Chapter 2

Inevitability of Violence: Underdeveloped Capitalism and the Absence of Bourgeois Democratic Institutions

As we know from the previous chapter, Marx and Engels believed, on the one hand, that a violent revolution was the inevitable end of bourgeois economic structures and their historical development. This was so because the political structures that logically followed from the exploitative economic structures were bound to be oppressive and authoritarian, leaving no room for peaceful revolutionary action on the part of the proletariat. Yet, on the other hand, they put forth the view that at places where bourgeois-democratic institutions have emerged and have become entrenched, the revolution could take a peaceful turn.

In the present chapter, we will find that although they themselves offer no such hint, Marx's and Engels' analysis of the political situation in the continental Europe as well as the conclusions they derive from it appear to follow from their alternate view mentioned above. The revolution in this part of Europe, they seem to argue, would assume a violent form because the bourgeois-democratic institutions either did not at all exist here or, if they did exist in certain periods, they were in an extremely circumscribed form.

It could seem from the above that the violent or peaceful
nature of revolution, in the opinion of Marx and Engels thus understood was now determined purely or at least primarily at the political level. However, as our analysis of their position in this chapter will show, it seems to be their argument that the reason for the absence or circumscription of the bourgeois-democratic political institutions itself was the still underdeveloped state of the capitalist economic structures.

The reader might have noticed that this form of the argument imparts a totally new dimension of their position, namely, that the bourgeois-democratic institutions are the essential political form of developed capitalism. This dimension could lead to the significant inference that Marx and Engels regarded a peaceful revolution as the more probable form of the socialist revolution in the developed capitalist societies. Needless to say, this would tantamount to a near reversal of their general position, elaborated at the beginning of chapter 1, that in capitalist societies a violent socialist revolution was inevitable.

Apart from their role of ultimately determining the nature of revolution, Marx and Engels attributed to economic structures another, secondary role: that of aiding the formation of potentially revolutionary situations by producing economic crisis and facilitating the working out of the most appropriate moment for attempting a revolution. All this could give the impression that their position remained totally structural-
determinist. In actuality, however, we shall see that they introduced room for conscious subjective intervention. This intervention, nevertheless, must be based on an indepth study of not only the prevailing economic conditions but also political circumstances, and should be made only at a moment when it is likely to yield maximum fruit.

Once again, it might seem that Marx and Engels should logically condemn attempts at intervention made at 'inappropriate' moments. But the picture is more complex. We shall see that, in practice, they refused to condemn such attempts once they had already been made. They praised, even glorified, them saying that they had hastened the development of forces necessary for a successful revolution.

Before we elaborate this picture of Marx's and Engels' argument, we will point out and clarify an initial problem here. In this chapter, we are supposed to be analysing Marx's and Engels' views on the status of violence in the socialist revolution. However, in their writings to be explored here they do not make it sufficiently clear as to whether a socialist revolution begins only after the bourgeois revolution has completed its course. On the contrary, their own analysis of the bourgeois revolutions of the period in which the working class too participated leads one to conclude that they treated these revolutions as a kind of proto-socialist revolutions, so to speak. In any case, one does not come across in
analysis that abstract model of the revolutionary development, found in The Communist Manifesto for example, in which the bourgeois and the socialist revolutions form two successive stages. The model that emerges in this analysis is much more complex so that it is difficult to see the two kinds of revolution as totally distinct from each other. Secondly, if one were to consider a socialist revolution to be one in which the working class fights exclusively against only the bourgeoisie, then out of the entire spectrum of the revolutions on the continental Europe beginning with the year 1848, the June revolution of 1848 in Paris and the March revolution of 1871, which culminated in the Paris Commune, would be the only ones left regarding which the views of Marx and Engels could be studied. But if one were to focus only on these two revolutions, one would have to leave out most of their views on the question of violence, for, as indicated earlier, a substantial portion of these views evolved during their discussion of the so-called bourgeois revolutions that took place during the period. We, therefore, do not propose to follow this approach.

We begin our discussion with the revolutions of 1848-49, and with France.

I. A. Marx carried out his analysis of the political and, to some extent, economic conditions in France both before
and during the revolutions of 1848-49 primarily in the pamphlet *The Class Struggles in France; 1848 to 1850*, but also in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, both written after the revolutionary wave had subsided. The first major flare up of the revolution had taken place on February 24, 1848 when the constitutional monarchy of Louis Philippe was overthrown.\(^1\)

Attempting to characterise the nature of the economy during the reign of Louis Philippe, Marx described it as capitalism still in the making. "The struggle against capital in its highly developed modern form – at its crucial point, the struggle of the industrial wage-labourer against the industrial bourgeoisie is in France a partial phenomenon".\(^2\) Consequently, the state in France at the time was essentially the rule of the financial aristocracy. "Under Louis Philippe it was not the French bourgeoisie as a whole which ruled but only one fraction of it – bankers, stock market barons, railway barons, owners of coal and iron mines and forests, a section of landed proprietors who had joined their ranks – the so-called financial aristocracy".

The industrial bourgeoisie, according to Marx, formed part

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of the "official opposition", and its opposition became increasingly strident as the "autocracy" of the 'financial aristocracy' became "more absolute". As for the other classes, that is, the petty-bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the working class, they were "completely excluded from political power". The monarchy, which had very little political power in its own hands, was in continuous financial difficulties and was dependent in this matter upon the 'financial aristocracy'. The 'financial aristocracy' managed the economy in such a manner that while the other classes, including the industrial bourgeoisie, stagnated, the 'financial aristocracy' itself kept increasing its wealth. Thus the rule of the 'financial aristocracy', in the words of Marx, "was nothing more than a joint-stock company for the exploitation of France's national wealth..." Under these conditions, the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie were "in permanent peril and at a permanent disadvantage..." The potato blight and the crop failure of 1845-46, the resulting rise in prices and the continent-wide commercial and industrial crisis of the period aggravated the discontent of the classes outside the political frame, which led to bloody conflicts at many places and finally to the February (1948) uprising in Paris under the leadership of industrial bourgeoisie.  

Marx nowhere explicitly says so, but it appears from the

3. Ibid., pp. 36-41. Emphases, unless otherwise indicated, are in the original.
tone of his argument that he approved of the violent February upheaval under the conditions of which it was an inevitable product. These conditions were the total exclusion from the political power of all classes except the monarchy and the *financial aristocracy*, and the arbitrary economic management by the latter. The February revolution, however, was not strictly a proletarian revolution; it was essentially a bourgeois revolution, even though, along with the monarchy, a section of the bourgeoisie itself was its target. As Marx himself said, the revolution had only completed the rule of the bourgeoisie "by allowing all the property-owning classes to enter the political arena along with the financial aristocracy". The proletariat, nevertheless, had played an important role in the revolution, and it had played this role not for the sake of the bourgeoisie but for its own sake. In the words of Marx, "The workers had carried out the February revolution together with the bourgeoisie and they tried to secure their interests alongside the bourgeoisie..." With the result that the workers gave a definite proletarian direction to the revolution. To quote Marx again: "Just as the workers, in July days, had fought for and won the *bourgeois monarchy*, so in February days they fought for and won the *bourgeois republic*. Just as the July

4. Ibid., pp. 43 and 45.
5. Marx has in mind the revolution of July 1830 in France.
monarchy was forced to proclaim itself a monarchy surrounded by republican institutions, so the February republic was forced to proclaim itself a republic surrounded by social institutions. The proletariat forced this concession to be made too". 6

Marx was aware, however, of the limited 'social' character of the revolution, and he attributed this limitation to the limited leverage that the proletariat had under the existing material conditions. As he put it: "In general, the development of the industrial proletariat is conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie... It is only the rule of the bourgeoisie which serves to tear up the material roots of feudal society and level the ground, thus creating the only possible conditions for a proletarian revolution". It was because of this reason that the French workers did not assert their interests "as the revolutionary interests of society itself, and ... lowered the red flag before the tri-colour". 7

In other words, in a situation where the bourgeois revolution has not yet been completed and as a consequence the proletariat has not been pushed forward to lead the historical movement, and, moreover, where the bourgeoisie, or a section of it, is willing to play its historical role, the proletariat should ally with the bourgeoisie, or with the leading section of it.

7. Ibid., p. 46.
and support its revolutionary actions, no matter what their nature, violent or peaceful. As should be clear, the February revolution presents an instance of the situation where the proletariat supports a faction of the bourgeoisie in a violent movement.

A contrast was presented by the situation in Germany where, before the March (1848) revolution, the bourgeoisie, instead of waging a militant struggle against the absolutist monarchy, wanted a peaceful accommodation with it. Marx exhorted the workers in this situation to carry on to the extent possible peaceful political activity till the bourgeoisie had acquired the courage to fight against the monarchy.

The German economy, as per Marx's analysis, had already become before the March revolution essentially a bourgeois economy, whereas the state structure that was still continuing over this economy was monarchical, feudal and absolutist. The growth of industry, trade and modern agriculture had not only given birth to a new, bourgeois, class, it had also "fundamentally bourgeoisified" the nobility itself. The composite bourgeoisie that had thus emerged effectively controlled the economy without having as yet become able to lay its hands upon state power. The historical development, thus, had "conjured away" from under the feet of the monarchical, absolutist state the old economic foundation, and this form of state was now only "a fetter and a hindrance for the new ... society with its changed ... needs". Under these conditions, the bourgeoisie had to lay
claim to a share in political power, if only to assert is purely material interests ... it had to assert its control of the resources of the state ... which it considered to be its own creation". It had to "conquer a political position commensurate with its social position". However, unlike the bourgeoisie of England and France in 1648 and 1789 respectively, the bourgeoisie of Germany wanted to achieve its aim without revolution due to an important reason. Whereas before the English and French revolutions the proletariat and the other non-bourgeois sections of the urban population had not as yet fully developed their own class interests separate from the interests of the bourgeoisie and, therefore, were not in a position to effectively challenge the would be power of the bourgeoisie by convening the bourgeois revolution into a revolution of the lower classes, this was not the case in Germany. "The German bourgeoisie had developed so sluggishly, so pusillanimously and so slowly, that it saw itself threateningly confronted by the proletariat in interests and ideas, at the very moment of its own threatening confrontation with feudalism and absolutism". It therefore wanted "a peaceful transaction with the Crown..." Hence its efforts to acquire the right of freedom of discussion and of

10. Ibid., p. 191.
free association within the overall framework of monarchy.\textsuperscript{11}

It was in these conditions that immediately after the February revolution in France Marx opposed a plan for attempting an armed installation of a republican government in Germany. This plan was made by the German expatriate workers in Paris who had formed an armed body, called the German Legion, for this purpose.\textsuperscript{12}

Marx's argument was that the conditions were not yet ripe for an armed attempt in Germany. In the words of Sebastian Seiler, a member of the Communist League, "Marx... developed the theme that February revolution should be viewed only as a superficial beginning of the European movement",\textsuperscript{13} meaning that an armed insurrection in Germany at this moment would be premature. He suggested instead that they should go into Germany, singly or in small groups, and carry out propaganda work in order to strengthen the bourgeois movement there. And this is in fact what Marx, Engels and some other members of the League ultimately did. The Legion, however, persisted in its task and was badly defeated.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 190.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Quoted in McLellan, \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 192-93.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Riazanov, n. 1, p. 86.
\end{itemize}
Clearly, Marx was not sure of the success of an armed attempt by the workers from abroad at establishing a bourgeois-republican government in Germany when both the bourgeois and the non-bourgeois urban classes within Germany were not willing or ready to go in for such an attempt, even though the changes in the economy had prepared the ground for a bourgeois political revolution.

However, the failed revolution in Germany only a few days later showed that at least the non-bourgeois urban classes had been willing to attempt a violent insurrection and that Marx’s assessment of their mood was in any case wrong. But the failure of the revolution and the non-participation of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, proved that Marx had been right so far as the prospects of such a venture were concerned.

I. B. The character of the states that emerged in France and Germany after the February and March revolutions, respectively, continued to differ. So did the political behaviour of the bourgeoisie in the two states and so, also, the response of the workers, and of Marx, so far as the use of violent or peaceful methods was concerned.

The provisional republican government that was formed in France after the February revolution reflected the interests
of all those classes that had participated in the revolution. The industrial bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie and the working class, all found a place in it. But it was dominated by the representatives of the bourgeoisie, and the political behaviour of the regime in the subsequent months revealed its true character.

In the words of Marx, "...the February republic was in reality - and could be nothing else but - a bourgeois republic, but the provisional Government was forced by direct pressure of the proletariat to proclaim it a republic with social institutions ... The promises made to the proletariat came to represent an intolerable danger for the new republic, and the Provisional Government's entire existence took the form of a struggle against the demands of the proletariat". In its milder form, this struggle revealed itself in such acts as the exclusion by the National Assembly of the representatives of the proletariat from the executive commission, and its rejection of the suggestion of a special ministry of labour. And it manifested its harsher form in decrees such as that of June 21, which ordered the forcible expulsion of all unmarried workers from the National Workshops, or their enrolment in the

army. The result was the June 22 revolt by the workers which lasted for five days, was ruthlessly crushed, and in which thousands of workers were killed.\footnote{17} The June revolt which, in the opinion of Marx, was "the first great battle... between the two great classes which divide modern society",\footnote{18} was characterised by him as "forced", "bold and revolutionary". "The Paris proletariat was forced into the June insurrection...", he wrote. But ultimately, it turned out to be for the good of the proletariat and its movement. "By making its burial place the birthplace of the bourgeois republic, the proletariat forced this republic to appear in its pure form, as the state whose avowed purpose it is to perpetuate the rule of the capital and the slavery of labour". On the other hand, its defeat convinced the proletariat of "the truth that the smallest improvement in its position remains a utopia within the bourgeois republic, a utopia which becomes a crime as soon as it aspires to become reality".\footnote{19} As Marx had written in an article in the \textit{Neue Rheinische Zeitung} on June 29, that is, immediately after the revolt. "The momentary triumph of brute force has been purchased with the destruction of all the delusions and illusions of the February revolution... \addcontentsline{toc}{section}{References} 17. McLellan, n. 12, p. 202; and Marx, ibid., pp. 57-8. 18. Marx, ibid., p. 58. 19. Ibid., pp. 60-1.
and the division of the French nation into two nations, the nation of owners and the nation of workers..." Summing up his survey of the entire revolutionary movement in France during the years 1848-49 in *The Class Struggles in France*, he similarly wrote:

What succumbed in these defeats was not the revolution. It was the pre-revolutionary traditional appendages, results of social relationships which had not yet come to the point of sharp class antagonism - persons, illusions, conceptions, projects from which the revolutionary party before the February Revolution was not free, from which it could be freed not by the victory of the February, but only a series of defeats.

In a word, the revolution made progress, forged ahead, not by its immediate tragi-comic achievements, but on the contrary by the creation of a powerful, united counter-revolution, by the creation of an opponent in combat with whom only the party of the overthrow ripened into a really revolutionary party.

We can see that Marx does not condemn the uprising, but he makes it clear that the conditions were not yet ripe for the success of the uprising. That was the reason for its immediate defeat. But the defeat is not ultimately regarded by him as a defeat but a victory, because the uprising and its suppression have aided and hastened the historical forces

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working towards a successful future proletarian revolution.
It has crystallised the situation by making the workers realise
the real intentions of their enemy, the bourgeoisie, which would
not hesitate to use brute force to crush them when its interests
so demanded;

Only after being dipped in the blood of the June
insurgents did the tricolour become the flag of the
European revolution - the red flag!

And we exclaim, the revolution is dead! - Long Live
the revolution!22

Tactically also the revolt proved beneficial to the
proletariat. By temporarily removing the proletariat from the
stage and by putting an official stamp on the dictatorship of
the bourgeoisie, the revolt made it obligatory for the middle
classes - the petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry - "to ally
themselves with the proletariat, as their own situation became
more intolerable and their antagonism to the bourgeoisie sharper.23

As for the bourgeoisie itself, after the suppression of the
June insurrection the conflicts within itself began to come
to the fore. The June suppression had been led by the republican
faction of the bourgeoisie. But the republicans had relied
heavily on the conservative sections of the bourgeoisie which

22. Ibid., p. 227.

23. Marx, The Class Struggle in France: 1848 to 1850, in
Surveys from Exile, n. 2, p. 61.
were greater in numbers and which had previously ruled the state along with the monarchy and the feudals. Once peace was restored, these sections started asserting themselves with ever-increasing vigour and slowly pushed the republicans out of power; the latter gave in tamely. The decline of republican bourgeoisie effectively started with the election of Louis Bonaparte, on December 10, 1848, as the president of France, and reached its apogee on December 2, 1851 when he brushed aside the republican constitution and declared himself the emperor.  

In Germany, although the March revolution had failed, one consequence of the revolution had been that the people were conceded limited democratic rights, and two legislative assemblies, the German National Assembly and the Prussian Assembly, to be indirectly elected, were promised. The grant of limited constitutional rights strengthened the political power of the bourgeoisie but not in a manner which, according to Marx, the bourgeoisie would have preferred. It put the bourgeoisie in a difficult and uncomfortable position. Since its newly acquired power had been given to it as a consequence of a people's revolution, it had to represent, in the assemblies, the interests of these people too. But a fulfilment of these interests would have created a danger for its own interests. A further increase in people's power would have weakened the King.  

24. Ibid., pp. 62, and 67, footnote No. 61.  
25. McLellan, n. 12, p. 199; and Marx, The Revolutions of 1848, n. 8, pp. 113 and 115, footnotes 3 and 7 respectively.
whereas the bourgeoisie looked upon the King, who still held a monopoly over military and bureaucratic power, as its protector against the people. In the words of Marx: "If therefore the February revolution and its German after-effects were welcomed by the bourgeoisie because the direction of the state was thereby thrown into its hands, the revolution was also and just as much a disappointment, because it attached to bourgeois rule conditions the bourgeoisie was unwilling and unable to fulfil". 26

So far as the monarchy was concerned, the March revolution, according to Marx, "by no means subjected the sovereign by the grace of God to the sovereign people. It only compelled the crown, the absolutist state, to come to terms with the bourgeoisie, to make an agreement with its old rival". 27

So that the German state after the March revolution was a monarchical bourgeois state, a state that was no longer absolutist but allowed limited constitutional rights to the people. And it was the existence of this latter fact that seems to have been crucial, for Marx, so far as the nature and direction of the proletarian politics in Germany during the period

27. Ibid., p. 195.
was concerned. This politics should be open and democratic, in accordance with the conditions brought into existence, by the grant of constitutional freedoms, and it should aim at helping the ongoing bourgeois movement, howsoever timid and difficult, reach completion.

When Marx tried to put this politics into practice, he immediately came into conflict with the recognised leadership of workers in Germany. The immediate issue was whether the workers' organisations should participate in the coming elections to the Prussian assembly and to the national parliament of Frankfurt. Andreas Gottschalk, a leader of the Cologne workers, the leading German industrial city, opposed the participation in elections. He believed that the elections would benefit the bourgeois republicans and not the workers as the workers' movement was not sufficiently strong to extract gains for itself through elections. He favoured an agitationist and confrontationist approach. Marx, on the other hand, was against keeping the workers isolated from the democratic political practice. He therefore helped to found a Democratic Society in Cologne which successfully sponsored a candidate for the Frankfurt parliament.28 It was in pursuance of this policy of his again that in May 1848 Marx dissolved the Communist League inspite of the opposition of some members of the League.

According to Peter Roser, a member of the Cologne group of the League, "Marx considered the continuance of the league to be superfluous, since the aim of the League was not conspiracy but propaganda and under the present circumstances propaganda could be conducted openly and secrecy was not necessary since a free press and the right of association were guaranteed". Marx himself said later that the League's activities "faded out of their own accord in that more effective means of carrying out our aims were available". Even the policy of the paper Neue Rheinische Zeitung that Marx founded in Cologne during this period was consistent with his above-mentioned stand. The subtitle of the paper was "An Organ of Democracy", and its programme was limited to the demands of universal suffrage, direct elections and the abolition of all feudal dues and charges etc. "The essence of the programme was" to quote McLellan, "the emancipation of the bourgeoisie with some concessions to workers and peasants". In this context, Marx declared that "the proletariat has not the right to isolate itself - from its allies", meaning the radical wing of the bourgeoisie.

30. Quoted, ibid., p. 197.
31. Ibid., p. 201.
However, Marx discontinued to advocate this policy in the subsequent months when the King started asserting his authority and there were clear indications that the bourgeoisie was giving in to him. The policy he now adopted was similar to the one he had asserted before the March revolution, namely, that a violent insurrection may ultimately become inevitable but the moment had not yet arrived for such an undertaking. In September (1848) there was an uprising in Frankfurt against the government over an armistice with Denmark. This led to the creation of an insurrectionary situation, a few days later, in Cologne when the population in general and the working class in particular wanted to have a clash with the government troops. But the Democratic Society, being led, among others, by Marx and Engels, argued against an uprising just then. As Marx put it two weeks later (October 12, 1840):

...[T]he democrats told the workers ... that under no circumstances did they want a putsch. At that moment, indeed, when there was no great question impelling the whole population to take part in the struggle, with the result that an uprising was bound to fail, such an action would be senseless, they said, and, still worse, would exhaust the workers before the day of decision, since tremendous events were expected in the next few days. 34

It should be obvious that this shift in Marx's policy

33. Ibid., pp. 206-08.
34. Marx, "The 'Cologne Revolution", in The Revolutions of 1848, n. 8, p. 169.
was caused by the change in the character of the German state which, while continuing to be a monarchical-bourgeois state in theory, had become in practice an absolute monarchy once again. This gets confirmed from Marx's appraisal of the role and status of the bourgeoisie in Germany in the immediately preceding months. In an article on November 6, 1848, he wrote:

In Germany the bourgeoisie finds itself pressed into the retinue of absolute monarchy and feudalism before it has even made sure of the basic conditions for its own freedom and supremacy. ... It plays the role of a slave, and makes the counter-revolution required by the despot who rule it. ... It humbles itself in order to prevent the people from conquering. In the whole of history there is no more ignominious example of abjectness than that provided by the German bourgeoisie.

This character and behaviour of the German bourgeoisie from March onwards convinced Marx that a pure bourgeois revolution, carried out by the bourgeoisie, was impossible in Germany. What was possible was either an absolutist, monarchical-feudal counter-revolution or a socialist-republican revolution made by the working class.

In other words, by the end of 1848 Marx had given up his initial line that in Germany the working class must first

36. Marx, "The Bourgeoisie and the Counter-Revolution", in The Revolutions of 1848, ibid., p. 212. Marx wrote this on December 31, 1848. Earlier, on December 5, the King had already dismissed the Prussian assembly and proclaimed his own constitution. See, ibid., p. 187, footnote 95.
help the bourgeoisie in carrying out bourgeois revolution before starting work exclusively for socialist revolution. Now the bourgeois and the socialist revolution were to be coalesced into one, and this was to be done by the working class. This imperative had come about due to the abandonment by the bourgeoisie of its historical task, that of completing the bourgeois revolution, for the fear of an immediately following proletarian revolution. As we will see immediately below, according to Marx, such a revolution in an absolutist state maintained by the monarchical and feudal classes and acquiesced in or supported by the bourgeoisie had to be necessarily violent.

I. C. As is evident from the exposition above, Marx and Engels had nurtured the hope, till at least the middle of 1848, that the democratic bourgeoisie would create conditions conducive to the free development of the proletariat - conditions which would allow the workers to pursue their political interests peacefully. But the democratic bourgeoisie of France and Germany proved too weak, timid and opportunistic to fulfil their hope. It failed not only to protect and advance its own interests adequately, it even helped the old order to suppress the nascent proletarian movement wherever it felt threatened by its emergence. Marx and Engels, in their programme so far, had virtually ignored the working class leadership and organisations and had aligned themselves tactically with the
radical democratic bourgeoisie. Their disillusionment with the latter now turned them towards the former.

They now entered a phase in which they abandoned their faith in peaceful political activity and vested it exclusively in revolutionary violence. Blaming the bourgeoisie for this radical turn in their attitude and politics, in November 1848, Marx wrote:

The power of arms was defeated everywhere in the February and March days. Why? Because it represented nothing but the governments. After the June days the power of arms has conquered everywhere, because everywhere the bourgeoisie is to be found in collusion with the governments, while, on the other side it has control of the official leadership of the revolutionary movement, and puts into operation all those half measures which have their natural outcome in an abortion.37

Marx argued, in this article, that if the counter-revolution in Europe were to be allowed to run its natural course, it will meet its inevitable end on the shores of "the bankruptcy of the state", because an absolutist state will throttle the development of what was essentially a capitalist economy. However,

...the course of development will not wait for the payment-day of that promissory note drawn by the European states on European society. The devastating counter-blow to the June defeat will be struck in Paris. With the victory of the 'red republic' in Paris, the armies will be vomited forth from inside of the other countries and over the boundaries, and the real power of the contending parties will reveal itself in a pure form. 38

37. Marx, "The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna", in The Revolutions of 1848, ibid., p. 175.
38. Ibid., p. 176.
Continuing in the same vein, Marx noted his indictment of the ruling classes and his hopes for violent counter-blow by the oppressed classes in the following words:

The purposeless massacres perpetrated since the June and October events, the tedious offering of sacrifices since February and March, the very cannibalism of the counter-revolution, will convince the nations that there is only one means by which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated—that is by revolutionary terror.39

As we know, Marx adopted this attitude at a moment in the history of the continental Europe when the bourgeois-democratic revolutions, in which the working class too had participated, failed to entrench the democratic bourgeoisie in power and establish bourgeois-democratic regimes. As things turned out, whereas in France it was the non-democratic sections of the bourgeoisie which emerged as the dominant partner in the regime, in Germany they retained a major say in decision-making despite the overall harmony of the monarchy. As at both these places the democratic bourgeoisie had to share whatever little influence it had with the class/groups which still owed allegiance to the pre-revolutionary regimes, the character of the new regimes remained largely authoritarian. Coupled with the fact that the defeated democratic bourgeoisie not only

remained passive but also anti-working class, it was this character of these regimes that prompted Marx to adopt a stance that at the moment saw no alternative to a violent working-class movement.

We should recall at this point that according to Marx the character of the economy primarily of Germany but also that of France to some extent had already become, before the revolutions, predominantly capitalist. It would not be wrong to infer from this that it was because of this shift in the character of the economies that Marx had been expecting the democratic bourgeoisie to take over the reigns of state power through these revolutions, something that the democratic bourgeoisie failed to do. So that a situation had been created where while the character of the economy was predominantly capitalist, the character of the state was still semi-feudal, semi-monarchical and only partly bourgeois - and hence, non-democratic. As we have said before, it is this non-democratic character of the state which appears to make, for Marx, a violent revolution inevitable.

II. A. We have seen that for Marx it was the authoritarian character of the state that seemed the immediate determining
factor behind a violent socialist revolution. This character of the state, however, was not very helpful in pin-pointing the actual time when the revolution was likely to occur. For Marx, this task was facilitated much more by the state of the economy— that is, whether in a given period the economy of an authoritarian state was in an ascendant phase or was in deep crisis. Therefore, in addition to finding out the political conditions that were responsible for the revolutions of 1848-49, Marx had also been concerned to know the economic conditions that had been instrumental in giving rise to the revolutions just then. His aim was also to compare these conditions with the conditions that prevailed immediately after the revolutions so that it could be precisely determined whether a revolution was likely to occur in the foreseeable future. In the event this likelihood was there, the policies and practices of the movement could be accordingly adjusted.

Marx's studies, which he conducted between June and September 1850, revealed that the revolutions were preceded by a severe economic crisis in all of Europe except the far eastern region. However, no such conditions were currently visible. Marx accordingly prophesied that the coming period would not be conducive to revolutionary upsurge.

According to Marx, the years 1837-42 had been the years of an almost uninterrupted depression. This was followed by a
brief industrial and commercial prosperity in 1843-45. This prosperity gave birth simultaneously to overproduction and excessive speculation. The result of these two developments was the large-scale bankruptcies of the post-1845 years which continued up to the outbreak of the revolution. This was accompanied by potato blight and a huge loss in corn harvest, which caused a steep rise in the corn prices in all European markets. During this entire period, the whole credit system collapsed and financial market was totally destroyed. 40

The recovery from the crisis began in England, which had suffered the least from both the crisis and the revolutions, and was followed soon by that on the continent. The recovery was not, according to Marx, the result of counter-revolutionary stability and order, but of the renewed prosperity in England and the increased demand for industrial goods in the American and tropical markets. Marx summed up his conclusion of this survey in the following words:

While this general prosperity lasts, enabling the productive forces of bourgeois society to develop to the full extent possible within the bourgeois system, there can be no question of a real revolution. Such a revolution is possible only at a time when two factors come into conflict: the modern productive forces and the bourgeois forms of production... A new revolution is possible only as a result of a new crisis... 41

41. Ibid., p. 303, footnote 47.
The Blanquist elements in the Communist League, particularly August Willich and Karl Schapper, did not agree with this analysis of Marx. They believed that it was possible to force a revolutionary uprising in Germany in any case. All that was needed, they argued, was a few daring individuals, and weapons. They accused Marx of being a reactionary. The conflict came to a head on September 15, 1850. In a meeting of the central committee of the League, Marx lashed out at his opponents as follows:

Instead of the materialistic view of the Manifesto they bring forth the idealist one. Instead of the real conditions they point to the will as the major factor in revolution.

While we tell the workers: "you have to endure and go through 15, 20, 50 years of civil war in order to change the circumstances, in order to make yourselves fit for power" - instead of that, you say, "We must come to power immediately..."

Obviously, for Marx the material conditions enjoyed a primacy over the idealistic ones so far as the possibility of a revolution and the determination of an appropriate time for it were concerned. As we know, Marx believed that the two factors that were most important in this context were an authori-

43. McLellan, n. 12, p. 247.
tarian state and an economy in crisis. We saw in this section that according to Marx the second of these factors was not present on the continental Europe during the period under focus. It was because of the absence of this factor in Europe just then that an attempt at insurrection would have been an exercise in foolhardiness. But what if both these factors were present? That is, what if the state were authoritarian and the economy passing through a crisis? Could, and should, an insurrection be attempted in such a situation? In other words, were both these conditions sufficient to create a situation in which a violent revolution could be attempted?

As we shall see below, Marx never formulated this question in this manner. But he answered it all the same through his pronouncements and his political behaviour during the subsequent years. However, in the process he also made a significant addition to his earlier views. This addition inhered in the realisation and its textual and practical expression that in addition to an authoritarian state and economic crisis, the presence of revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat was also necessary for constituting a revolutionary situation. Implied in this position was the assertion, first, that when both the other factors are present but the revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat is missing, one should not indulge in insurrec
tionary politics; and, second, that revolutionary consciousness
Marx adopted this position when the economic crisis that he had predicted, and had been waiting for, did not develop into an immediate proletarian revolution, although it stirred up the by now almost dormant labour movement in Europe and reawakened the old socialist groups of various hues. Marx and Engels played very little active role in the formation of the First International in 1864, the culmination of this fresh awakening of the European working class movement, but Marx was elected a member of the committee that was to draw up the rules of the International. The committee accepted, with small modifications, Marx's draft for the Inaugural Address of the International. 45

As compared to his earlier writings, the Inaugural Address was mild both in tone and content. It did not give the workers any call for immediate revolutionary action. Marx seemed more concerned at this moment about the preservation of the unity of international working class movement. It appears that he did not want to frighten away those elements in it which were hostile to the social revolution of the Marxian variety. Secondly, although the labour movement had grown over the years,

yet the class consciousness of the workers and their leaders was not as sharp now as during the late forties. Pointing out these limitations, and talking in the context of the Inaugural Address, Marx wrote to Engels: "It was very difficult to frame the thing so that our view should appear in a form acceptable from the present standpoint of the workers' movement... It will take time before the reawakened movement allows the old boldness of speech".  

III It may seem from the above that by 1864 Marx had abandoned or softened his previous militant approach to revolution on the continent. This, in any case, is the argument of George Lichtheim, according to whom the Inaugural Address was "the Charter of Social Democracy" and the Marx of 1864 was "the theorist of labour movement ... committed to democratic socialism". Secondly, a corollary of our analysis at the end of the previous section should be that Marx and Engels would not advocate a violent struggle anywhere if the existing 'standpoint' of the workers' movement did not favour such a

46. Marx, in Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, pp. 139-40.
48. Ibid., p. 99.
struggle. However, our analysis in the present section will show that Marx and Engels not only continued to hold their pre-1864 approach to revolution on the continent, but also they severely criticised the workers' movement whenever and wherever it displayed any inclination to give up the militant road if the conditions, in their view, disfavoured such a step. In their view, the movement must either follow militant line or face condemnation. We will see that this was their attitude towards the German socialist movement. So far as the issue of their abandonment of the previous militant approach is concerned, they actually went in the case of Russia to the extent of hoping for a minority revolution at a place where the workers' movement had hardly begun.

III. A. We will begin by outlining their views on the upheaval that took place in Paris in 1871, and resulted in the Paris Commune (March 28, 1871 - May 29, 1871). This development, in the opinion of Lichtheim, "did not permanently dislodge Marx from his mature standpoint", 49 but only "temporarily" influenced him to abandon "his realistic outlook of 1864..." 50

The regime against which the workers revolted and established the Commune was no longer a monarchy but a

49. Ibid., p. 126.

50. Ibid., p. 105.
bourgeois-republic. The king had been defeated and captured by the Prussians in the immediately preceding Franco-Prussian war and a bourgeois-republican government had replaced him during the crisis. However, according to Marx, this regime lacked a genuine bourgeois-democratic character. "We hail the advent of the republic in France", he wrote, "but ... that Republic has not subverted the throne, but only taken its place become vacant. It has been proclaimed, not as a social conquest, but as a national measure of defence". Further, according to Marx, "the stranglehold of the army and the police" remained under the control of those factions of the republican government which had been loyal to the monarch. Lastly, the republicans had "inherited from the Empire, not only ruins, but also its dread of the working class". The implication of this characterisation of the French state at that moment was clear: the workers could not depend upon the institutions of this state to conquer power. In other words, an illegal, extra-institutional struggle was the only real option that they had. This comes out in the support Marx and Engel extended to the workers' revolt when it broke out on March 18.


However, they had believed before the revolt that the moment had not yet arrived for it. Marx had written in September 1870, for example, that any attempt to overthrow the government "in the present crisis, when the enemy is almost knocking at the doors of Paris", would be "a desperate folly". Engels had expressed a similar view when he wrote to Marx that the workers "would be needlessly crushed by the German armies and thrown back another 20 years". When the revolt actually broke out, Marx considered it the result largely of an "accident". That accident was "the presence of Prussians in France and their position right before Paris". But Marx by no means denounced the revolt. "World history", he wrote to Ludwig Kugelmann, "would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on the condition that the prospects were unmistakably favourable", meaning thereby that taking risk was, to a certain extent, natural, necessary and justified. We should recall that Marx had taken a similar position in 1850 in his The Class Struggle in France, and, before that, in 1848 when he had labelled the June uprising of Paris as premature and yet had praised it.

53. Ibid.
54. Engels, in Selected Correspondence, n. 46, p. 234.
55. Marx, ibid., p. 248.
Marx's analysis of the tactics of the Commune also proves our point. Almost right from the beginning he was pessimistic about the success of the Commune, but he blamed the Communards themselves for their impending failure. On April 7, 1871, he wrote to Wilhelm Leibknecht: "It seems the Parisians are succumbing. It is their own fault... a fault which was ... due to their too great decency ... they rather foolishly did not want to start a civil war". On April 12, he repeated these views in his letter to Kugelmann, "They ought to have marched at once on Versailles", he wrote, "They missed their opportunity because of moral scruples". 56

Marx displayed, too, this militant attitude regarding the revolution on the continent in certain general remarks he made in the same period, remarks which sprang during the course of his detailed appraisal of the functioning of the Commune. These remarks pertained to the strategy and tactics of the working class movement when the power has already been captured. He wrote: "The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes". 57 We get a clue to Marx's meaning when we read this remark in conjunction with what he had written to Kugelmann only a few

56. Ibid., pp. 246-47.
days earlier. He had said, "If you look at the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire*, you will find that I declare: the next French Revolution will no longer attempt to transfer the bureaucratic–military apparatus from one hand to another, but to smash it, and this is the pre-condition for every real peoples revolution on the continent".\(^58\) We can see that Marx is advocating here the use of force after the political power proper has been seized in a revolution on the continent. In other words, he is advocating its use during the period of the reorganisation of the state.

Force may also have to be used to put down the bourgeois elements left over after the seizure of power, who may try to impede the work of the Commune. Such elements will still exist because the Commune does not do away with class struggles but only represents "the organised means of action" of the working class; it only begins the process leading towards the final emancipation of labour. Therefore, the Commune may still have to undergo "catastrophe" in the form of "specific slave-holders' insurrections, which, while for a moment interrupting the work of peaceful progress, would only accelerate the movement by putting the sword into the hands of the Social Revolution".\(^59\)

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58. Marx, *Selected Correspondence*, n. 46, p. 27.

A similar point was made by Engels in his article "On Authority", written between March 1872 and October 1873, in which he criticised the Bakuninists who opposed all authority. Talking of the nature of revolution, Engels said: "A revolution is ... the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon... And if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries". Giving the example of the Commune, Engels further said: "Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeois?" Engels, in fact, accused (like Marx had done before) the Commune of not having used this force "freely enough". 60

Clearly, what Lichtheim calls Marx's "temporary abandonment" of his "realist outlook of 1854" was in fact a reassertion, under favourable conditions, of a belief he had never really given up, namely, that in the continental Europe the revolution had to come through a violent struggle.

III. B. With regard to Germany, Marx and Engels severely criticized the reformist strategy and tactics of the German

60. Engels, Selected Works, Volume 2, n. 52, p. 379.
Social-Democratic Party (SPD) throughout the period from 1867 onwards when representative assemblies, elected through manhood suffrage, were once again allowed there, but in such a manner that they had little control over the executive authority of the state, which remained in the hands of the King. Thus, for example, condemning the Gotha Programme of 1875, on the basis of which the Social Democratic Workers' Party (which later changed its name to the German Social-Democratic Party, mentioned earlier) had just been created, Marx wrote: "There is nothing in its political demands beyond the old and generally familiar democratic litany: universal suffrage, direct legislation... etc... which depend on the recognition of the so-called sovereignty of the people and are hence only appropriate in a democratic republic". He ridiculed the party for addressing such demands "which are only feasible in a democratic republic" "to a State which is no more than a military despotism and a police state, bureaucratically carpentered, embellished with parliamentary forms and disguised by an admixture of feudalism although under the influence of bourgeoisie, and then to assure this same state into the bargain that they imagine that they can impose these demands on it "by legal means". "Even vulgar democrats", continued Marx, "tower mountains above

this kind of democratism which keeps within the bounds of what is allowed by the police and disallowed by logic". Two year later, Engels made light of Eugen Duhring, a German philosopher and economist, in a similar fashion. Speaking of the role of force in revolution, he wrote: "It is only with sighs and groans that he admits the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of an economic system of exploitation... And this in Germany, where a violent collision ... may, after all, be forced on the people..." Marx returned to this issue once again in 1880 when, in a letter to Henry M. Hyndman, he contrasted the situation in England with that in Germany and remarked that the "military despotism" in the latter made a "revolution" necessary.

Since the SDP did not change its policies despite the fact that in 1878 Bismark had imposed the Anti-Socialist Law (the law was lifted only in 1890) which prohibited the formation or continuation of any organisation which openly preached socialism or communism, Engels continued to criticise the

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64. Marx, Selected Correspondence, n. 46, p. 314.
party after the death of Marx. His critique of the Draft Democratic Programme of the party in 1891 was in the familiar vein. In his critique, he attacked the "opportunism" that was steadily "gaining ground in a large section of the Social-Democratic Press". He condemned these elements for believing that the "present legal order in Germany was adequate for putting through all party demands by peaceful means", without asking themselves whether in Germany they "will not have to smash the fetters of the still semi-absolutist, and moreover indescribably confused political order". He made it clear that it was only in democratic republics, or in monarchies where the democratic institutions had become entrenched and powerful, that it could be possible to bring communism in a peaceful manner. But in Germany, where it "was not permitted to advance even a republican party programme openly", the belief that a communist society could be established "in a cosy, peaceful way" was "totally mistaken".66

It only remains to quote Engels' remarks in his famous 1895 introduction to Marx's pamphlet The Class Struggles in France to show that his appraisal of the situation in Germany continued to be different from that of the SPD till the very end. It is revealing, in this context, that the more militant

passages from this introduction were deleted by the cautious SPD leadership, and that Engels allowed it to be published in this edited form only under protest. "I am of the opinion", he had written while protesting, "that you gain nothing by preaching a complete abstinence from violence. No one believes it and no party in any country goes so far as to give up the right to withstand illegality arms in hand". 67

In the introduction itself, Engels speaks of the post-1870 Germany after briefly reviewing the history of the workers' movement in Europe. He writes: "... here, too, the conditions of the struggle had essentially changed. Rebellion in the old style, street fighting with barricades which decided the issue everywhere up to 1848, was to a considerable extent obsolete". A few pages later, Engels writes these often-quoted sentences: "The time of surprised attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for, body and soul". 68


68. See Engels' introduction to Marx's The Class Struggle in France 1848-1850, in Selected Works, Volume 1, n. 21, pp. 196, and 199-200.
At a superficial glance, it could look as if Engels were suggesting an abandonment of violent struggle. However, in our opinion he is speaking here purely from the military point of view. In the first quotation, he only says that "rebellion in the old style", that is, "street fighting with barricades", had become "considerably" obsolete. In other words, it is not rebellion that has become obsolete, but the old style of rebellion. And even the obsolescence of the old style is not total. In the second quotation, Engels says that the method of making revolution by small minorities through surprise attacks was now outdated. Now the masses "themselves" must be "in it", that is, in revolution. This becomes more clear when we read the following words of Engels: "Does that mean that in future street-fighting will not play any role? Certainly not. It only means that the conditions since 1848 have become far more unfavourable for civilian fighters and far more favourable for the military. In future, street-fighting can, therefore, be victorious only if this disadvantageous situation is compensated by other factors. Accordingly, it will occur more seldom in the beginning of a great revolution than its farther progress, and will have to be undertaken with greater forces". 69

69. Ibid., p. 199.
III. C. In Russia, too, Marx and Engels believed, a violent revolution remained the only way socialism could be reached. However, this revolution need not necessarily be made by the working class; it could be made, or at least led, by some revolutionary group on behalf of the village communes that had historically been a dominant feature of the Russian rural society and, in the later half of the nineteenth century, were still in existence, although they had now fallen on bad days. If the revolution took this latter course, the Russians could totally bypass the capitalist stage of development and land straight into socialism via regenerated village communes. Further, both Marx and Engels made it clear in their own separate ways that the revolution in Russia need not necessarily be a majority affair. It becomes clear from their statements in this connection that if the revolution actually assumed a minority form it would still meet their approval.

A detailed and exact characterisation of the Russian state and economy of the period is not available in Marx's and Engels' writings. But their pronouncements show that they were aware of the monarchical and despotic nature of the state and a mixed kind of agricultural economy in which, after the serfdom was abolished in 1861, village communes, big landlords, and middle and poor peasants all existed together.

Further, the writings at least of Marx give evidence of the fact that he felt it desirable that Russia should bypass
the capitalist phase of development. Dissociating himself from those socialists who wanted Russia to rapidly develop into a capitalist society so that a socialist revolution of the traditional Marxian variety could be attempted, and condemning the newly-emerging capitalists who were bent upon destroying the village commune, Marx wrote: in November 1877: "If Russia continues to pursue the path she has followed since 1861, she will lose the finest chance ever offered by history to a people and undergo all the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist regimes".  

This jump to socialism via village commune could, however, be made, emphasised Marx, only through a revolution. In a draft of his letter to Vera Ivanovna Zasulich, in February - March 1881, he said: "In order to save the Russian commune there must be a Russian Revolution. And the Russian government and the 'new pillars of society' are doing their best to prepare the masses for such a catastrophe. If the revolution takes place at the right time, if it concentrates all the forces to ensure the free development of the village commune, the latter will soon emerge as the regenerative force in Russian society and is something superior to those countries which are still enslaved by the capitalist regime".


The people who, in addition to Marx, wanted to bring about this development were various populist groups which had become active after 1861 when some political activity was allowed in Russia. These groups believed that will play a catalytic role in revolution, meaning that a revolution could be created in rural Russia. Marx particularly admired the group Norodnaya Volya and after the assassination of Alexander II, praised the group as "brave people with no melodramatic poses, straightforward, realistic and heroic". At the same time, he condemned such socialist exiles as George Plekhanov and P. Axelrod for not believing in "politico-revolutionary action". "In order to make propaganda in Russia", he sarcastically remarked, "these gentlemen ... go away to Geneva!"

Engels too was expecting an immediate revolution in Russia. And he was so eager to see this revolution that he was willing to accept it even if it were to be made by a small minority. In a letter to Vera Zasulich, on April 23, 1885, he wrote: "What I know... about the situation in Russia makes me think that the Russians are approaching their 1789. The revolution ... may break out any day. In these circumstances the country

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73. Marx to Jenny Lougnet, quoted in McLellan, ibid., p. 441.
74. Marx to F. Sorge, quoted in McLellan, ibid.
is like a charged mine which only needs a match to be applied to". Further on in the same letter, Engels made these significant remarks: "This is one of the exceptional cases where it is possible for a handful of people to make a revolution, i.e., by giving a small impetus to cause a whole system, which ... is in no more than labile equilibrium, to come crashing down...

Ever Blanquism - the fantastic idea of overturning an entire society by the action of a small group of conspirators - had a certain raison d'être, that is certainly so now in Petersburg. 75

As should be clear, this was for the first time in their entire political career that Marx and Engels approved, in so many words, a minority revolution even before it had actually taken place. However, they adopted this position because in their perception, firstly, the old Russian system had become so weak and unstable that it would need no more than a handful of people to pull it down, and, secondly, even though the entire population may not be willing to participate in the revolution, a majority of it was uniformly hostile to the existing regime.

75. Engels to Vera Ivanovna Zasulich, Selected Correspondence, n. 46, p. 362.