

Marx on the Centrality of the Peripheries for the Global Revolution

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ABSTRACT: This text presents an examination of Karl Marx's final and mostly unexplored phase of intellectual development and suggests a reassessment of some of his key ideas. It challenges the long-lasting misrepresentation of Marx as a Eurocentric and economistic thinker. It reconsiders Marx's ideas in light of his late remarks on non-Western societies and the critique of European colonialism and shows how Marx avoided economic determinism unlike many of his followers. The article shows that Marx highlighted the specificity of historical conditions and the centrality of human intervention in the shaping of reality and the achievement of revolution and change.

KEY WORDS: Marx, theory of revolution, communism, Russia, center-peripheries

I. FROM CENTER TO PERIPHERIES

Like many other European revolutionaries of their time, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels believed that the communist revolution would arise in one of the countries where capitalism had transformed a large part of the population into wage laborers, generating conditions of exploitation and misery so intolerable that rebellion would become necessary. Even before the revolution of the Paris Commune, Marx had stated that, most likely, the movement that would overthrow the existing order would begin in France, the epicenter—since 1789—of the most significant social mobilizations

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and political transformations in Europe. However, he was convinced that only in England, a nation where capitalism had taken control of nearly all spheres of production, could a revolution be realized that would radically alter economic and social relations and present a true alternative society.

Marx's beliefs regarding where the revolution could begin gradually became more flexible. Already in 1853, in the article *Revolution in China and Europe*, written for the *New-York Tribune* to analyze the effects of British colonialism, Marx had written that the uprising in China could "export disorder to the Western world." By the late 1860s, Marx believed that the revolution could also start from the periphery of the system. After realizing that, instead of making a revolution, the majority of English proletarians had preferred to become the "tail of their own oppressors,"¹ and after understanding the centrality of the Irish question, Marx argued that the "decisive blow against the ruling classes in England" could be "struck not in England, but in Ireland," and that the only way to "accelerate the social revolution in England . . . was to make Ireland independent."² He was firmly convinced that a people who subjugated another only strengthened their own chains.

Even toward the end of his life, when called upon to express his opinion on the possible socialist transformation of the Russian rural commune, he stated that it was an option that could not be dismissed *a priori*. He agreed with Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828–1889), a prominent theorist of anti-capitalist populism in Russia who, in his essay *Critique of Philosophical Prejudices Against the Community Ownership of Land* (1859), had written that, thanks to the maturation of certain economic and social phenomena in economically advanced countries, it had become possible "for other peoples to enjoy rapid development and rise directly from a lower to a higher stage, avoiding the intermediate logical steps."³ The positive characteristics of the rural commune could be preserved if they were related to the achievements made in Western Europe. The rural commune (*obshchina*) could contribute to the advent of a season of social emancipation for the Russian people only if it became the embryo of an economic organization radically different from the existing one. In other words, without the transformations brought about by capitalism, the *obshchina* could never have transformed into a new and modern example of agricultural cooperativism.

On the political side, this meant that the common ownership of land, still in effect in the rural communes, did not necessarily have to be replaced by the spread of private property—conceived by some as an inescapable step for the formation of the urban proletariat. Moreover, Marx had learned, through studies on Algeria by another Russian theorist—the sociologist Maxim Kovalevsky (1851–1916)—that the "individualization of land ownership" not only brought enormous economic benefits to the French invaders, but also facilitated the achievement of a fundamental "political goal" of the colonizers: "to destroy the foundations of this society."⁴

Contrary to a popular interpretation today, which tries to portray Marx—despite the textual evidence revealed through the publications of the new *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, and significant studies published in recent years⁵—as an economicist and Eurocentric author, for him the outbreak of a revolution did not depend solely on economic dynamics. The political factor was always the central element for the overthrow of the system. However, Marx was well aware that certain specific material conditions were necessary for a society based on socialist principles to emerge.

II. IS CAPITALISM ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNIST REVOLUTION?

The conviction that expansion of the capitalist mode of production is a necessary prerequisite for the birth of communist society runs through the whole of Marx's work. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), he and Friedrich Engels declared that attempts at a working-class revolution during the age of the overthrow of feudal society had been doomed to failure, owing to "the then undeveloped state of the proletariat, as well as to the absence of the economic conditions for its emancipation, conditions that had yet to be produced, and could be produced by the impending bourgeois epoch alone."⁶

Exploiting new geographical discoveries and the birth of the world market, the bourgeoisie had "given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country." More important still, it had created "the weapons that bring death to itself" and the human beings who would wield those weapons: "the modern working class—the proletarians," who were increasing at the same rhythm at which capitalism was expanding.⁷ For Marx and Engels, "the advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association."⁸

Marx expressed a similar judgment, in a more political optic, in the "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*" (1856). Recalling that historically unprecedented industrial and scientific forces had been born together with capitalism, he told the militants attending the event that "steam, electricity and the self-acting mule were revolutionists of a rather more dangerous character than even citizens Barbes, Raspail and Blanqui."⁹

In the *Grundrisse* (1857–1858), Marx repeated several times the idea that capitalism "creates bourgeois society and the universal appropriation of nature and of the social nexus itself by the members of society." In this text, he clearly affirmed that:

Capital drive[s] beyond national boundaries and prejudices and, equally, beyond nature worship, as well as beyond the traditional satisfaction of existing needs and the reproduction of old ways of life confined within long-established and complacently accepted limits. Capital is destructive towards, and constantly revolutionizes, all this, tearing down all barriers which impede the development of the productive forces, the extension of the range of needs, the differentiation of production, and the exploitation and exchange of all natural and spiritual powers.¹⁰

One of Marx's most analytic accounts of the positive effects of capitalist production is found toward the end of *Capital, Volume One* (1867), in the section entitled "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation." In the passage in question, he summarizes the six conditions generated by capitalism—particularly by its centralization—that constitute the basic prerequisites for the birth of communist society.¹¹ These are: (1) the cooperative labour process; (2) the scientific-technological contribution to production; (3) appropriation of the forces of nature by production; (4) creation of machinery that workers can only operate in common; (5) the economizing of all means of production; and (6) the tendency to the creation of the world market. For Marx:

Hand in hand . . . with this expropriation of many capitalists by a few, other developments take place on an ever-increasing scale, such as the growth of the cooperative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economizing of

all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and, with this, the international character of the capitalistic regime.¹²

Marx well knew that the concentration of production in the hands of a small number of bosses increased “the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation” for the working class,¹³ but he was also aware that “the cooperation of wage-labourers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them.”¹⁴ He was convinced that the extraordinary growth of the productive forces under capitalism, greater and faster than in all previously existing modes of production, had created the conditions to overcome the social-economic relations that capitalism had itself brought about—and therefore the conditions to achieve the transition to socialist society.

In sum, on the basis of the dialectical method he used in *Capital*, Marx maintained that “the elements for the formation of a new society” mature along with “the material conditions and the combination on a social scale of the processes of production.”¹⁵ These “material premises” are decisive for the achievement of a “higher synthesis in the future,”¹⁶ and, although revolution will never arise solely through economic dynamics but will always require a political factor too, the advent of communism “demands for society a certain material groundwork or set of conditions of existence which in their turn are the spontaneous product of a long and painful process of development.”¹⁷

Similar ideas that confirm the continuity of Marx’s thought are contained in short but significant writings of a political character that he wrote after *Capital*. In the “Notes on Bakunin’s *Statehood and Anarchy*” (1874), which document his radical differences with the Russian revolutionary over the prerequisites for an alternative to capitalist society, Marx said of the social subject that will lead the struggle:

A radical social revolution is bound up with definite historical conditions of economic development; these are its premises. It is only possible, therefore, where alongside capitalist production the industrial proletariat accounts for at least a significant portion of the mass of the people.¹⁸

In the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), he further argued the need “to prove concretely how in present capitalist society the material, etc., conditions have at last been created which enable and compel the workers to lift this historical curse.”¹⁹ Finally, in one of his last short published pieces, the “Preamble” (1880) to the electoral program of the *French Workers’ Party*, he stresses that one essential requirement for the producers to appropriate the means of production is “the collective form, whose material and intellectual elements are shaped by the very development of capitalist society.”²⁰

III. THE RUSSIAN CASE: MARXISTS THOUGHT SO, NOT MARX!

While Marx was firmly convinced that capitalism was an essential transition in order to create the historical conditions within which the working class could fight for the communist transformation of society, he always strongly denied having conceived a monolithic interpretation of history, according to which human beings were destined to follow the same path everywhere in the world and through identical temporal stages. Completely opposed to any meta-historical theory, understood as a universal march inevitably imposed on all peoples and detached from a rigorous analysis of different economic and social contexts, Marx repeatedly refuted the thesis, wrongly attributed to him, of the inevitability

of the bourgeois mode of production. He believed that the course of history should not be imagined based on abstract laws, but should always be measured according to the different existing contexts. The controversy on the prospect of capitalist development in Russia, usually known for the letters exchanged between Vera Zasulich (1849–1919) and Marx, provides clear evidence of this.

In November 1877, Marx had drafted a long letter to the editorial board of *Patriotic Notes* (*Otechestvennye Zapiski*), in which he set out to reply to an article on the future of the *obshchina* in Russia—"Karl Marx Before the Tribunal of Mr. Zhukovsky"—by the literary critic and sociologist Nikolai Mikhailovsky (1842–1904).²¹ However, it contained some interesting anticipations of the arguments that Marx would later use in his reply to Zasulich.

In a series of essays, Mikhailovsky had raised a question very similar, nuances apart, to the one that Zasulich would pose four years later. For Zasulich, the crux of the matter was the impact that possible changes in the rural commune would have on the propaganda activity of the socialist movement. Mikhailovsky, on the other hand, was concerned to discuss at a more theoretical level the various positions regarding the future of the *obshchina*—ranging from the thesis of liberal economists that Russia should simply do away with the *obshchina* and embrace a capitalist regime, to the argument that the commune might develop further and avoid the negative effects of the capitalist mode of production on the rural population.

Whereas Zasulich approached Marx to discover his views and to receive indications for practical work, Mikhailovsky, an eminent representative of the more moderate, liberal wing of Russian Populism, clearly leaned toward the second thesis and thought that Marx had a preference for the first. While Zasulich wrote that "Marxists" were arguing that the development of capitalism was indispensable, Mikhailovsky went further and claimed that the author of this thesis was Marx himself in *Capital*.

In his reply to Mikhailovsky, through the letter to the editorial board of *Patriotic Notes*, Marx decided to "speak straight out" and to express the conclusions he had reached after many years of study. He began with the following sentence: "if Russia continues along the path it has followed since 1861, it will lose the finest chance ever offered by history to a people and undergo all the fateful vicissitudes of the capitalist regime."²²

Marx's first key clarification concerned the areas to which he had referred in his analysis. He recalled that, in the section of *Capital* entitled "The So-called Primitive Accumulation," he had sought to describe how "dissolution of the economic structure of feudal society" set free the elements of "the economic structure of capitalist society" in "Western Europe." The process did not occur throughout the world, therefore, but only in the Old Continent. Marx referred to a passage in the French translation of *Capital* (1872–1875), where he asserted that the basis for the separation of the producers from their means of production was the "expropriation of the agricultural producers," adding that "only in England [had this been] accomplished in a radical manner," but that "all the other countries of Western Europe [were] following the same course."²³

This is also the spatial horizon within which we should understand the famous statement in the preface of *Capital, Volume One*: "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future." Writing for a German readership, Marx observed that "just like the rest of Continental Western Europe, we suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness

of that development.” In his view, alongside “the modern evils,” the Germans were “oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production, with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations.”²⁴ It was for the German who might “in optimistic fashion comfort himself with the thought that in Germany things are not nearly so bad,” that Marx asserted “*De te fabula narratur!*”²⁵

Marx also displayed a flexible approach to other European countries, since he did not think of Europe as a homogeneous whole. In a speech he gave in 1867 to the German Workers’ Educational Society in London, later published in *The Harbinger* (*Der Vorbote*) in Geneva, he argued that German proletarians could successfully carry out a revolution because “unlike the workers in other countries, they need not go through the lengthy period of bourgeois development.”²⁶

In the letter to the editorial board of *Patriotic Notes*, Marx shared Mikhailovsky’s view that Russia might “develop its own historical foundations and thus, without experiencing all the tortures of the [capitalist] regime, nevertheless appropriate all its fruits.” He accused Mikhailovsky of “transforming [his] historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves.”²⁷ Continuing his argument, Marx pointed out in his analysis in *Capital* that the historical tendency of capitalist production lay in the fact that it “created the elements of a new economic order, giving the greatest impetus both to the productive forces of social labour and to the all-round development of each individual producer”; in effect, it “already rested upon a collective mode of production” and could “not but be transformed into social property.”²⁸

Mikhailovsky, then, could apply this historical sketch to Russia in only one way: if Russia was tending to become “a capitalist nation like the nations of Western Europe”—and in Marx’s view it had been moving in that direction in the previous few years—she would not succeed “without first transforming a large part of her peasants into proletarians”; subsequently, “once brought into the fold of the capitalist regime, she [would] pass under its pitiless laws like other profane peoples.”²⁹

Marx was most annoyed because he thought his critic had set out “to transform [his] historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they [found] themselves placed.”³⁰ He added with a touch of sarcasm: “But I beg his pardon. That is to do me both too much honour and too much discredit.”

Thus Mikhailovsky, who did not know Marx’s real theoretical position well, criticized it in a way that seemed to anticipate one of the cardinal points of twentieth-century Marxism, which was already spreading insidiously among Marx’s followers in Russia and elsewhere. Marx’s critique of this conception was all the more important because it related not only to the present but also to the future.³¹ He never published this response, however,³² and the idea that Marx considered capitalism to be an obligatory stage for Russia, too, rapidly took hold and had serious consequences for what became Marxism in Russia.

A similar misunderstanding happened with Vera Zasulich. A great admirer of Marx, she wanted to know whether he also knew of the influence it had had on Russian comrades discussing “the agrarian question and the rural commune.” She stressed that he, “better than anyone,” could understand the urgency of the problem—a “life and death question” for Russian revolutionaries—and added that “even the personal fate of our revolutionary

socialists depended” on his answer.³³ Zasulich then summarized the two different viewpoints that had emerged in the discussions:

Either the rural commune, freed of exorbitant tax demands, payment to the nobility and arbitrary administration, is capable of developing in a socialist direction, that is, gradually organizing its production and distribution on a collectivist basis. In that case, the revolutionary socialist must devote all his strength to the liberation and development of the commune.

If, however, the commune is destined to perish, all that remains for the socialist, as such, is more or less ill-founded calculations as to how many decades it will take for the Russian peasant’s land to pass into the hands of the bourgeoisie, and how many centuries it will take for capitalism in Russia to reach something like the level of development already attained in Western Europe. Their task will then be to conduct propaganda solely among the urban workers, while these workers will be continually drowned in the peasant mass which, following the dissolution of the commune, will be thrown onto the streets of the large towns in search of a wage.³⁴

Zasulich further pointed out that some of those involved in the debate argued that “the rural commune is an archaic form condemned to perish by history, scientific socialism and, in short, everything above debate.” Those who held this view called themselves Marx’s “disciples *par excellence*”: “Marxists.” Their strongest argument was often: “Marx said so.” For this reason, she addressed a heartfelt plea to Marx: “You would be doing us a great favour if you were to set forth your ideas on the possible fate of our rural commune, and on the theory that it is historically necessary for every country in the world to pass through all the phases of capitalist production.”³⁵

For nearly three weeks, Marx remained immersed in his papers, well aware that he had to provide an answer to a highly significant theoretical question and to express his position on a crucial political matter. He did not exclude the possibility that the rural commune would break up and end its long existence. But if that happened, it would not be because of some historical predestination. Referring to his self-styled followers who argued that the advent of capitalism was inevitable, he commented to Zasulich with his typical sarcasm: “The Russian ‘Marxists’ of whom you speak are quite unknown to me. To the best of my knowledge, the Russians with whom I am in personal contact hold diametrically opposed views.”³⁶

For Marx the Russian *obshchina* was not predestined to suffer the same fate as similar West European forms in earlier centuries, where “the transition from a society founded on communal property to a society founded on private property” was more or less uniform. To the question whether this was inevitable in Russia, Marx drily replied: “Absolutely not.”³⁷ Russia could not slavishly repeat all the historical stages travelled by England and other West European countries. Logically, therefore, even the socialist transformation of the *obshchina* could happen without its being necessary to pass through capitalism.

In the end, Marx thought it essential to assess the historical moment at which this hypothesis was being considered. The “best proof” that a socialist development of the rural commune was “in keeping with the historical tendency of the age” was the “fatal crisis [here Marx’s political hopes led him to write one ‘fatal’ too many] which capitalist production has undergone in the European and American countries where it has reached its highest peak.” Drawing on ideas suggested by the masterpiece *Ancient Society* (1877) by the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881), he expected that the economic

crisis then under way might create favorable conditions for the “destruction” of capitalism and “the return of modern society to a higher form of the most archaic type—collective production and appropriation.”³⁸

IV. BUT STILL MARX

Marx’s openness to the potential beginning of revolution in regions where capitalism was still in its nascent stage is a positive example of his theoretical flexibility and helps understand why, at the end of his life, he consistently focused on peripheral countries and the devastating effects of European colonialism.

However, it is fundamental to emphasize that he never ceased to prioritize the struggles of the working-class movement and to recognize the primary role of the industrial proletariat. Marx had not changed his complex critical judgment on the rural communes in Russia, and the importance of individual development and social production remained intact in his analysis. He did not suddenly become convinced that the archaic rural communes were a more advanced locus of emancipation for the individual than the social relations existing under capitalism. Both remained remote from how he conceived of communist society.

The well-known drafts of Marx’s letter to Zasulich³⁹ show no glimpse of the dramatic break with his former positions that some scholars have detected.⁴⁰ Marx did not suggest, as a matter of theoretical principle, that Russia, or other countries where capitalism was still underdeveloped, should become the special locus for revolution to break out; nor did he think that countries with a more backward capitalism were closer to the goal of communism than others with a more advanced productive development. In his view, sporadic rebellions or resistance struggles must not be confused with the establishment of a new social-economic order on a communist basis. The possibility he considered at a highly particular moment in Russia’s history, when favourable opportunities arose for a progressive transformation of agrarian communes, could not be elevated into a more general model. French-ruled Algeria or British India, for example, did not display the special conditions that Chernyshevsky had identified, and the Russia of the early 1880s could not be compared with what might happen there in the future. The new element in Marx’s thinking was an ever-greater theoretical openness, which enabled him to consider other possible roads to socialism that he had never before taken seriously or had regarded as unattainable.⁴¹

Marx and Engels effectively expressed their views on the relationship between workers and peasants for the world revolution in the preface to the new Russian edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in 1882:

In Russia we find, face to face with the rapidly developing capitalist swindle and bourgeois landed property, which is just beginning to develop, more than half the land owned in common by the peasants. Now the question is: can the Russian *obshchina*, a form of primeval common ownership of land, even if greatly undermined, pass directly to the higher form of communist common ownership? Or must it, conversely, first pass through the same process of dissolution as constitutes the historical development of the West? The only answer possible today is this: if the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for communist development.⁴²

The first spark could have appeared in Beijing or New Delhi, but the fire was also bound to spread to London and Paris.

Notes

1. Karl Marx.
2. Karl Marx to Sigfried Meyer and August Vogt, 9 April 1870, MECW, 45:475.
3. Nikolaj Černyševskij, *Scritti politico-filosofici*, Lucca, Fazzi, 2001, p. 104.
4. K. Marx, *Über Formen vorkapitalistischer Produktion*, Frankfurt, Campus, 1977, p. 109.
5. Cf. Marcello Musto, “New Profiles of Marx after the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA²),” *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 49 (2020), n. 4: 407–419, and Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, MECW, 6:514.
7. *Ibid.*, MECW, 6:490.
8. *Ibid.*, MECW, 6:496.
9. Karl Marx, “Speech at the Anniversary of the *People’s Paper*,” MECW, 14:655.
10. Karl Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*” [*Grundrisse*], MECW, 28:337. For a commentary on this complex text, see Marcello Musto, ed., *Karl Marx’s Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* (London: Routledge, 2008).
11. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, MECW, 35:749.
12. *Ibid.*, MECW, 35:750.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, MECW, 35:336.
15. *Ibid.*, MECW, 35:504–505.
16. *Ibid.*, MECW, 35:506.
17. *Ibid.*, MECW, 35:90–91.
18. Karl Marx, “Notes on Bakunin’s Book *Statehood and Anarchy*,” MECW, 24:518.
19. Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme,” MECW, 24:83.
20. Karl Marx, “Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers Party,” MECW, 24:340.
21. Marx reworked the letter a couple of times, but in the end it remained in draft form, with signs of deletions, and was never actually sent.
22. Marx, “Letter to *Otechestvennye Zapiski*,” MECW, 24:199.
23. Marx, “Letter to *Otechestvennye Zapiski*,” MECW, 24:200. See also Karl Marx, *Le capital, Paris 1872–1875*, MEGA², II/7:634. This addition to the original 1867 edition, which Marx introduced when revising the French translation of his book, was not included by Engels in the fourth German edition of 1890, which later became the standard version for translations of *Capital*.
24. Marx, “Preface to the First German Edition,” MECW, 35:9. In the French edition, Marx slightly restricted the scope of this phrase: ‘Le pays le plus développé industriellement ne fait que montrer à ceux qui le suivent sur l’échelle industrielle de leur propre avenir,’ K. Marx, *Le Capital*, MEGA², vol. II/7: 12. In his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty misinterprets this passage as a typical example of historicism that follows the principle of ‘first in Europe, then elsewhere’ (*ibid.*, 7). He further presents the ‘ambiguities in Marx’s prose’ as characteristic of those who regard ‘history as a waiting room, a period that is needed for the transition to capitalism at any particular

time and place. This is the period to which . . . the third world is often consigned' (ibid., 65). At any event, Neil Lazarus, "The Fetish of 'the West' in Postcolonial Theory," in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, eds. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), has rightly pointed out that 'not all historical narrativization is teleological or "historicist"' (ibid., 63).

25. Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, MECW, 35:8.
26. "Report of a Speech by Karl Marx at the Anniversary Celebration of the German Workers' Educational Society in London, February 28, 1867," MECW, 20:415.
27. Marx, "Letter to *Otechestvennye Zapiski*," MECW, 24:200.
28. Marx, "Letter to *Otechestvennye Zapiski*," MECW, 24:200.
29. Ibid., 201.
30. Ibid.
31. See Pier Paolo Poggio, *L'Obščina. Comune contadina e rivoluzione in Russia* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1978), 148.
32. Various attempts have been made to explain why Marx did not publish his reply to Mikhailovsky. When Engels forwarded it, in 1885, "To the Editors of the *Severny Vestnik*," he said that it had not been published 'for reasons unknown to [him],' in MECW, 26:311. A year earlier, however, in a letter to Vera Zasulich, he had said: 'This is the reply he wrote; it bears the stamp of a piece done for publication in Russia, but he never sent it to Petersburg for fear that the mere mention of his name might compromise the existence of the review which published his reply.' Friedrich Engels to Vera Zasulich, 6 March 1884, MECW, 47:112. It should be noted that there is no proof that the journal would have really been in danger if it had hosted a text by Marx in its pages.
33. Vera Zasulich, "A Letter to Marx," in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, ed. Shanin (London: Routledge, 1984), 98–99.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Marx, "Second Draft," MECW, 24:361.
37. Ibid., MECW, 24:367.
38. Ibid., MECW, 24:357.
39. For an analysis of these complicated fragmentary and incomplete texts see Marcello Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020, pp. 65–73.
40. See the interpretations of Wada, "Marx and Revolutionary Russia," in *Late Marx*, ed. Shanin, 60, where it is argued that the drafts showed a 'significant change' since the publication of *Capital* in 1867. Similarly, Enrique Dussel, *El último Marx (1863–1882) y la liberación latinoamericana* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1990) spoke of a 'change of course' (pp. 260, 268–269), and Tomonaga Tairako, "Marx on Capitalist Globalization," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 35 (2003) has argued that Marx 'change[d] his perspective on the global revolution carried out by the working class' (ibid., 12). Other authors have suggested a 'third-worldist' reading of the late Marx, in which the revolutionary subject is no longer factory workers but the masses in the countryside and the periphery. Reflections and various interpretations on these questions may also be found in Umberto Melotti, *Marx and the Third World* (London: Palgrave 1977) and Kenzo Mohri, "Marx and 'Underdevelopment,'" *Monthly Review* 30/11 (1979), 32–43.

41. See Marian Sawer's excellent work *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 67: 'What happened, in the 1870s in particular, was not that Marx changed his mind on the *character* of the village communities, or decided that they could be the basis of socialism as they were; rather, he came to consider the possibility that the communities could be revolutionized not by capitalism but by socialism. . . . He does seem to have seriously entertained the hope that with the intensification of social communication and the modernization of production methods the village system could be incorporated into a socialist society. In 1882 this still appeared to Marx to be a genuine alternative to the complete disintegration of the *obshchina* under the impact of capitalism.'
42. Marx and Engels, "Preface to the Second Russian Edition," MECW, 24:426.

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