owners of property, the bourgeois, extend to it, as reflected in the rise and fall of government securities on the stock exchange.

31 Alp Yücel Kaya, "Genç Marx ve 'Odun Hırsızlığı Kanunu Tartışmaları'" ["Young Marx and 'Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood'"], Sevinç Orhan, Serhat Koloğlugil ve Altuğ Yalçıntaş (derl.), *İktisatta Bir Hayale: Karl Marx*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2012.

32 Levine, "The German Historical School...", p. 444.

33 Friedrich Karl von Savigny, *Traité de la possession d'après les principes du droit romain*, (transl. by Jules Beving) Société belge de librairie Hauman et comp., Brussels, 1840 [1803].

By the mere fact that it is a *class* and no longer an *estate*, the bourgeoisie is forced to organise itself no longer locally, but nationally, and to give a general form to its average interests. Through the emancipation of private property from the community, the state has become a separate entity, alongside and outside civil society; but it is nothing more than the form of organisation which the bourgeois are compelled to adopt, both for internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests.³⁴

Is class struggle a dependent variable in Marx's perspective of historical materialism?

Let us now put aside the claim that Marx's perspective of historical materialism follows the four-stage theory of history and look at Brenner's other claim that Marx recognized the class struggle as a dependent variable in the 1840s. Evidence from the Kreuznach notebooks indicates that Marx was studying and annotating a book written in 1818 by Jacques-Charles Bailleul³⁵, a Jacobin-turned-Conventionist (following a line closely aligned with that of the Girondins), in which Bailleul (critiquing Germaine de Staël's work on the French Revolution) defends the Revolution.³⁶ Marx, in his analysis of Bailleul's book, delineates the distinctions between the property law of the feudal regime and the new property order established by the Revolution, interpreting this in terms of class struggle as follows:

Under the feudal system, land ownership was everything: its organization constituted the social order; it determined who was to command and who was to obey; you were free or slave, master or serf, lord, or villain, depending on whether you were born in the castle or next door; all rights were attached to property; and nothing to man. The first concession made to the serfs was a mortal blow to feudalism: it detached man, who was nothing, from the soil, which was everything. This first measure gave rise to the battle between feudalism and humanity: humanity demanded rights attributed exclusively to property. The Revolution judged this great trial; the result was that, instead of property having all rights over man, it was man who acquired all rights over property: from then on, the regime of reason or laws was substituted for the regime of feudalism. By a necessary consequence, the principle of order in society had to change its nature, just as rights had changed their place.³⁷

The concept of class struggle is also addressed in *The German Ideology*, wherein Marx explicitly identifies the classes involved and posits this struggle as the driving force of history. In this context, it becomes evident that Marx does not set the bourgeoisie against the nobility, as Political Marxists think, but rather the serfs:

The production which these productive forces could provide was insufficient for

³⁴ Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology...", p. 89-90.

³⁵ *Examen critique de l'ouvrage posthume de Madame de Staël ayant pour titre « Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française »*, Paris: chez Ant. Bailleul, 1818.

³⁶ Claude Mazauric, "Aux sources de la connaissance par Marx de la Révolution française: note sur Jacques-Charles Bailleul, Conventionnel de la Seine-Inférieure et Historien de la Révolution", *Annales de Normandie*, vol. 39, no 2, 1989, p. 219- 229.

³⁷ Quoted by Mazauric, "Aux sources ..." p. 226 from *MEGA (Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe)*, vol. 4, p. 2-63, 102-103, 166 (« Cahiers de Kreuznach », 1-5, 1843-1845).

the whole of society and made development possible only if some persons satisfied their needs at the expense of others, and therefore some—the minority—obtained the monopoly of development, while others—the majority—owing to the constant struggle to satisfy their most essential needs, were for the time being (i.e., until the creation of new revolutionary productive forces) excluded from any development. Thus, society has hitherto always developed within the framework of a contradiction—in antiquity the contradiction between free men and slaves, in the Middle Ages that between nobility and serfs, in modern times that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.³⁸

In *The German Ideology*, Marx sees class struggle as the locomotive of history, but he also identifies differences in the rhythms of development and the resulting combination of old and new forms, that is, the dynamics of uneven and combined development³⁹:

Thus all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse. Incidentally, to lead to collisions in a country, this contradiction need not necessarily have reached its extreme limit in that particular country. The competition with industrially more advanced countries, brought about by the expansion of international intercourse, is sufficient to produce a similar contradiction in countries with a less advanced industry (e.g., the latent proletariat in Germany brought into more prominence by the competition of English industry).⁴⁰

The clash of old and new forms also triggers the dynamics of the permanent revolution. It should also be noted that Marx's perspective of permanent revolution in the context of the developments in Germany in 1848 was inspired by the French Revolution. As Michael Löwy underlines, Marx and Engels, in their address to the Communist League in 1850, drew lessons from the 1789-1794 phase of the French Revolution and assigned the task of permanent revolution to proletarians in the German revolution⁴¹:

The first point on which the bourgeois democrats will come into conflict with the workers will be the abolition of feudalism. As in the first French Revolution, the petty bourgeois will give the feudal lands to the peasants as free property, that is to say, try to leave the rural proletariat in existence and form a petty-bourgeois peasant class, which will go through the same cycle of impoverishment and indebtedness which the French peasant is now still caught in. The workers must oppose this plan in the interest of the rural proletariat and in their own interest. They must demand that the confiscated feudal property remain state property and

38 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology...", p. 431-432.

39 In Brenner's work, as in all Political Marxists' works, capitalism and pre-capitalism are like night and day. Pre-capitalism is dominated by extra-economic forces and capitalism by economic forces. Capitalism emerges as a result of class struggle, but there is no room for class transformations, the coexistence of old and new forms, or the leaps that class struggles give rise to. In this framework, we must say that we are faced with a linear reading of history that ignores the dynamics of uneven and combined development and permanent revolution.

40 Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology...", p. 74-75.

41 Mihael Löwy, "Marx et la Révolution française : la 'poésie du passé'", *Permanence(s) de la Révolution*, Paris: Éditions la Brèche, 1989, p. 245-246.

be converted into workers' colonies cultivated by the associated rural proletariat with all the advantages of large-scale agriculture, through which the principle of common property immediately obtains a firm basis in the midst of the tottering bourgeois property relations. Just as the democrats combine with the peasants so must the workers combine with the rural proletariat.⁴²

As far as the workers are concerned, it is certain above all that they are to remain wage-workers as before; the democratic petty bourgeois only desire better wages and a more secure existence for the workers and hope to achieve this through partial employment by the state and through charity measures; in short, they hope to bribe the workers by more or less concealed alms and to sap their revolutionary vigour by making their position tolerable for the moment. The demands of the petty-bourgeois democrats here summarised are not put forward by all of their factions and only very few of their members consider these demands in their aggregate as a definite aim. The further individual people or factions among them go, the more of these demands will they make their own, and those few who see their own programme in what has been outlined above would believe that thereby they have put forward the utmost that can be demanded from the revolution. But these demands can in no wise suffice for the party of the proletariat. While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, ***it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent***, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one.⁴³

After all, “[t]he social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future.”⁴⁴ In the face of the bourgeoisie’s highly probable betrayal, the revolution must undergo continuous development, radicalization, and deepening. Failure to do so may result in a “revolution from above,”⁴⁵ as evidenced by the developments in Germany, wherein the ascending bourgeoisie reconciles with the ruling classes of the old order and suppresses the working classes.⁴⁶ At this point, it would be prudent to consider Engels’ analysis of the evolution of the 1848 Revolution in France:

42 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Address of the Central Authority to the League”, *MECW*, vol. 10, p. 284-285.

43 Ibid, p. 280-281 (our emphasis).

44 Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”, *MECW*, vol. 11, p. 106.

45 On the question of “revolution from above” or “passive revolution” we will take a brief look at Engels here, but in order to keep the subject on its main axis, we will content ourselves with referring to Gramsci: Antonio Gramsci, “Passive Revolution, Caesarism, Fascism”, in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, David Forgacs (ed.) with a foreword by Eric J. Hobsbawm, New York: New York University Press, 2000, p. 246-274.

46 Sungur Savran, *Türkiye’de Sınıf Mücadeleleri [Class Struggles in Turkey]*, vol. 1, 1908-1980, 5th edition, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2022 [1992], p. 74-75.

[In France a] bourgeoisie split into two dynastic-monarchist sections [the Legitimists and the Orleanists], a bourgeoisie, however, which demanded, above all, peace and security for its financial operations, faced by a proletariat vanquished, indeed, but still a menace, a proletariat around which petty bourgeois and peasants grouped themselves more and more -the continual threat of a violent outbreak, which, nevertheless, offered absolutely no prospect of a final solution -such was the situation, as if made-to-measure for the coup d'état of the third, the pseudo-democratic pretender, Louis Bonaparte. On December 2, 1851, by means of the army, he put an end to the tense situation and secured Europe internal tranquility, only to confer upon it the blessing of a new era of wars. ***The period of revolutions from below was conducted for the time being; there followed a period of revolutions from above.***⁴⁷

When Marx emphasizes in an article published on 15th of December 1848 in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* the “secondary” nature of the March (1848) Revolution in Prussia in comparison to the French Revolution of 1789, through which was established the rule of German bourgeoisie that “developed so sluggishly, timidly and slowly,” “did not represent the interests of a new society against an old one, but renewed interests within an obsolete society” and “was inclined to betray the people and to compromise with the crowned representative of the old society”⁴⁸, he is describing nothing but the second phase of revolutions that Engels would later (in 1895) describe as the “revolution from above.”

The Prussian March revolution [1848] was intended to *establish* nominally a constitutional monarchy and to *establish* actually the rule of the bourgeoisie. Far from being a *European revolution* it was merely a stunted after-effect of a European revolution in a backward country. Instead of being ahead of its century, it was over half a century behind its time. From the very outset it was a *secondary* phenomenon, and it is well known that secondary diseases are harder to cure and at the same time cause more harm than the primary diseases do. It was not a question of establishing a new society, but of resurrecting in Berlin a society that had expired in Paris.⁴⁹

47 Friedrich Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850 [1895]”, *MECW*, vol. 27, p. 512-513 (our emphasis).

48 “The German bourgeoisie developed so sluggishly, timidly and slowly that at the moment when it menacingly confronted feudalism and absolutism, it saw menacingly confronting it the proletariat and all sections of the middle class whose interests and ideas were related to those of the proletariat. The German bourgeoisie found not just one class *behind* it, but all Europe hostilely *facing* it. Unlike the French bourgeoisie of 1789, the Prussian bourgeoisie, when it confronted the monarchy and aristocracy, the representatives of the old society, was not a class speaking for the *whole* of modern society. It had sunk to the level of a kind of *social estate* as clearly distinct from the Crown as it was from the people, with a strong bent to oppose both adversaries and irresolute towards each of them individually because it always saw both of them either in front of it or behind it. From the first it was inclined to betray the people and to compromise with the crowned representative of the old society, for it itself already belonged to the old society; it did not represent the interests of a new society against an old one, but renewed interests within an obsolete society. It stood at the helm of the revolution not because it had the people behind it but because the people drove it before them; it stood at the head not because it represented the initiative of a new social era but only because it represented the rancour of an old one.” (Karl Marx, “The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution”, *MECW*, vol. 8, p. 162).

49 Ibid, p. 161-162.

Engels characterizes the Prussian Revolution of 1866 as a revolution from above that emerged in this new phase, emphasizing both external factors (the expansionist policy of France) and internal developments (the alliance of the bourgeoisie with the monarchy):

The reversion to the empire in 1851 provided fresh proof of the immaturity of the proletarian aspirations of that time. But it was itself to create the conditions under which they were bound to grow mature. Internal tranquility ensured the unfettered advancement of the new industrial boom; the necessity of keeping the army occupied and of diverting the revolutionary currents in an outward direction produced the wars in which Bonaparte, under the pretext of asserting the “principle of nationalities”, sought to secure annexations for France. His imitator, Bismarck, adopted the same policy for Prussia; he carried out his coup d’état, his **revolution from above**, in 1866, against the German Confederation and Austria, and no less against the Prussian *Konfliktskammer* [constitutional conflict].⁵⁰

According to Engels, the issue does not lie in the revolutionary nature of the Prussian Revolution; rather, the concern is that it was insufficiently revolutionary, characterized as a revolution from above.

In short, it was a complete revolution, carried out with revolutionary means. We are naturally the last to reproach him for this. On the contrary, what we reproach him with is that he was not revolutionary enough, that he was no more than a Prussian **revolutionary from above**.⁵¹

To summarize our analysis of Brenner’s interpretation of Marx’s historical materialism, it is evident that Marx did not adhere to the four-stage theory of history and Adam Smith’s perspective, given the significance he attributed to both relations of production and property relations. Furthermore, Marx did not conceptualize class struggle as a dependent variable. However, an extensive elaboration on this matter may be unnecessary, as Marx was introduced to the four-stage theory of history after encountering Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on Civil Society* in 1847, subsequent to his composition of *The German Ideology*. Marx engaged with John Dalrymple and John Millar’s works in 1851 and 1852. He studied Adam Smith in 1843, but *The Wealth of Nations*, which he read that year, only briefly mentions the four-stage theory of history. According to Levine, Marx’s acquaintance with the theory occurred indirectly in 1844 and 1845 through the works of Charles Pecqueur and Simon Linguet in French publications that expounded upon the theory. However, Marx did not utilize the work of either scholar in the Paris Manuscripts or *The German Ideology*.⁵² This suggests that Marx was neither familiar with nor inclined towards the four-stage theory of history. Consequently, the Adam Smith-influenced theory

⁵⁰ Friedrich Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850* [1895]”, *MECW*, vol. 27, p. 513 (our emphasis).

⁵¹ Friedrich Engels “The Role of Force in History [1887]”, *MECW*, vol. 26, p. 481 (our emphasis); Hal Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, vol. 1, The State and Bureaucracy*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977, p. 427.

⁵² Levine, “The German Historical School...”, p. 435.

of history, which Brenner characterizes as Marx's initial theory of history, loses its validity. Within this framework, Marx does not follow bourgeois historiography, but rather develops a critical perspective. In our assessment, if a distinction is to be made in Marx's theory of history, it is that the historical materialist perspective that matured in Marx during the 1850s-1860s was emerging in his works of the 1840s.

French Revolution and Marx

Let us look at what Marx had to say about the British and French revolutions. In his article "The Bourgeoisie and Counter-Revolution," the second part of which was published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* on December 15, 1848, Marx evaluates the British and French revolutions from a historical perspective, emphasizing the bourgeois nature of both in a manner that diverges from Political Marxists' simplified interpretation:

In 1648 the bourgeoisie was allied with the modern aristocracy against the monarchy, the feudal aristocracy and the established church.

In 1789 the bourgeoisie was allied with the people against the monarchy, the aristocracy and the established church.

The revolution of 1789 (at least in Europe) had as its prototype only the revolution of 1648; the revolution of 1648 only the revolt of the Netherlands against Spain. Both revolutions were a century in advance of their prototypes not only in time but also in content.

In both revolutions the bourgeoisie was the class that *really* headed the movement. The *proletariat* and the *non-bourgeois strata of the middle class* had either not yet any interests separate from those of the bourgeoisie or they did not yet constitute independent classes or class sub-divisions. Therefore, where they opposed the bourgeoisie, as they did in France in 1793 and 1794, they fought only for the attainment of the aims of the bourgeoisie, even if not *in the manner* of the bourgeoisie. *All French terrorism* was nothing but a *plebeian way of dealing with the enemies of the bourgeoisie*, absolutism, feudalism and philistinism.

The revolutions of 1648 and 1789 were not *English* and *French* revolutions, they were revolutions of a *European* type. They did not represent the victory of a *particular* class of society over the *old political order*; they *proclaimed the political order of the new European society*. The bourgeoisie was victorious in these revolutions, but the *victory of the bourgeoisie* was at that time *the victory of a new social order*; the victory of bourgeois ownership over feudal ownership, of nationality over provincialism, of competition over the guild, of the division of land over primogeniture, of the rule of the landowner over the domination of the owner by the land, of enlightenment over superstition, of the family over the family name, of industry over heroic idleness, of bourgeois law over medieval privileges. The revolution of 1648 was the victory of the seventeenth century over the sixteenth century; the revolution of 1789 was the victory of the eighteenth century over the seventeenth. These revolutions reflected the needs of the world at that time rather than the needs of those parts of the world where they occurred, that is England and France.⁵³

However, Marx and Engels emphasize only the French Revolution as a classic bourgeois revolution:

53 Karl Marx, "The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution", *MECW*, vol. 8, 2010, p. 161.

The great French Revolution [after the Protestant Reformation and Calvinism in Germany] was the third uprising of the bourgeoisie, but the first that had entirely cast off the religious cloak, and was fought up to the destruction of one of the combatants, the aristocracy, and the complete triumph of the other, the bourgeoisie. In England the continuity of pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary institutions, and the compromise between landlords and capitalists, found its expression in the continuity of judicial precedents and in the religious preservation of the feudal forms of the law. In France the Revolution constituted a complete breach with the traditions of the past; it cleared out the very last vestiges of feudalism, and created in the *Code Civil* a masterly adaptation of the old Roman law – that almost perfect expression of the juridical relations corresponding to the economic stage called by Marx the production of commodities – to modern capitalistic conditions.⁵⁴

So, where did Marx obtain his information on the French Revolution while making these evaluations? Perhaps the first thing to be said is that Marx did not only read books about the French Revolution. For this reason, it will be useful to briefly follow Jean Bruhat and evaluate Marx and his environment in the context of the French Revolution. Marx was born in 1818; individuals born in 1794 were 25 that year, while Saint-Just would have been 51. Filippo Buonarroti, comrade of Gracchus Babeuf, published *La Conspiration pour l'Égalité* in 1828 and passed away in 1837, coinciding with Marx's completion of his first year at the University of Berlin. Due to his generation, Marx was temporally proximate to the Revolution and its participants. Furthermore, the Rhineland, Marx's birthplace and upbringing, was under French rule from 1794 to 1814, encompassing both the Revolutionary and Imperial periods, with his birthplace Trier serving as the seat of the French *département* of Sarre. When the French Revolution of 1830 came to the fore, the people of Rhineland had nothing on their mind but 1789. The atmosphere in his family, as well as in high school in Trier, was predominantly francophone. While studying at university in Berlin, he sought to navigate between two distinct schools of law: one emphasizing universal and rational codification that underscored the historical and social ruptures produced by the French Revolution, and another focusing on historical codification that emphasized historical and social continuities based on customs, traditions, and beliefs in the historical development of societies. The young dissidents of the 1830s and 1840s, including Marx, organized around Hegel and his thoughts, whose admiration for the French Revolution was well-known. It was precisely in such a context, where the Revolution was decisive, especially in 1843-1844, that Marx engaged with the historiography of the French Revolution, conducted research in libraries, and carried out political work during his time in Paris.⁵⁵

We also know that Marx's Kreuznach and Paris manuscripts of 1843-1844

⁵⁴ Friedrich Engels, "Introduction to the English Edition (1892) of Socialism: Utopian and Scientific", *MECW*, vol. 27, s. 294.

⁵⁵ Jean Bruhat, "La Révolution française et la formation de la pensée de Marx", *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no 184, 1966 (Special Issue: La pensée socialiste devant la Révolution française), p. 129-134.

contain his reading and analysis notes on the French Revolution, and that he was planning to write a book on the history of *La Convention* (the Constituent Assembly that ruled from the proclamation of the Republic in 1792 until the *Directoire* in 1795 and gave its name to this period), for which he postponed writing *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* for a while. Moreover, Marx notes in his article "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'the King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian'" published in the *Vorwärts!* of August 7 and 10, 1844, that "the Convention represented the *maximum of political energy, political power and political understanding*".⁵⁶

Bourgeois historians and Marx

Political Marxists state that Marx borrowed the narrative of historical development, namely the bourgeois revolution, promoted by liberal historians. A similar view has been expressed in some studies discussing the place of the French Revolution in Marx's intellectual development (mostly emphasizing the other side of the bourgeois revolution coin: class struggle).⁵⁷ The common references of these studies are the relevant passages in Marx's letters to Joseph Weydemeyer and Friedrich Engels. It would be useful to review them together.⁵⁸ In his letter to Communist League member Weydemeyer dated March 5, 1852 (London to New York), in which he emphasizes classes, class struggle, and the historicity of this struggle, Marx says that the idea of class struggle was put forward by bourgeois historians before him:

Now as for myself, I do not claim to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes, as had bourgeois economists their economic anatomy.⁵⁹

In the same letter, he emphasizes that just as reading Ricardo is essential for the critique of political economy, reading bourgeois historians is also necessary to

⁵⁶ Quoted by Bruhat, "La Révolution française...", p. 128 from Karl Marx, *Œuvres philosophiques*, vol. 5, Editions Alfred Costes, 1937, p. 213-214. Moreover, the first article of Marx's "Draft Plan for a Work of the Modern State", presumably prepared in November 1844, is "The *history of the origin of the modern state* or the *French Revolution*" (Karl Marx, "Draft Plan for a Work on the Modern State", *MECW*, vol. 4, p. 666).

⁵⁷ For example, Eric Hobsbawm writes: "In fact, as Marx himself freely acknowledged, these were the men from whom he derived the idea of the class struggle in history. They were essentially historians of their own times. François Guizot was twenty-eight years old when Napoleon was sent to Saint Helena, Augustin Thierry was twenty, Adolphe Thiers and F.A. Mignet nineteen, and Victor Cousin twenty-three." (Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise: Two Centuries Look Back on the French Revolution*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2019 [1990], p. 8). For other examples, see Julien Louvrier, and Jean-Numa Ducange.

⁵⁸ There are still other authors that use the same quotations but discuss them in the context of Marx's readings of the French Revolution rather than the concept of bourgeois revolution or the circulation of the idea of class struggle: Jean Montreau, Jean Bruhat, Auguste Cornu, Albert Soboul, Raphael Samuel, Claude Mazauric, Neil Davidson, Jean-Numa Ducange, Bertel Nygaard, Isabella Consolati.

⁵⁹ *MECW*, vol. 39, p. 62.

develop a critical position, and he names a few of them:

Finally, if I were you, I should tell the democratic gents *en général* that they would do better to acquaint themselves with bourgeois literature before they venture to yap at its opponents. For instance they should study the historical works of Thierry, Guizot, John Wade and so forth, in order to enlighten themselves as to the past ‘history of the classes’. They should acquaint themselves with the fundamentals of political economy before attempting to criticise the critique of political economy. For example, one need ... open Ricardo’s magnum opus...⁶⁰

Engels adds François Auguste Marie Mignet to this list:

If it was Marx who discovered the materialist view of history, the work of Thierry, Mignet, Guizot and every English historiographer prior to 1850 goes to show that efforts were being made in that direction, while the discovery of the same view by Morgan shows that the time was ripe for it and that it was bound to be discovered.⁶¹

Among these names, let us highlight Marx’s focus on Augustin Thierry in his correspondence to Engels dated July 27, 1854 (from London to Manchester):

A book that has interested me greatly is Thierry’s *Histoire de la formation et du progrès du Tiers Etat*, 1853. It is strange how this gentleman, **le père of the ‘class struggle’** in French historiography, inveighs in his Preface against the ‘moderns’ who, while also perceiving the antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, purport to discover traces of such opposition as far back as the history of the *tiers-état* prior to 1789. He is at great pains to show that the *tiers-état* comprises all social ranks and estates save the *noblesse* and *clergé* and that the bourgeoisie plays the role of representative of all these other elements.⁶²

An examination of these quotations reveals that Political Marxists’ thesis aligns with the literature emphasizing that Marx’s concept of bourgeois revolution or class struggle is derived from liberal historians. However, it is important to note that this alignment is only partial, as none of the aforementioned authors (in the footnotes 57 and 58) explicitly states that Marx directly references bourgeois historians or that

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 61-62.

⁶¹ Letter sent by Engels on January 25, 1894, to W. Borgius from London to Breslau (Wroclaw in Polish), *MECW*, vol. 50, p. 266. In a letter to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis in The Hague, dated February 4, 1886, Engels listed his favorite reading list as follows: “The best works on the great French Revolution are indubitably those of Georges Avenel who died round about 1875. *Lundis révolutionnaires*, a collection of feuilletons which came out in the *République Française*; also, *Anacharsis Cloots*, this last a survey, forming part of the biography, of the course of the Revolution up till Thermidor 1794. It’s melodramatically written and, if one is not to lose the thread, one has continually to refer to Mignet or Thiers for the exact dates. But Avenel has made a close study of the archives and also produces a vast amount of new and reliable material. He is indisputably the best source for the period from September 1792 to July 1794. Then there is a very good book by Bougeart on Jean Paul Marat, *L’Ami du peuple*; also another about Marat, said to be good, the name of whose author eludes me — it begins with Ch.[F. Chèvremont] Some other good stuff also appeared in the final years of the Empire; the Robespierrites (Hamel, *St.-Just etc.*) not, on the whole, so good — mostly mere rhetoric and quotations from speeches. Mignet still remains the bourgeois historian of my choice.”, *MECW*, vol. 47, p. 398-399.

⁶² *MECW*, vol. 39, p. 473 (our emphasis).

the historical materialist perspective he develops is fundamentally liberal.⁶³

Upon examination of the aforementioned quotes, one observes a reflection of Marx's thoughts derived from his readings. Essentially, he elucidates the historicity of the concept of class struggle. Consequently, the assertion that Marx founded his ideas of historical materialism on bourgeois historians appears to be based on an excessive (or perhaps superfluous) interpretation. Notwithstanding this consideration, it is evident that Marx's relationship with bourgeois historians cannot be adequately explained by the mere circulation (copying and pasting) of ideas. Marx himself articulates this in his correspondence with Weydemeyer; just as the study of bourgeois economists is fundamental for the critique of political economy, the study of bourgeois historians is fundamental for the critique of bourgeois ideology and its conception of history.⁶⁴ At this juncture, it would be pertinent to recall the work of Sungur Savran, and through him, the concept of the "critique of political economy," which characterizes Marx's relationship with his predecessors in economics (particularly the classical school).⁶⁵ This consideration will provide insights into the "critique of bourgeois historiography," which will further elucidate Marx's relationship with predecessor historians.

Savran emphasizes that Hegel's concept of *aufhebung*, which encompasses both acts of supersession and conservation, is crucial for comprehending Marx's relationship with the classical school of political economy: There exists a superficial resemblance between Marx's analysis and the classical school; however, the decisive factor is the dialectical relationship between them, a relationship that involves both supersession and conservation.⁶⁶ In analyzing capitalist society, the classical school accepts the categories of society (value, price, profit, wages, rent, etc.) as given. These categories are not considered specific to a particular mode of production but are regarded as general, immutable, and universally valid natural forms.⁶⁷ Marx, conversely, posits that the relations of capitalist society are

63 As previously noted in footnote 57, Hobsbawm, who posits that Marx's conception of class struggle is predicated on bourgeois historians, does not repudiate either the concept of bourgeois revolution or its associated political perspective. Rather, he emphasizes that Marx and Engels did not systematically expound upon the concept of bourgeois revolution (Hobsbawm, *Echoes*, p. 6).

64 This point is also emphasized by Claude Mazauric, *L'histoire de la Révolution française et la pensée marxiste*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 2009, p. 38-39 and Bertel Nygaard, *History and the Formation of Marxism*, Palgrave, 2022, p. 208-209.

65 Sungur Savran, "Critique of Political Economy" in Sungur Savran and E. Ahmet Tonak, *In the Tracks of Marx's Capital, Debates in Marxian Political Economy and Lessons for 21st Century Capitalism*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2024, p. 57-79.

66 Sungur Savran, "Capital: An Introduction to the Three Volumes" in Sungur Savran and E. Ahmet Tonak, *In the Tracks of Marx's Capital, Debates in Marxian Political Economy and Lessons for 21st Century Capitalism*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2024, p. 39-44.

67 In this context, the following passage is useful: "Economists have a singular method of procedure. There are only two kinds of institutions for them, artificial and natural. The institutions of feudalism are artificial institutions, those of the bourgeoisie are natural institutions. In this they resemble the theologians, who likewise establish two kinds of religion. Every religion which is not theirs is an invention of men, while their own is an emanation from God. When the economists say that present-day relations—the relations of bourgeois production—are natural, they imply that these are the relations in which wealth is created and productive forces developed in conformity with the laws of nature. These relations therefore are themselves natural laws independent of the influence of time. They are eternal laws which must always govern society." Karl Marx, "The Pov-

historically determined and transitory. Since the classical school perceives relations in capitalist society as natural and fails to grasp their historicity, it could not provide an adequate explanation of these relations nor accurately resolve the determination of quantitative magnitudes. Only through historicizing the specific forms of social production (commodities, value, capital, etc.) can the interrelation between the categories prevailing in society and the laws governing the quantitative magnitudes determined within them be elucidated.⁶⁸

Therefore, understanding the relations specific to the capitalist mode of production is a priority. Social forms, which are presuppositions for the classical school, become the problem itself for Marx. In Engels' words, "where others had seen a solution, [Marx] saw nothing but a problem".⁶⁹

On the other hand, classical economists depict relations in a capitalist society as inverted and relations between people appear as properties of objects (see commodity fetishism). However, this inversion does not originate from classical economists, but rather from the capitalist reality itself. Marx's critique of political economy is therefore a critique of capitalist reality as well as a critique of bourgeois ideology.⁷⁰

In this context, Political Marxists' assertion regarding Marx's acceptance of the liberal narrative of historical development bears a notable similarity to the perspective of Paul Samuelson, the Nobel Prize-winning liberal economist of the Cold War era, who failed to comprehend the dialectical relationship between Marx and classical political economy, consequently categorizing Marx as a classical economist:

Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus, and John Stuart Mill shared in common essentially one dynamic model of equilibrium, growth, and distribution. When the limitation of land and natural resources is added to the model of Karl Marx, he also ends up with this same canonical classical model.⁷¹

From this perspective, we can reread Marx's statement on the distinction in his own approach to include historians as well:

The view outlined here diverges sharply from the one current among bourgeois economists [and historians] imprisoned within capitalist ways of thought. Such thinkers do indeed realize how production takes place within capitalist relations. But they do not understand how these relations are themselves produced, together with the material preconditions of their dissolution.⁷²

erty of Philosophy. Answer to the *Philosophy of Poverty* by M. Proudhon", *MECW*, vol. 6, p. 174.

68 Savran, "Critique of Political Economy", p. 63-70.

69 Quoted by Savran, "Critique of Political Economy", p. 68 from Friedrich Engels, "Préface", *Le Capital*, vol. 2, tome 1, Editions Sociales, 1974, p. 21.

70 Ibid, p. 77.

71 Paul A. Samuelson, "The Canonical Classical Model of Political Economy", *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 16, no 4, 1978, p. 1415.

72 Quoted by Savran, "Critique of Political Economy", p. 68-69 from Karl Marx, "Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production", in *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1: *The Process of Production of Capital*, transl. by Ben Fowkes, London: Penguin Books, 1976,

To examine Marx's critique of bourgeois historiography, it is necessary to first consider the work of Augustin Thierry.

Augustin Thierry: "the father of the class struggle"

From his letter to Engels dated July 27, 1854 (mentioned and quoted above), we understand that among the bourgeois historians, Augustin Thierry, whom Marx referred to as "the father of the class struggle," particularly interested him.⁷³ Donald R. Kelley, a significant figure in historiography, describes Thierry as follows: "Former secretary, collaborator, and 'adopted son' of Saint-Simon and disillusioned political journalist, Thierry turned away from the public arena more deliberately than his colleagues did and embraced history as both surrogate politics and higher vocation."⁷⁴ Marx's characterization of Thierry as "the father of the class struggle" initially suggests Thierry's contribution to historiography by emphasizing class struggle. However, Kelley contextualizes this characterization within a broader perspective, specifically in relation to Thierry's critique of the old historiography in France, and identifies him (in Thierry's own assessment) as the founder of the "new historical school" that emerged in France in the 1820s. Indeed, Thierry presents himself as the herald of a second, albeit historiographical, French Revolution, as he criticizes the great tradition of national historiography, which traces its origins to the 16th century, giving rise to the study of institutional history⁷⁵:

Reform of the study of history, reform of the way history is written, war on the writers without learning who failed to see, and on the writers without imagination who failed to depict . . . ; war on the most acclaimed writers of the philosophical school, because of their calculated dryness and their disdainful ignorance of our national origins.⁷⁶

Thierry's examination of the national dimensions of the new history within a social and institutional framework commenced in 1836, during the political climate of the July Monarchy (1830-1848), a bourgeois monarchy, when François Guizot commissioned him to compile sources on the history of the Third Estate. Thierry had previously blessed "bourgeois liberty" in the context of England⁷⁷; now he was to investigate the formation and development of the Third Estate in the French context. His documentary study, *Essai sur l'histoire de la formation et le progrès du Tiers Etat*, focused on the ascension of the communes⁷⁸, the royal court (*Etats généraux*), and the Parisian Parliament, through which the bourgeoisie, whose "historical

p. 1065.

⁷³ *MECW*, vol. 39, p. 473.

⁷⁴ Donald R. Kelley, *Historians and the Law in Postrevolutionary France*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 21.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20-21.

⁷⁶ Quoted by Kelley, *Historians...*, p. 21 from Augustin Thierry, *Dix ans d'études historiques*, Paris: J. Tessier 1835, p. XV.

⁷⁷ Augustin Thierry, *Histoire de la conquête de l'Angleterre par les normands, de ses causes et de ses suites jusqu'à nos jours : en Angleterre, en Ecosse, en Irlande et sur le continent*, Paris: Firmin Didot, 1825.

⁷⁸ Here, the commune refers to the bourgeoisie's self-governed city, freed from the feudal yoke.

destiny” was purportedly to be the bearers of liberties, was able to represent itself. In this process, the commoners (*la Roture*) emerged with a demand for equality against the nobility, asserting “we are just like you,” and by the 12th century had established themselves with the flourishing of urban liberties, progressing through “social revolutions,” eventually encompassing the entire nation in 1789.⁷⁹

As Kelley emphasized, the influence of the German Historical School of Law was prominent in both historical scholarship and professional jurisprudence in the 1830s. In France, the “new history” approach developed under this influence, emphasizing legal and institutional history.⁸⁰ This influence is evident in Thierry’s study of the Third Estate (along with Jules Michelet’s *Origines du droit français* (1837)). Within the framework of the new history’s principle that “history is a novel and the people are its author” (according to Alfred de Vigny’s famous concept) law is considered an expression of a culture, a reflection of a spirit, created by the common people, and as such had to be established not by pure reason but by historical investigation and interpretation.⁸¹ We think that Marx was able to penetrate and discuss Thierry’s work more easily due to the influence of the German School of Historical Law, which was also prominent in his legal education at university and in his early writings.⁸² However, this appears to have occurred gradually. Marx’s references to Thierry’s *Lettres sur l’histoire de France* (1827) in his notes (particularly in the Kreuznach notebooks) and the excerpted passages are from its German translation *Geschichte von Frankreikh* (trans. Ernst Alexander Schmidt, 1835-1848). With reference to his letter to Engels, it appears that Marx only read Thierry’s work (*Essai sur l’histoire de la formation et le progrès du Tiers Etat*, published in 1853) in its entirety in 1854.⁸³

What if Thierry read Marx?

As Jean-Numa Ducange emphasizes, Marx appears to have devoted greater attention to long-term class struggles within the framework of Thierry’s research. If the urban revolution was a precursor to the significant movement of 1789, what were the events of 1789-1794 or 1848 precursors to? The focus here shifts from the moment of revolution to the evolution of social and political conflicts over centuries and their manifestation in class struggles.⁸⁴ In his correspondence with Engels dated July 27, 1854, Marx asserts that despite Thierry’s success in elucidating the formation of classes and the transformations leading to class domination, he fails to

⁷⁹ Kelley, *Historians...*, p. 21-22

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 93.

⁸¹ Donald R. Kelley, “Ancient Verses on New Ideas: Legal Tradition and the French Historical School”, *History and Theory*, vol. 26, no 3, 1987, p. 319-338.

⁸² Alp Yücel Kaya, “Genç Marx ve ‘Odun Hırsızlığı Kanunu Tartışmaları’ ” [“Young Marx and ‘Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood’ ”], Sevinç Orhan, Serhat Koloğlugil and Altuğ Yalçıntaş (eds.), *İktisatta Bir Hayalet: Karl Marx*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2012.

⁸³ Jean-Numa Ducange, “Marx, le marxisme et le ‘père de la lutte des classes’, Augustin Thierry”, *Actuel Marx*, no 58, 2015, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

discern the dynamics of inter-class struggle, which he could have observed had he examined them personally:

Had Mr Thierry read our stuff, he would know that the decisive opposition between bourgeoisie and *peuple* does not, of course, crystallise until the former ceases, as *tiers-état*, to oppose the *clergé* and the *noblesse*. But as for the “*racines dans l’histoire ... d’un antagonisme né d’hier*” his book provides the best proof that the origin of the “*racines*” coincided with the origin of the *tiers-état*. By the same token, this otherwise intelligent critic would have to conclude from the “*Senatus populusque Romanus*” that in Rome there was never any opposition save that between the *senatus* and the *populus*. I was interested to discover from the documents he quotes that the term “*catalla, capitalia*”, capital, came into being with the rise of the communes. He has, by the by, unwittingly demonstrated that the victory of the French bourgeoisie was delayed by nothing so much as the fact that it did not decide until 1789 to make COMMON CAUSE with the peasants. Although he does not generalise, he depicts very nicely, 1. how from the beginning, or at least since the rise of the towns, the French bourgeoisie has gained undue influence by constituting itself a parliament, bureaucracy, etc., and not, as in England, by commerce and *industrie* alone. This undoubtedly holds true even of present-day France. 2. ***From his account it may be readily shown how the class rises as the various forms in which its centre of gravity has lain at different times are ruined and with them the different sections whose influence derives from these forms. In my view, this sequence of metamorphoses leading up to the domination of the class has never before been thus presented—at least so far as the material is concerned.*** In regard to the *maîtrises*, *jurandes*, etc., in short, the forms, in which the industrial bourgeoisie develops, he has, alas, restricted himself almost wholly to general, and generally known, phrases, despite the fact that here too he alone is familiar with the material. What he successfully elaborates and underlines is the conspiratorial and revolutionary nature of the municipal movement in the twelfth century.⁸⁵

In Marx’s correspondence to Weydemeyer, dated March 5, 1852, wherein Marx asserts that the concept of class struggle was developed by liberal historians, which accounts for its frequent citation, particularly regarding the influence of liberal historians on Marx, he also articulates his own contribution to historical materialism (although this aspect is often omitted in the citations). The critique of bourgeois historiography is evident in this passage: Marx both supersedes and conserves the concept of class struggle that he derived from bourgeois historians, emphasizing the historicity of classes in relation to production, asserting that the class struggle will culminate in the dictatorship of the proletariat, and positing that the dictatorship of the proletariat will ultimately engender a classless society.

My own contribution was 1. to show that the *existence of classes* is merely bound up with *certain historical phases in the development of production*; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3. that this dictatorship itself constitutes no more than a transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*. Ignorant louts such as Heinzen, who deny not only the struggle but the very existence of classes, only demonstrate that, for all their

⁸⁵ *MECW*, vol. 39, p. 474 (our emphasis).

bloodthirsty, mock-humanist yelping, they regard the social conditions in which the bourgeoisie is dominant as the final product, the *non plus ultra* of history, and that they themselves are simply the servants of the bourgeoisie, a servitude which is the more revolting, the less capable are the louts of grasping the very greatness and transient necessity of the bourgeois regime itself.⁸⁶

The circular addressed to militants in Germany prepared by Marx and Engels on behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist League in March 1850 serves as a notable exemplar of critique regarding bourgeois historiography. Marx and Engels effectively elucidate the concept of “permanent revolution,” which both supersedes and conserves the bourgeois historians’ notion of class struggle and bourgeois revolution⁸⁷:

While the democratic petty bourgeois [with whom the proletariat has allied itself] wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, ***it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent***, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one.⁸⁸

As soon as the new governments have consolidated their positions to some extent, their struggle against the workers will begin. Here in order to be able to offer energetic opposition to the democratic petty bourgeois, it is above all necessary for the workers to be independently organised and centralised in clubs ... The speedy organisation of at least a provincial association of the workers’ clubs is one of the most important points for strengthening and developing the workers’ party.⁸⁹

If the German workers are not able to attain power and achieve their own class interests without completely going through a lengthy revolutionary development, they at least know for a certainty this time that the first act of this approaching revolutionary drama will coincide with the direct victory of their own class in France and will be very much accelerated by it.

But they themselves must do the utmost for their final victory by making it clear to themselves what their class interests are, by taking up their position as an independent party as soon as possible and by not allowing themselves to be misled for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeois into refraining from the independent organisation of the party of the proletariat. Their

⁸⁶ *MECW*, vol. 39, p. 62, 65

⁸⁷ Quoted by Michael Löwy, “Politique”, Michael Löwy, Gérard Dumenil and Emmanuel Renault, *Lire Marx*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 2009, p. 42 from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Circulaire de mars 1850 à la Ligue des communistes” *Œuvres politiques*, vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 547. Also see Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development, The Theory of Permanent Revolution*, London: Verso, 1981, p. 14 and following pages.

⁸⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Address of the Central Authority to the League”, *MECW*, vol. 10, p. 280-281 (our emphasis).

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 284.

battle cry must be: *The Revolution in Permanence*.⁹⁰

[The workers] know that the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie against the feudal estates and the absolute monarchy can only accelerate their own revolutionary movement. They know that their own struggle against the bourgeoisie can only dawn with the day when the bourgeoisie is victorious... They can and must accept the *bourgeois revolutions* a precondition for the *workers' revolution*. However, they cannot for a moment regard it as their *ultimate goal*.⁹¹

The concept of the bourgeois revolution from Thierry to Plekhanov

We have seen that Marx developed a critique of bourgeois historians as well as a critique of political economy. Nevertheless, it remains imperative to ascertain the origin of the approach that confines the class struggle to a binary opposition, distorts the concept of the bourgeois revolution. In this regard, an article by Jean-Numa Ducange, who has gained prominence for his work on Marxism in recent years⁹², provides valuable insight.⁹³ According to Ducange, while the phrase “the father of the class struggle” has become a stereotype in 20th-century literature, the second part of Marx’s 1854 letter to Engels on class formations and transformations and the dynamics of the class struggle (which we have emphasized above) - which is incompatible with the binary approach that reduces the class struggle to the opposition of two easily identifiable camps - has generally been overlooked.⁹⁴ Ducange notes that in foreign-language Soviet manuals⁹⁵ on Marx’s conception of history, the first half of the famous letter is presented, while the second part on the transformation of classes is omitted, resulting in the loss of the concept of “transformation of classes.” He emphasizes that the same omission is also found in an article by Albert Soboul, who links Marx’s thought to Thierry.⁹⁶ According to Ducange, after Marx’s death, a certain relationship was established between his perspective of historical materialism and Augustin Thierry’s works, and a body of literature developed based on this construction. At this point, Ducange finds Emmanuel Renault’s observation reasonable: “as much as the questions of

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 286-287 (our emphasis).

⁹¹ Karl Marx, “Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality. A Contribution to German Cultural History. Contra Karl Heinzen”, *MECW*, vol. 6, p. 332-333.

⁹² Jean-Numa Ducange, *The French Revolution and Social Democracy : the Transmission of History and its Political Uses in Germany and Austria, 1889-1934*, transl. by David Broder, Leiden: Brill, 2018; Jean-Numa Ducange and Antony Burlaud (eds.), *Marx, A French Passion : The Reception of Marx and Marxisms in France’s Political-Intellectual Life*, Leiden: Brill, 2018.

⁹³ Jean-Numa Ducange, “Marx, le marxisme et le ‘père de la lutte des classes’, Augustin Thierry”, *Actuel Marx*, no 58, 2015, p. 12-27.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 21.

⁹⁵ Eugénia Stépanova et al., *Karl Marx, sa vie, son œuvre*, Moscou: Éditions du progrès, 1973, p. 278; *Histoire de la France de la Révolution de 1789 à la fin de la Première guerre mondiale*, Moskova: Édition du progrès, 1973-1978, vol. 2, p. 201-202.

⁹⁶ Albert Soboul, “Jaurès, Mathiez et l’histoire de la Révolution française”, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, no 237, 1979, s. 447. We think that Ducange is a bit unfair to Soboul, since Soboul is one of the leading figures, along with Daniel Guérin, in discussing the French Revolution through class struggles by including those of *sans-culottes* and *bras-nus*.

alienation and materialism, the question of dialectics has been subjected to the process of Marxism inventing its own tradition.”⁹⁷ According to Ducange, the same applies to the “class struggle” and its putative “father,” and it is necessary to expose this subsequent invention.⁹⁸

Let us continue to follow Ducange: Considering Marx’s complete works (the MEGA compilation), there are minimal explicit references to Thierry by Marx. However, it is pertinent to examine when the notion of a significant connection between them and its reiteration became prominent. Ducange posits that it is either the quotations from Marx and Engels’ correspondence in major works published posthumously, or subsequent Marxist theorists who established Thierry as the “father of the class struggle.” An examination of the excerpts from the letters reveals that Marx’s 1852 letter to Weydemeyer was first published in the German social-democratic theoretical journal *Neue Zeit* in 1906, while his letter to Engels initially appeared in the second volume of the Marx-Engels correspondence published in 1913.⁹⁹ Consequently, the communist tradition that emerged post-1913, primarily after the October Revolution of 1917, established Thierry as Marx’s reference. It is noteworthy that Thierry’s book *Essai sur l’histoire de la formation et du progrès du Tiers États* was not reprinted in France after Marx’s death, and historical scholarship during the Third Republic (1870-1940) effectively marginalized Thierry’s work.¹⁰⁰

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, Ducange highlights that Georges Plekhanov, a Marxist theorist, consistently referenced Thierry even prior to the discovery of Marx’s letters in 1906 and 1913. Following 1880, no other Second International leader allocated as much attention to liberal historians, particularly Thierry, as Plekhanov, who was instrumental in the development of Marxism (and who, despite his Menshevik affiliation, was praised by Lenin for his contribution to the development of Marxism in Russia). While Marx and Engels made no explicit reference to Thierry in their published works, only in their personal correspondence during their lifetimes, Plekhanov conducted a comprehensive analysis of Thierry’s works, which he regarded as fundamental to the Marxist concept of class struggle. Indeed, his article “*Augustin Thierry et la conception matérialiste de l’histoire*” [“Augustin Thierry and the Materialist View of History”], which directly addresses Thierry’s work, was published in the French Marxist theoretical journal *Le Devenir social*¹⁰¹:

Karl Marx’s historical materialism does not indiscriminately condemn the histori-

97 Quoted by Ducange, “Marx...”, p. 22 from Emmanuel Renault, *Marx et la philosophie*, Paris: Puf, 2014, p. 40. In fact, Sungur Savran’s emphasis on the concept of the critique of political economy in Marx also fits this context (Sungur Savran, “Critique of Political Economy”, p. 57-79.).

98 Ducange, “Marx...”, p. 22.

99 Quoted by Ducange, “Marx...”, p. 23 from Franz Mehring, “Neue Beiträge zur Biographie von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels”, *Die neue Zeit : Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, vol. 2, notebook 31, 1906-1907, p. 160-168; Bebel August and Bernstein Eduard, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Engels und Karl Marx, 1844 bis 1883*, Stuttgart: Dietz, 1913.

100 Ducange, “Marx...”, p. 14.

101 Georges Plekhanov, “Augustin Thierry et la conception matérialiste de l’histoire”, *Le Devenir social*, no 8, 1895, p. 693-709.

cal ideas of previous schools; it merely removes a fatal contradiction from these ideas, which prevented them from breaking out of a vicious circle.

Another result no less worthy of our attention is that, while it is not true to say that Marx was the first to speak of the class struggle, there can be no doubt that it was he who first revealed the true cause of the historical movement of mankind and, by the same token, the “nature” of the various classes which, one after the other, appear on the world stage. Let us hope that the proletariat will make good use of this valuable discovery by the great socialist thinker.¹⁰²

Apart from this article, he mentioned Thierry in many of his works, even in the preface to the Communist Manifesto, which he translated into Russian and published in 1900:

This new point of view, the point of view of *social or class interest*, combined with the attachment to those “fathers” who had for centuries borne the brunt of the struggle against the privileged classes, was bound to lead to an awareness of the considerable historical importance of the struggle of interests between the various social classes - in short, of the *class struggle*.¹⁰³

Therefore, it seems that by 1900, before Marx’s famous quotations were known, Thierry had become a reference for Marxists through Plekhanov.

So, what is Plekhanov telling us? Starting from Thierry, Plekhanov highlighted the conflict between two classes at a particular historical moment within a binary model, showing that different class conflicts are sequenced one after the other in the historical process. In line with his pedagogical and activist aims to popularize Marxism, Plekhanov takes the sharpest side of Thierry and presents the class struggle in a rather simple conceptualization: if the bourgeoisie stood against the nobility, it would be the turn of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁴ But what is interesting is that Plekhanov, despite having analyzed Thierry’s complete works, arrived at a more limited conclusion than Marx, who conducted a less comprehensive analysis. Whereas Marx derives from *L’essai* a method for the sequential historical transformation of a class, Plekhanov is far from this, focusing on the immediate political efficacy of the class struggle. For Thierry, the urban revolutions anticipated 1789, then for Plekhanov, for socialists, popular movements and class struggles can anticipate the proletarian revolution. The bourgeois democratic revolution overthrows feudal society and builds a bourgeois society in which the working class finds a place; the socialist revolution makes the transition from a class (bourgeois) society to a classless society. Accordingly, industrialized and democratically developed countries should follow the path of the socialist revolution, while underdeveloped countries with a weak working class should follow the path of the bourgeois democratic revolution to build the conditions for the socialist revolution. The first “grand narrative” of the Second International, constructed especially by Plekhanov,

102 Ibid, p. 709.

103 Ducange, “Marx...”, p. 24 from Georges Plekhanov, “Préface au Manifeste du parti communiste”, *Œuvres philosophiques*, vol. 2, Moskova, Éditions du progrès, 1961-1983, p. 491.

104 Neil Davidson underlines in the same way that Plekhanov’s materialism is mechanistic, see Davidson, *How Revolutionary...*, p. 184, 194-195.

inherited this model.¹⁰⁵ The concrete result of this perspective for Plekhanov and the Mensheviks was to link the revolution against Tsarist rule in Russia to the alliance of the working class with the bourgeoisie, following the bourgeoisie's alliance with the dissident nobility in France to overthrow the kingdom:

When the ideologists of the French bourgeoisie in the XVIII century “went” among the aristocracy, recruiting fighters for a new social order, did they betray the *point of view of their own class*? Not at all. No such betrayal occurred, only a perfectly correct political calculation (or, if you will, instinct), which led to an even more consistent affirmation of exactly the same point of view. And will there be any betrayal if ideologists of the proletariat go among the “upper” classes with the goal of finding means and resources that might serve the interests of Social Democracy? It would appear that in this case, too, there will be no betrayal; here again, the “reaching out” will be a matter of political calculation.¹⁰⁶

The more we separate the wheat from the chaff, the more we see that Political Marxists present the reading (or misreading) of history that leads us to Menshevism's alliance with the bourgeoisie as an absolute one, and that they nullify Bolshevism and the permanent revolution. This perspective was previously already apparent in their conflation of the revolutionary perspectives of Plekhanov, Kautsky, Lenin, and Trotsky, despite all their divergences. Interestingly, they adopt an approach that critiques Plekhanov yet arrives at a position analogous to Plekhanov. Their stance can be considered even more regressive than Plekhanov's, as the latter at least regards Marx as a revolutionary figure, whereas they characterize young Marx as a liberal.

Conclusion: Other sources of Marx's theory of revolution

The revolutionary movement that began in 1789 with the *Cercle Social*¹⁰⁷, whose main representatives in the middle of its career were *Leclerc* and *Roux*, and which finally succumbed temporarily with the *Babeuf* conspiracy, had germinated the communist idea that *Babeuf's* friend *Buonarroti* reintroduced to France after the revolution of 1830. This idea, developed with consequence, is the *idea of the new state of the world*.¹⁰⁸

105 Ducange, “Marx...”, p. 24-25.

106 Quoted by Davidson, *How Revolutionary...*, p. 195 from Georges Plekhanov, ““Orthodox’ Pedantry”, Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (eds.), *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009 [1903], p. 148-149.

107 “*Cercle social*— an organisation established by democratic intellectuals in Paris in the first years of the French Revolution. Its chief spokesman, Claude Fauchet, demanded an equalitarian division of the land, restrictions on large fortunes and employment for all able-bodied citizens. The criticism to which Fauchet and his supporters subjected the formal equality proclaimed in the documents of the French Revolution prepared the ground for bolder action in defence of the destitute by Jacques Roux, Théophile Leclerc and other members of the radical-plebeian ‘*Enragés*’.” (*MECW*, vol. 4, p. 690).

108 Quoted by Walter Markov, “Jacques Roux et Karl Marx (Sur l’entrée des ‘*Enragés*’ dans la Sainte Famille)”, *Recherches internationales à la lumière du marxisme*, no 62 (*Voie de la révolution bourgeoise*), 1970, p. 87 from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *La Sainte famille*, Paris: Editions sociales, 1969 (1845), p. 145.

It is clear from this passage that in 1845, Marx knew what the *Cercle social* was and who Jacques Roux was. But how did he know these things? According to Walter Markov, known for his work on *Enragés*¹⁰⁹, P.-J. Bouchez and P.-C. Roux's *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française* (40 volumes, 1834-1838) is a source for Marx; his main source however is (utopian socialist) Etienne Cabet's *l'Histoire populaire de la Révolution française 1789-1830* (4 volumes, 1839-1840). When Marx wanted to write the history of *La Convention*, he must have already seen Cabet's work, although there is no hint of this in the manuscripts.

As a result, we would like to propose the hypothesis that Marx felt provoked by Cabet's unserious overestimation of the "Hébertistes" and felt the need to put things back on their feet here too, that is, on real class terrain. However, going beyond his earlier observations on the character of the Revolution, he recognized the essence of a movement to the left of the Jacobins and discovered the position of the Enragés; in so doing, he encountered a decisive element. The "Doctor of the Revolution", as Henri Heine put it, had thus legitimized Jacques Roux as the practical hook for an idea whose very existence Marx had set himself as the goal of elaborating and transforming into a theory that becomes a material force as soon as it takes hold of the masses.¹¹⁰

Therefore, Marx was well aware of social forces and struggles other than the bourgeoisie during the French Revolution. He defined revolution as a bourgeois revolution in the final analysis. This reflects a political perspective intertwined with the present. Starting from the social dynamics of 1789, he showed the necessity of a social revolution in 1844 by setting "human emancipation" against political emancipation, and in 1846 with the perspective of "communist revolution." This can be seen in the article he wrote in 1847, in the context of his polemic with Karl Heinzen¹¹¹:

If therefore the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary, only an element in the service of the *bourgeois revolution* itself, as in the year 1794, as long as in the course of history, in its "movement", the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production and therefore also the definitive overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie. The terror in France could thus by its mighty hammer-blows only serve to spirit away, as it were, the ruins of feudalism from French soil. The timidly considerate bourgeoisie would not have accomplished this task in decades. The bloody action of the people thus only prepared the way for it. In the same way, the overthrow of the absolute mon-

109 The *Enragés* were a revolutionary group in France in 1793, led by Jacques Roux, a former priest, and Varlet, a postal official. This group advocated for social and economic measures that favored the lower classes. Their appellation reflects the horror they elicited among the bourgeoisie.

110 Markov, "Jacques Roux..." p. 96. The validity of Markov's interpretation is evidenced by Marx's plan for a "Library of the Best Foreign Socialist Writers" drafted on March 7-17, 1845. The plan, depicted on paper, features a central box containing Cercle social, Hébert, Jacques Roux and Leclerc; the left column lists Morelly, Mably, Babeuf, Buonarroti, Hobach, Fourier, Considérant, Cabet; the lower middle column includes Owen, Lalande, Producteur, Globe; and the right column comprises Bentham, Godwin, Helvétius, Saint Simon, Dzemay and Gay. (Karl Marx, "Plan of the 'Library of the Best Foreign Socialist Writers'", *MECW*, vol. 4, p. 667).

111 Löwy, "Marx et la Révolution française...", p. 238.

archy would be merely temporary if the economic conditions for the rule of the bourgeois class had not yet become ripe. Men build a new world for themselves, not from the “treasures of this earth”, as grobian superstition imagines, but from the historical achievement of their declining world.¹¹²

As Michael Löwy underlines, Marx’s observation is striking that if the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie before the material conditions for its power are in place, as in 1794, its victory will only be temporary and will ultimately serve the bourgeois revolution itself. In an article published in 1847 (as previously cited), Marx highlighted Babeuf’s struggle as follows:

The first manifestation of a truly active communist party is contained within the bourgeois revolution, at the moment when the constitutional monarchy is eliminated. The most consistent *republicans*, in England the *Levellers*, in France *Babeuf*, *Buonarroti*, etc., were the first to proclaim these “social questions”. *The Babeuf Conspiracy*, by Babeuf’s friend and party-comrade Buonarroti shows how these republicans derived from the “movement” of history the realization that the disposal of the social question of *rule by princes* and *republic* did not mean that even a single “social question” has been solved in the interests of the proletariat.¹¹³

In this context, it is useful to recall Friedrich Engels’ observation of 1843: “We must have either a regular slavery—that is, an undisguised despotism, or real liberty, and real equality—that is, Communism. Both these consequences were brought out in the French Revolution; Napoleon established the first, and Babeuf the second.”¹¹⁴

Upon thorough examination, we concur with the conclusions drawn by Jean Bruhat and Michael Löwy, who provide a comprehensive analysis of the place of the French Revolution in Marx’s thought. The study of the French Revolution contributed substantially to the formulation of a materialist and dialectical conception of history. Class struggles, the contradiction between the development of productive forces and relations of production, and the complexity of class conflicts extending beyond the primary class oppositions to encompass secondary class movements are among the critical issues that the French Revolution brought to Marx’s attention. While historical materialism has numerous sources, Marx’s engagement with these questions opened a novel perspective within this theoretical framework. Marx’s innovation lay in combining the communist critique of the French Revolution’s limitations (from Babeuf and Buonarroti to Moses Hess) with the class analysis propounded by bourgeois historians of the Restoration period (Mignet, Thiers, Thierry, et al.) and placing the whole formed by his materialist historical method by superseding and conserving it through a dialectical approach within the context of world history. Consequently, Marx occupies a distinctive position among historians of the French Revolution.

Political Marxists’ view of young Marx as liberal when they see references to

112 Karl Marx, “Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality. A Contribution to German Cultural History. Contra Karl Heinen”, *MECW*, vol. 6, p. 319-320.

113 Ibid, p. 321-322.

114 Quoted by Bruhat, “La Révolution française...”, p. 161 from Friedrich Engels, “Progress of Social Reform on the Continent”, *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 393.

bourgeois economists and historians (or subjects they raised), and their search for bourgeois in the Revolution, like all revisionists, reminds us of Marx's critique of political economy:

Vulgar economics actually does nothing more than interpret, systematize and turn into apologetics the notions of agents trapped within bourgeois relations of production. So it should not surprise us that precisely in the estranged form of appearance of economic relations that involves these *prima facie* absurd and complete contradictions - and all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence - that precisely here vulgar economics feels completely at home, these relationships appearing all the more self-evident to it, the more their inner connections remain hidden, even though they are comprehensible to the popular mind.¹¹⁵

In doing so, they directly conflate the appearance of things with their essence, thereby throwing out historical materialism and the concept of bourgeois revolution. They refuse to historicize the great upheavals, thus directly coinciding with the bourgeois economists and historians, not in appearance but in essence.¹¹⁶

115 Karl Marx, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3: *The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, transl. by David Fernbach, London: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 956.

116 From this perspective it is not surprising that 2024 Nobel laureates in the economic sciences, Daron Acemoğlu, James Robinson and Simon Johnson refer in their every book to Robert Brenner's 1976 article ("Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Preindustrial Europe.") as an important precursor of their approach: Daron Acemoğlu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 350; Daron Acemoğlu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail, The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Profile Books, 2012, p. 469, 471, 472; Daron Acemoğlu and James A. Robinson, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*, New York : Penguin Press, 2019, p. 937 (of epub version); Daron Acemoğlu and Simon Johnson, *Power and Progress : Our Thousand-Year Struggle over Technology and Prosperity*, New York: Public Affairs, 2023, p. 774, 777, 800, 804 (of epub version).

Book launch

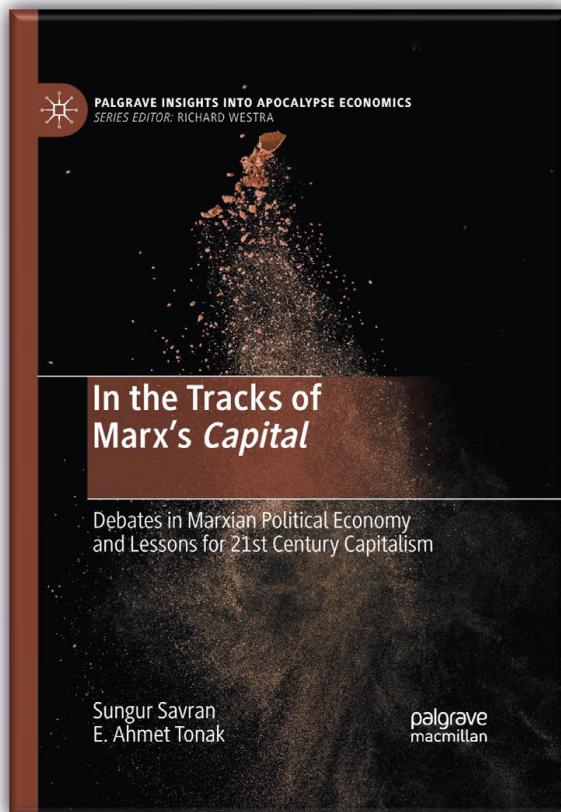
In the Tracks of Marx's *Capital*

Authors:

Sungur Savran
E. Ahmet Tonak

Publisher:

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"A masterly work... A passionate and intelligent application of Marxist categories."

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This book provides an accessible introduction to Marx's seminal work *Capital* and explores the core ideas of Marxian political economy relevant for modern day economies. The first part gives an overview of *Capital* based on the authors' original thinking in the methodology of *Capital*. The second part discusses the application of these ideas to some understudied questions of measuring profit on alienation, the rate of exploitation, the reconstruction of input-output tables, and the role of the welfare state and social wage. The third part sets forth new research in Marxian analysis in the 21st century, facing the challenges brought about by digital labor and the deep crisis of the global economy. The last part discusses the Marxism/Neo-Ricardianism controversy.

At Kant's Tercentenary: Relevance of Kant's Categorical Imperative for Revolutionary Politics

Ana Bazac¹

This paper was completed after I wrote the four parts seen below and intended both to discuss Kant in an engaged way, and not neutral – as is the fashion between the professional philosophers, and to popularize him in a blog, in order to show to non-philosophers that he is not incomprehensible and far from their everyday concerns but, on the contrary, helps them. Now, at the advice of a colleague from the board of *Revolutionary Marxism*, I grouped the parts in a single article. They signal the actuality of Kant when such sensitive topics as the wars in Ukraine and Palestine are approached, as well as Kant's contradictory attitude towards the French Revolution. And the analysis and the conclusion highlight that, despite the limits of Kant's liberalism, just his revolutionary ethical theory of categorical imperative was continued – and by surpassing it – by Marx.

(1) Introduction

We are in a Kant philosophical year (Immanuel Kant, 1724-1804). In fact,

¹ Professor, Division of Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, Romanian Committee of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Romanian Academy.