

PHILOSOPHER OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION AND ORGANIZATION MAN

Section I: Critique of the Gotha Program (of a United Workers' Party of Germany)

"The international activity of the working classes does not in any way depend on the existence of the International Working Men's Association. This was only the first attempt to create a central organ for that activity; an attempt which was a lasting success on account of the impulse which it gave but which was no longer realisable in its first historical form after the fall of the Paris Commune."

Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, 1875

The fetish of a vanguard party to lead is very nearly beyond comprehension when it affects as great a revolutionary as Rosa Luxemburg who had such overpowering confidence in the spontaneous action of workers that she was considered as simply a spontaneist. It is true that that is wrong, because her passionate conviction about the creativity and spontaneity of the masses did not ~~prevent~~ keep her from being a member of a strictly Marxist party, a strictly Marxist International. Indeed, the fetish of ~~unity~~ unity kept her from breaking with the party to the point of building a new one, even at the outbreak of war and the betrayal of ~~established~~ established Marxism, though she had called that International a "stinking corpse". Nevertheless, she was still working to "reconstruct" it rather than to call for a new International. So all-pervasive was the idea of a vanguard party that <sup>though</sup> she functioned as an independent revolutionary tendency -- the <sup>Spartacus</sup> ~~Spartacus~~ League -- she remained with the USPD until the very eve of the 1919 Revolution; and at that point, when the Spartacus League did transform itself into a new and separate Communist Party, she still had instructed it ~~to~~ to vote ~~against~~ against the establishment of a new <sup>Third</sup> ~~Third~~ International.

She herself may not have seen the great contradiction in the manner in which she projected, even hallowed, spontaneity, and the way she clung to ~~the Party~~ the Party even though she was always calling *for* (and was convinced that the leadership needed a hefty push from) the spontaneous mass actions to move forward. She certainly didn't at-  
 tribute ~~the breakup of her~~ <sup>the breakup of her</sup> passionate and complex relationship with Jogiches organization in ~~the~~ <sup>a period of open</sup> to the strains of ~~a~~ <sup>the</sup> revolution. Yet a serious look back to that highest point of her activity in the 1905-06 Russian Revolution will disclose the sharp dualism in ~~the~~ the two aspects of organization and spontaneity, not to mention the other silent feature -- the man/woman relationship for one as independent as Luxemburg. Yet it became ground for the heartbreaking separation though they never separated for a single instance as revolutionaries, as Marxist activists, <sup>They had</sup> ~~the same~~ the same perspective of world revolution, and Jogiches met his death shortly after hers in the struggle to find her murderer and continue with the revolutionary work.

In the 1905-06 revolution, too, the exultation that came with their joint activity never wavered. The fact that she was also with her lover who was an organization man, par excellence, in those 24-hour a day whirlwind activities, seemed to have reached the highest point of all. Yet another fact is likewise indisputable. ~~She~~ Becoming witness to a small ~~organization~~ organization being transformed overnight into a mass party in the midst of masses in motion, did ~~she~~ modify her appreciation for what Jogiches never left out of his view in this activity -- the need also for secrecy, oppressive awareness of the strength of the powers that be, working night and day to achieve a counter-revolution.

In our search for illumination on this burning question of the relationship of spontaneity to organization three very different dates



Why did it grow "more and more with the historical perspective" of 40 years? Wasn't this due to the fact that Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program was never studied? Could ~~there be~~ a duality between the concept of organization and a philosophy of revolution have arisen ~~without~~ without awareness if one had not separated Marx's concept of revolution from <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ concept of organization? Isn't it a fact that the need for and the building of organization so preoccupied all Marxists except Marx that a fetish was made of it? It is a fact that the fetish was at the very innards of the GSD, <sup>from its</sup> ~~at its~~ very birth, that was so overwhelming a fact that although they were ~~preparing~~ <sup>Gotha</sup> preparing to replace the program of <sup>their</sup> predecessor ~~with a new one~~, the Erfurt Program, they talked at publishing Marx's Critique, even 15 years after the event. Not only that. They seemed to have disregarded the fact that it was Marx, not Lassalle who founded the First International Working Men's Organization. Worse still, it wasn't only just disregarded. It was the greater appreciation of a national organization, the ~~German~~ German party.

The innumerable articles written

about the fact that Marx had no theory of organization obscured, if not totally covered up, the fact that Marx was indeed conscious of organization, helped found organizations--from the International Communist Correspondence Committees to the First International. Because that mediation -- proletarian organization, an independent proletarian organization, and one that would be both international and have the goal of revolution and a new society <sup>--</sup> was so central to his views, Marx kept referring to "the Party" when all that was involved was himself and Engels.

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What Marx called "party in the eminent historical sense" was alive to Marx throughout the entire decade when no organization existed in the 1850s with which he could associate. *Once a mass*  
 movement <sup>(in 1844)</sup> he left the <sup>British Museum,</sup> ~~to help~~ to help establish the Working-  
 man's International Association. And when <sup>at</sup> its height -- the Paris Commune--  
 the International ~~was~~ was disintegrating, he did not consider that its  
 end. On the contrary, he sent it away to make sure, however, that it  
 would not "suddenly" get a totally new philosophy -- in this case,  
 anarchism -- which was waiting in the wings. But he also was ready to  
 hail <sup>the 1850s</sup> ~~the~~ possibility of another organization which he was sure  
 would result from a new mass movement. This was the case in the U.S.  
 when the ~~great~~ great class struggles of the mid-1870s in  
 railroads, in the mines, culminating the the first General Strike in the  
 U.S. in St. Louis, would result, he hoped, "in an independent working class  
 party", <sup>Q</sup> ~~to~~ ~~underline~~ underline its significance he said that the First  
 International was but a form of organization ~~suited~~ suited to the time,  
 and the creativity of the masses would discover another form. *Marx at the*

time made a fetish of organization, which is why, in the covering letter  
 of the critique, he wrote: "Every step of real movement is more important  
 than a dozen programmes. If, therefore, it was not possible -- and the  
 conditions of the time did not permit it -- to go beyond the Eisenach  
 programme, one should simply have concluded an agreement for action  
 against the common enemy." How inseparable <sup>were</sup> theory and organization ~~was~~  
 will not only be present throughout the modestly entitled "critical  
 marginal notes" ~~which~~ ~~are~~ ~~sent~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~author~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~critique~~ ~~but~~ ~~even~~ ~~in~~ ~~his~~ ~~covering~~ ~~note,~~ ~~which~~ ~~includes~~  
 the fact that <sup>he is sending</sup> "in the near future the last parts of the French edition  
 of Capital." And there were also references to a new edition of the

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1853 Revelations of the Cologne Communist Trial. In a word, 1875 was a most active year politically, philosophically, organizationally, none of which ~~elements~~ were separable from both a philosophy of revolution and the perspectives for the future. The Critique itself is of course, not just a criticism of a program, but a comprehensive analysis of Lassalle-ism. It contains a theory of the state and, more importantly, of the non-state-to-be (as he called the Paris Commune), which ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> to be the model for the future breakup of the capitalist state and establishing a commune form of non-state. Furthermore, not only was ~~capitalism~~ <sup>capitalism</sup> a transient state but so was "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" which was to replace it. These two fundamental principles were <sup>to become</sup> the basis for the 1917 Revolution and Lenin's State and Revolution. Unfortunately, the great transformation in Lenin, both on philosophy and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat did not extend to <sup>Lenin's</sup> ~~his~~ concept of the party, which, despite all modifications in actual revolutions, remained essentially what it was in 1903. And since by now that tactical\*\* work had been made into a fetish, a universal fetish ~~is~~ at the very time that the first workers' state was transformed into its opposite, a state-capitalist society, ~~there~~ the relevance of Marx's Critique of the Gotha PROGRAM gains a special urgency for our age. Paragraph by paragraph, beginning with the first paragraph of the program, Marx analyzes how totally wrong (and when not wrong quite imprecise) is the program's analysis of labor, ~~its~~ <sup>its</sup> subordination to "the monopoly of the means of labor". Where, for the First International, the class of monopolists includes both capitalists and landowners, Lassalle spoke as if it were only the capitalist class, thus leaving the <sup>Prussian</sup> landowners, by no accident, off scot-free.

Along with this, came the point that was most objectionable to Marx and that was that "the working-class strives for its emancipation first of all within the framework of the present day national state..." to which Marx asks:

how could socialists "conceive the workers' movement from the narrowest national standpoint <sup>...</sup> after the work of the International?" Marx naturally considered it the greatest retrogression to go back to the move from <sup>...</sup> the international to a national standpoint.

<sup>What must tower above all national and international</sup> struggles against exploitation, <sup>that</sup> must be the perspective of a totally class-less society and <sup>that</sup> the vision of its ground would be "from each

according to his ability to each according to his needs." To this day, this remains the perspective for the future, and yet the Marxists who keep quoting it never bother to study just how concretely that arose from the Critique of the Program, and what would be required to make that real. The revolution that would overthrow capitalism would have to be a great deal more total in its uprooting of the old than just what it is against. Thus Marx says that to reach the communist stage, there would have to be an end to the ~~enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor~~ "enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of ~~labor~~ labor and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor ..."

This is not the young Marx speaking. This is the mature author of Capital, the revolutionary who <sup>yes</sup> experienced both the exciting 1860s reaching its climax in the historic Paris Commune, but one who has suffered through its defeat

and ~~was~~ and yet ~~is~~ is projecting so totally new a concept of labor as the <sup>creative</sup> self-activity of humanity that he is now saying that we will reach communism only when ~~the~~ "labor from a mere means of life, has itself become the prime necessity of life ..." \*

¶ Now then, ~~what~~ what had happened between the transfer of the First International to the U.S. ~~workers~~ and the attempts at unity between two different tendencies of the German ~~workers~~ movement, and ~~why~~ why was it that Lassalle ~~who~~ <sup>General Association of</sup> founded the German Workers in the early 1860s as the first <sup>independent mass</sup> political organization should still tower above Marx after he founded the International Working Man's Association? Was there a national strain from the start? How could Rosa Luxemburg, who was the greatest internationalist, not have seen any of this? It couldn't have been national vs. international. It could have only been activism vs. philosophy. ~~That~~ That Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program (in the German ~~Party~~ Social Democracy) couldn't win adherents among the new leadership <sup>may be under-</sup>standable considering their isolation at the time as against the birth of a new "mass party."

What isn't understandable <sup>in fact is</sup> very nearly fantastic <sup>is</sup> that ~~no~~ no revolutionary studied these notes as ~~not~~ not just critique of ~~a~~ a particular tendency, but actual perspective for the whole movement. Let's remember <sup>it</sup> that not only was ~~it~~ Bernstein, the reformist, who ~~tried~~ tried to revise Marx's principles; it was also Kautsky <sup>the</sup> "orthodox" Marxist. And not only that. <sup>No</sup> No revolutionary took it as a point of departure for working out a theory of organization that would be inseparable from the theory of revolution. ~~Any~~ Any "orthodox" Leninist who tries to say that Lenin's statement that there could be no revolution without a revolutionary theory meant that his concept of organization was in any



way related to ~~Marx's~~ Marx's theory in the Critique of the Gotha Program, rather than the immediate Concrete of ~~the~~ having to function under Tsarism, would have to contend with both Lenin's own statement in the midst of the 1905 revolution when he moved far, far away from his own narrow position \*, and the position Lenin had on the eve of the 1917 Revolution as he completed his State and Revolution. Unfortunately, neither the philosophic reorganization on the basis of the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic, nor the ground for State and Revolution gained from Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program, extended to Marx's concept of the party.

That means that Lenin's philosophic reorganization remained in a separate compartment from the concept of the party and the practice of vanguardism. Clearly, there is no substitute for the totality that was Marx as organization man, as political theorist, as visionary of a future social order. Which is exactly the warp and woof of his theory of permanent revolution. That covering letter that Marx wrote with the Critique of the Gotha Program, which showed that he had just completed the 1875 French edition of Capital, also referred to the ~~the~~ reissuance of the 1851 Revelations of the Cologne Trial. What is significant about this is that that was the edition which reproduced the 1850 Address. In turning to that projection of the permanent revolution, we should also keep in mind the fact that the 1848-49 Revolutions had led to a restudy of the peasantry, and its great revolts. Indeed not only, Engels' The Peasant War in Germany -- and Marx kept reminding us that that was the only revolutionary moment in German history, and its betrayal by Luther and feudalism, Marx held *recalled*

its backwardness -- important in relation to the 1848 revolutions and the theory of permanent revolution for that period, but Marx clearly held it out. Here is what he wrote to Engels on April 16, 1856: "The whole matter in Germany will depend upon the possibility of supporting the proletarian revolution with a sort of second edition of the peasant war. Then the thing will be excellent."

One he finished with the Critique <sup>of</sup> the Gotha Program and returned to the work <sup>on</sup> Volumes II and III of Capital, he became interested, at one and the same time, in Russian agriculture and the study of the primitive commune ~~---~~ <sup>;</sup> and in <sup>the</sup> possibility ~~of a new independent workers~~ of a new independent workers party in the U.S. as a result of the new heightened class struggles in the railroads. All of these will reconnect ~~with~~ <sup>new</sup> with the theory of the permanent revolution and a totally new ~~before-thought-of~~ <sup>new</sup> way both in the letters to Zasulitch and in the Russian Preface to the 1882 edition of the Communist Manifesto. It is to this we need to turn.

SECTION II: The Permanent Revolution:

From 1843 to 1863

"Revolution is never practical until the hour of revolution strikes. Then it alone is practical, and all the efforts of the conservatives and compromisers become the most futile and visionary of human language."

-- James Connolly in his Workshop Talks

"The relation of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty-bourgeois democrats is this: it marches together with them against the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them on everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in their own interests.... Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence."

-- Marx, Address to the Communist League, 1850

Luxemburg's internationalism was second to none in her thought, in her actions, indeed her whole life. As she put it on what turned out to be the last day of her life -- the following day the counter-revolution beheaded the 1919 German Revolution; she was murdered

:" 'Order reigns in Berlin!' You stupid lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rear its head once again, and, to your horror, will proclaim, with trumpets blazing: I was, I am, I will be!"

Clearly, her luminous mind, when it came to the question of revolution, was likewise second to none. The 1905 Revolution which led to her exclamation that the revolution was "everything" and all else was "bilge" was the red thread that permeated all her <sup>political</sup> writings. Yet when it came to philosophy, even when that was a philosophy of revolution, that was not the dominant factor. Quite the contrary.

To the extent that Marx's 1850 Address on the

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permanent revolution was a point of reference, it was most often a reference to the "mistake" of thinking after the defeat of 1848-49 that a revolution was still in the offing in 1850, <sup>was the pivotal point</sup> as if ~~the~~ dating rather than the philosophy of revolution and all that flowed from it, beginning with the fact of taking the highest point of any revolution as the point of departure for the next revolution. Even when <sup>in</sup> her 1904 review of Mehring's publication of some of Marx's early works, <sup>Lukenburg</sup> recognized "the original conception... the hopes for the so-called 'revolution in permanence'", the emphasis was on the "so-called" as she spelled out Marx's "anticipation that the bourgeois revolution would be only the first act, immediately followed by the petty-bourgeois, alternately, in the proletarian revolution." The truth, however, is that <sup>in</sup> the very first year that he broke with bourgeois society, 1843, and even when he was writing on a "mere" individual subject like the "Jewish Question", Marx refused to leave it at merely "being for" civil rights for Jews. Rather, he insisted that the question revolved around the inadequacy of any bourgeois rights. And because his vision from the start was for totally new human relations, he there -- and that was the first time -- projected the concept of permanent revolution:

" At times of heightened self-confidence, political life seeks to suppress its own presumption, (namely) the civil society and its elements, and to set itself up as the real species- life of man without any contradictions. But it can do this only in violent contradiction with its own conditions of existence, only by declaring the revolution to be permanent and hence the political drama ends with the restoration of religion, private property and all the elements of the civil society just as inevitably as war ends with peace."

It is true that there were elements of the concept of permanent revolution once she was in <sup>the</sup> <sup>1905</sup> an actual revolution and judged that revolution to be <sup>no</sup> mere extension of 1848 but rather initiation of 20th century European revolutions. But it was not worked out as a theory as Trotsky had in what later became known as the theory of Permanent Revolution (\*). What Luxemburg singled out was the General Strike, which did combine politics and economics, but <sup>not only</sup> ~~did not~~ have a philosophy of revolution emerging out of it, but even <sup>totally</sup> the new form of organization which had emerged spontaneously -- soviets -- was mentioned only in passing. It would remain so until the very eve of the 1919 Revolution when she rejected the reactionary call for a Constituent Assembly and called for the creation of Workers Councils.

To put it even more sharply, even when finally

(\*) See Afterword

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the Spartacus League did decide to transform itself into a separate and independent Communist Party, that break with the fetish of "unity of party" preceded any concept of permanent revolution, as was seen once again by the fact that even then she instructed the German delegation to oppose the immediate establishment of a new Third International.

¶ Karl Marx, on the other hand, as we have seen, was grounded in a philosophy of permanent revolution as far back as 1843, kept developing the concept of and the activities in revolutionary struggles culminating in the 1848-49 revolution, after which he worked it out, not just in passing, but in full in the March 1850 Address to the Communist League.

¶ In reviewing "the two revolutionary years, 1848-1849" and the activities of the League in all places, in the press, on the barricades, and on the battlefields", Marx's report to the League stresses in the very next sentence that it was rooted in "the conception of the movement as laid down in circulars of the congresses and of the Central Committee of 1847 as well as in the Communist Manifesto ...". In a word not a single element of this Address to the League whether it concerned the need for "reorganization" in a centralized way because "a new revolution is impending, when the workers' party, therefore, must act in the most organized, most unanimous and most independent fashion, or whether it concerned the outright declaration "Revolution in Permanence" -- is in any way separated from the total conception of philosophy and revolution. The most important conclusion for the movement then and now was that never again will a workers' movement be

... tied to the bourgeois <sup>democratic</sup> movement  
even when they fight together against feudalism: "The relation  
of the revolutionary workers' party to the petty bourgeois  
democrats is this: it marches together with them against  
the faction which it aims at overthrowing, it opposes them in  
everything whereby they seek to consolidate their position in  
their own interests."

He kept stressing the fact that "far  
from desiring to revolutionize all society", the <sup>democratic</sup> petty bourgeois  
<sup>were</sup> striving to work within the bourgeois framework and  
in fact showed themselves to be a more deadly enemy than the  
liberals. The search for revolutionary allies, therefore, must  
include the "rural" proletariat". The  
stress on achieving the workers' own class interests was made  
the center point of everything, even as the international out-  
look would mean that the German workers look upon not only their  
country but "the direct victory of their own class in France".  
In developing the strategy and tactics for a continuous revolu-  
tion, this Address that was actually distributed in <sup>illegal</sup> leaflet form

ended as follows:

"But they themselves must do the utmost for their  
final victory by clarifying their minds as to 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 seduced for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeois into refraining from the independent organization of the party of the proletariat. Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence."

Far from that Address being something Blanquist that Marx discarded afterwards, it was . . . followed with another Address in June where he reviewed the concrete activities in five of the countries -- Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, France, England. And the Minutes of the Central Committee meeting on September 15, 1850 pointed to the possibility of defeats. There was no . . . letting go of what was needed for total uprooting of this society even if that needed "15, 20, 50 years of civil war to go through in order to change society." In a word, . . . what remained in the statutes of the Communist League was: "The aim of the Communist League is to bring about the destruction of the old order of society and the downfall of the bourgeoisie -- the intellectual, political and economic emancipation of the proletariat, and the communist revolution, using all the resources of propaganda and political struggle towards this goal."

For that matter, it wasn't the phrase, Permanent Revolution, that was the proof of the concept, but the fact that <sup>in</sup> that . . . the constant search for re-



revolutionary allies the vision of the revolutions to come was in no way changed. Thus ~~whether~~ whether it was a question of the organization itself, i.e. the Communist League which was in fact disbanded in 1852, and Marx kept referring to the party "in the eminent historical sense"; or whether it was the ~~search for historic roots and with it, the~~ projection of a revolutionary role for the peasantry, and Engels in that very same period wrote the magnificent work The Peasant War in Germany which was published in the NRZ Review -- Marx was concluding: "Everything in Germany will depend upon whether it will be possible to support the proletarian revolution by something like a second edition of the Peasant War. Only then will everything proceed well." \*

It should not need to be said that this philosophy of revolution, far from diminishing in the mid- 1850s, was intensified with his original study of "Economics". But, since the fact that Marx was "closeted" in the British Museum has been interpreted as "a scientific period", it does need to be stressed that it is precisely the work on the Grundrisse and its relationship to what Marx called "epochs of social revolution" which gave him a new appreciation of the Asiatic mode of production and the Oriental society's resistance to British imperialism. In a word, the dialectics of economic development and the dialectics of liberation led to a further development of the concept of permanent revolution, world revolution, under no matter what name. <sup>The</sup> establishment of the First International, on the one hand, and the <sup>final</sup> structuring of Capital on the other hand, in the 1860s revealed, at one and the same time, not only the break with the concept of

theory as a debate with theoreticians, <sup>and the development of</sup> the concept of theory as a history of class struggles, but a concept also of a new revolutionary force -- Black.\* The culmination of all these theories and activities was, of course, the historic appearance of the Paris Commune of 1871, and there, too, we saw <sup>an historic</sup> along with the great discovery of a form for working out the economic emancipation of the proletariat -- a new force of revolution, women.\*\*

The greatest concretization of the philosophy of revolution, and its reconnection with the deep roots of the concept of permanent revolution first developed in the 1850 Address, came in the last years of Marx's life and the study <sup>pre</sup> as well as the history of the history of humanity.

It is that March Address which is to this day still a point of debate. The first revisionists began not only attacking it but trying to attribute the thought not to Marx but to Blanqui.\* <sup>Whether it was the Blanquist standard that</sup> the concept of permanent revolution was Blanquist; <sup>or</sup> revolutionaries like Trotsky who had developed the theory of permanent revolution but one that was hardly rooted in Marx's (see Afterword); <sup>or even</sup> Lenin who certainly did ground the whole theory of State and Revolution in Marx's Critique of the Gotha Program, none seemed to have made a special category of Marx's 1882 Preface to the Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto. There the concept was worked out anew as the relationship between advanced and underdeveloped

countries, where the latter rather than the former might spark the revolution. No doubt part of this was due to the fact that the Ethnological Notebooks were unknown and so

... was the letter to Zaslitch, all of which would have shown how deep were the roots of a ... seemingly wild statement for 1882. But we do have that advantage.!

Let us keep the following quotation in mind as we turn to the final section:

"If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."

London, January 21, 1882

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