COMMENTARY:

a critique of B. J. Harrell's "Marx and Critical Thought"

Karl Marx

Bill J. Harrell's "Marx and Critical Thought" is the primary essay published in the May 1976 issue of PAUNCH, *a scholarly journal concerned with the relationships of literature to body to radical vision. Published twice a year, the journal (123 Woodward Ave., Buffalo, NY 14214) is edited by Arthur Efron, who submitted Mr. Harrell's study to several persons for their commentary, including Raya Dunayevskaya whose critique of the essay follows.*

> Time is the place of
> human development--Marx

Marx's Humanism--and that is what Marx named his discovery of a new continent of thought: "a new Humanism"[1]--is either a revolutionary philosophy of liberation or it is nothing at all. Just as a revolutionary philosophy of liberation is not just a "philosophy" (much less Harrell's concept of "sociology"), but a struggle for actuality, the actuality of freedom, so the uprooting of the exploitative system, existing reality, is a great deal more than freedom from economic exploitation, rooted though it is in that necessity. Rather, the process of liberation--"the negation of the negation"--creates what Marx called "new forces, new passions."[2] Having uprooted the exploitative class structure of society, the Subject (the proletariat) has achieved a whole new human dimension. Because "the individual is the social entity,"[3] the contradiction between the individual and society is transcended. Even when this was still expressed in the abstract philosophic language of Hegel, instead of Marx's analysis of concrete class struggles and historic revolutions, the dialectics of liberation were unambiguous: "Individuality

purified of all that interferes with its Universalism, i.e., freedom."[4]

Harrell is right when he says labor is "central to Marxian critical analysis" (my emphasis)--and totally wrong when he speaks of it as "ultimate end," as if it were not Marx's specific description of capitalism and capitalism only, but of any society. All that did was permit Harrell to impose on Marx's "ambiguous" conception some sort of kinship with today's state-capitalist societies that call themselves Communist. Though Harrell feels compelled to qualify that allegedly theoretical affinity, holding that the "totalitarian result" "clearly violates its /Marx's/ spirit," he never lets go of his perverse definition:

> Perhaps the most succinct way in which one could summarize Marxian political-economy is: a theory of the development of workers' control as the prerequisite for a society based upon work.

Far from looking toward "a society based upon work" as an "ultimate end," Marx was so appalled by labor that he, at first, called for "the abolition of labor."[5] What convinced him otherwise, that is to say, had him concretize the concept, and call, instead, for "the emancipation of labor" was the laborer, his class struggles, his daily resistance at the point of production, where the instrumentality, machinery, dead labor dominated living labor. The revolt of the laborer against his exploiter, the capitalist, was also directed against the ideology, the false consciousness, which represented him as what he is not.

Marx's critique of classical political economy's great discovery that labor was the source of all value was that labor was treated only as "source," not as Subject, the "gravedigger" of the system resting on alienated labor. Naturally, workers' control of production would change that mode of labor, but for that to be the absolute opposite of capitalistic reification of labor, transformation of man into thing, labor has to become self-activity, development not only of production, but the self-development of man/woman,[6] the human dimension. Over 100 years

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before Hannah Arendt discovered the difference between labor and work, and profoundly misread Marx, and Harrell read Arendt as an improvement on Marx's concept, Marx had spent a lifetime developing the concept of the duality of labor. It is "about"[7] the only category Marx takes credit for creating.

This is no empty concern with who was the "first." Rather, my point is the dialectics, which so escape Harrell who is busy piling up "failures" of Marx as if he were the first in this century plus 33 years to be burying Marx, and this, though he himself admits that Marx keeps living, living globally, agreeing with George Sorel's accounting for Marxism's "historic tenacity." Instead of rushing to declare labor and freedom "ambiguous in conception and unclear in its implications," ought Harrell not at least have asked himself: "though I deny Marx is any such genius as his adherents claim him to be, how does it happen that a genius credited with discovering a whole new continent of thought, lays claim to originality in but a single category, the duality in labor? What is so crucial in Marx's concept of alienated labor (whether or not 'lifted' from Hegel's theory of alienation), that has, in Marx's hands, led (1) to break with other socialists, revolutionaries, so that, on the one hand stands Marx and his evaluation of the class struggles, and, on the other hand, all others, from the anarchist Proudhon to Marx's adherent, Lassalle (whom Marx called "first workers' dictator"). (2) A century before "Third World" as concept was developed, why did Marx himself move from the concept of China as "vegetating in the teeth of barbarism" to such "embrace"[8] of the T'aiping Revolution as to necessitate a second deeper look at labor as work of artisans? Moreover, (3) the concepts of labor and of freedom and of "becoming"[9] were so deepened that, if anything moved Marx from being an "economist" to being a "sociologist" that surely is clearest seen in the Grundrisse which I, Harrell, have dismissed as if it simply proved there was no difference between the young and the mature Marx? Finally, (4) in Capital, Marx claims originality for the concept of duality of labor, a split sharpened as "concrete and abstract labor." Marx feels an urgency to work out a totally new section, "The Fetishism of Commodities" which, to this day, has

served schools of thought as different as Existentialism in France and the Frankfurt School in Germany (not to mention political economists and sociologists and other specialized "sciences" Marx as revolutionary has rejected), but I, Harrell, concerned with the 'inadequacy of Marxian thought as a critical sociology' fail to examine."

Now then, since I had to ask the questions "for Harrell, but Harrell himself spent not a single word on them, limiting himself to some isolated quotations from Marx, let us take a look at Marx's thought, as a totality, no matter in what abbreviated form alloted space demands. Great as the Marx quotations were that Harrell chose, they are no substitute for the singularity of that split in the category, labor. Because it is original with Marx, and "is the pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns,"[10] Marx raises it in the very first chapter of Volume I of Capital, no matter how many new discoveries of economic laws (none of which are "iron"),[11] leading to the discernment of "the law of motion of capitalism," to its collapse; and no matter how broad the historical developments, philosophic insights and literary allusions Marx traces through in the four volumes--he does not stray far from the duality of labor as pivot since, indeed, it is not only pivot for comprehension of political economy, but is ground for revolution--the dialectical development from the revolution in philosophy to philosophy of revolution to actuality.

None before Marx had split the category, labor, but it is this, just this, which discloses the perversity of capitalism whose mode of production, with its factory clock, pounds all the many varieties of concrete labor, into one abstract mass of "socially-necessary labor-time."[12] Marx, having followed the worker from the market place, where the worker, though "free," had sold himself, or rather his ability to labor, labor power, as a commodity, proceeded to the workshop. The center point of Marx's Capital is the analysis of 'The Labor Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value." There he traces the laborer as he is turned into an appendage of a machine. This dead labor (labor congealed into the form of machine) dominates living labor, after which "it," as

commodity, be he employed or unemployed, is traced back into the market. There--and this there is not only in the market place but includes the whole of bourgeois culture--"The Fetishism of Commodities" reigns supreme not only over capital/labor, but also over independent intellectuals, including the discoverers of labor as the source of all value.[13] This is no accident, says Marx, as only "freely associated men" can strip the fetishism from commodities.

Obviously, Harrell thinks he is the exception and can give a more "substantative" view of freedom whose thought, as it moved to materialist "political economy" was "so wrong as to be irrelevant" and became "progressively narrower." To correct that Harrell empties the specificity of Marxian categories, introducing such total confusion into that most precise expression, "capital accumulation," as to make it both equivalent to bourgeois culture and acceptable to Marx since "bourgeois culture provides the necessary capital accumulation as well as the abstract insight as to the ultimate end of universal freedom." On the way to his conclusion of the know-it-all, be-it-all "sensual needs," Harrell arms himself with what he conceives as support from "Critical Thought." (Incidentally, while that is what the Frankfurt School called itself and also what it directed toward Marx, it is not what Marx named his new continent of thought. So opposed was he to labels that, outside of "the new Humanism" as the dialectic unity of the material and the ideal, he never tried pasting labels upon his total outlook. Historical Materialism was Engels' expression; Dialectical Materialism was Plekhanov's. And, while the Frankfurt School tried to leave their designation "open" enough to "include" Marxism, it is they, not revolutionary Marxism, that narrowed itself to "Critical.")

Unfortunately, though his sympathy lies in their direction, Harrell hardly presents a total picture of them, whether in relation to Marx, or "as such." First, he fails to show the division within: what they were in the 1930s and early 1940s, and what they became in the postwar years hardly makes them a unified outlook--not totalitarian, need it be added--but nevertheless motivated by Marxism, independent, and separate from both the German Social Democracy

and the Russian "state socialism." Secondly, he acts as if the present "school"--the Habermas "school" is altogether removed from both Marxism and the original Critical school--speaks with a like voice.

The most telling mixup relates to the one--Herbert Marcuse--Harrell so admires as to credit one of his works, Eros and Civilization, as being nothing short of "one of the most important works in social philosophy since Marx." We do not see the Herbert Marcuse of Reason and Revolution, from which work Harrell could have learned a great deal about both Marx and Hegel. He makes no note of the open departures from Marxism since then.[14] And, though he analyzes more of Marcuse's works as against none of Adorno's and little of Horkheimer, the founders of Frankfurt School, the truth is that his preoccupation is just Eros and Civilization. Or, more precisely put, sensuality sans history, applicable to "all" cultures, as substitute, not just for Marx's "economics" or "sociology"--but passions, striving to reconstruct exploitative capitalism on humanist beginnings. Instead, Harrell redefines needs as "timeless erotic needs." That, of course, is Harrell's privilege, but it certainly wasn't Marx's perspective, and I doubt it is Marcuse's.

Harrell may argue that, that was precisely his point, a critique of Marx which showed that "in the effort to avoid considering" just such sensual human needs and restricting "his analysis to the negative or given historical trends, the critical perspective is crippled." The trouble is that thereby Harrell rejects more than Marx and/or "critical thought" as he rushes, helter skelter, to conclude: "There must not only be the negation of the negation but negation through the identification of positive possibilities."

Language is no stranger to reductionism, but this violates simple common sense which I am sure Harrell has plenty of. But so anxious was he to drive in the nail into his accusation of just how far "Marxian theory fell short of its liberating purpose" that he violated even the simple linguistic meaning of two negatives equalling a positive.

Before Harrell, to friend and foe alike, negation of negation meant a positive, not just a positive "possibility," but a positive, a new positive. Marx took seriously the Hegelian dialectic which, at the very apex of second negativity, affirmed "the most important part of rational cognition" to be "to hold fast to the positive in the negative . . ."[15] As Marx opposed blueprinting the future, he allowed but one intimation of "the future" and that because it was so rooted in the concrete, in the present. He spelled it out as "permanent revolution."[16] That "negation of negation" would assure not stopping at first negation--the overthrow of the exploitative system--but would recognize and develop "the wealth of human needs" so that "there arises positive Humanism, beginning from itself."[17]

As for Harrell's dramatic climax, that the inclusion of "sensual needs" into "socio-historical categories" would assure the conquest of "unhappy consciousness"-- "'unhappy consciousness' resolves itself through the discovery of the sensual in the form of its particularity."--I wish him happiness. But let him not forget that the "unhappy consciousness" is only a quite early stage in Hegel's Phenomenology, and in Marx's new continent of thought and in critical thought to the present; there is a long, long road still ahead.

NOTES

[1]Lest this be identified only with the young Marx of the famous 1844 Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts, consider also Volume III of Capital (p. 954) where he defines freedom as "development of human power, which is its own end, the true realm of freedom."

[2]Capital, Vol. I, (p. 839) contains a paragraph on "new forces and new passions," and (p. 837) "negation of the negation." (Charles H. Kerr edition is used throughout.)

[3]Again, lest only the 1844 Manuscripts be thought of when identifying individual and social, consider the expression in The Communist Manifesto: "the free development of each is the condition for free development of all."

[4]Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, par. 481.

[5]The German Ideology, p. 69.

[6]In the same Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts where Marx wrote, "The secret of the relationship of man to man finds its unambiguous definitive, open, obvious expression in the relationship of man to woman" he attacked not only capitalist private property but also "quite vulgar and unthinking communism" which thought all evils would be done away with once private property was abolished instead of going on to "second negation" and going on to self-development of mankind, putting all his stress on the fact that it must not be only a "to have," but a "to be": "Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that . . . in place of all physical and spiritual senses, there is the sense of possession, which is the simple alienation of all these senses . . . Each of his human relations to the world--seeing, hearing, smell, taste, feeling, thought, perception, experience, wishing, activity, loving . . . To such absolute poverty has human essence had to be reduced in order to give birth to its inner wealth."

(I am using my own translation as I was first to translate these now famous essays, but they can be found in many editions.)

[7]The only other category Marx claimed credit for is the split in the category of capital into constant capital and variable capital, but since capital was treated not as a thing but a relationship of production of capitalist to laborer, and since constant capital was but another name for dead labor and variable capital for living labor, the latter is the only element that underwent a variation in magnitude because of all the millions of commodities exchanged daily; this alone was living and could be and was exploited to produce all surplus values as well as its own exchange-value, wages. They all ended with the split in the category labor, thus: concrete and abstract; labor/labor power; living labor/dead labor; constant/variable capital; fetishism of commodities.

[8]Read especially the articles he wrote for The New

York Daily Tribune, reproduced now in The American Journalism of Marx and Engels. (N.Y., The American Library.) And if you cannot read the massive Grundrisse, at least read those parts reproduced in abbreviated form, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formation (N.Y. International Publishers). Marx also brought the question of T'aiping into a footnote in Capital itself, which the American edition omitted.

[9]Grundrisse: "When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productives powers, etc. of individuals, produced in universal exchange? . . . . What is this, if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality. Where he does not see to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?"

[10]Capital, Vol. I, p. 48.

[11]Harrell encloses "iron laws" in quotation marks as if they summed up Marx's own attitude. In fact, he directed one of his latest works against such expressions used by Lassalle whose famous expression was "iron law of wages"; "If I abolish wage labor, then naturally I abolish its laws also, whether they are 'iron' or sponge." (Critique of the Gotha Program).

Capital is, generally, referred to as a 3 volume study because that is all that bear that name. But, in fact, The Theories of Surplus Value, edited and misedited by Kautsky was, by Marx, considered Volume 4 of Capital, and I always include those volumes as integral to Capital.

[12]Contrast this view of time by factory clock and world market to Marx's concept, quoted at the top of my commentary, which maintains that time is the "place of human development." The same totally different world relates to all the criticisms piled on "immiseration" as against Marx's insistence that, be the worker's payment "high or low," capital ("value big with value") "vampire-like" sucks him dry of "free individuality." (See the whole of Part VII, "Accumulation of Capital," and the penultimate chapter, "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation." Capital, I.).

[13]In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Marx explained why it was he considered intellectuals "petty bourgeois" like "shopkeepers," though in "their education and individual position they may be separated from them as widely as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not go beyond the limits which the latter do not go beyond in life, that they are consequently driven theoretically to the same tasks and solutions to which material interests and social position practically drive the latter."

[14]Marcuse surely makes no secret of this, with the sole exception that the 1960 new preface to Reason and Revolution, originally published in 1941, is presented as if the author had not undergone some very fundamental changes that were quite discontinuous. We have been friendly enemies for many years, and I believe the first serious change is seen in his re-examination of Marxism that he wrote as Preface, in 1957, to my Marxism and Freedom. (It has been recently reproduced in the 4th English edition of my work.)

[15]Hegel, Science of Logic, Vol. II, p. 476. In the new 1-volume translation by A. V. Miller, the quotation appears on p. 834. (N.Y., Humanities Press).

[16]The idea of permanent revolution was first developed by Marx after the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, in his 1850 Address to the Communist League. It has been developed, first, by Trotsky who, however, while holding to the concept of world revolution, nevertheless introduced a duality into it by glossing over the revolutionary role of the peasantry. Then, in the hands of Mao as "uninterrupted revolution," it not only violated the Hegelian concept of negation of negation by "declaring" it "non-existent," but Marx's concept of proletarian revolution which got lowered to "cultural revolution." There are all kinds of ways of decapitating the dialectic since the first revisionist, Bernstein, found its revolutionary nature burdensome up until the present Russian chief philosopher, Kedrov, who tried to force a separation between Lenin's Philosophic Notebooks, and the Hegelian concept of negativity. See "Why Hegel? Why Now?" in