

# **MARXISM AND THE ABORIGINAL QUESTION: THE TRAGEDY OF PROGRESS**

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## **Abstract/Résumé**

Aboriginal concerns are among the least studied areas of Marxist thought. Historically, Aboriginal people have ignored or rejected Marxist ideas. The author suggests that recent events in Canada have given Marxists an opportunity to begin building a practical relationship with Aboriginal people. The left, he notes, must treat Aboriginal demands for cultural survival seriously.

Les affaires aborigènes sont parmi les sujets les moins étudiés de la pensée marxiste. Historiquement, les Aborigènes n'ont tenu aucun compte des idées marxistes ou les ont rejetées. L'auteur suggère que des événements récents au Canada ont donné aux Marxistes une occasion de commencer à construire un rapport pratique avec les Aborigènes. Il remarque qu'il faut que la gauche traitent sérieusement les demandes aborigènes pour la survivance culturelle.

## Part One

This paper will deal, in a preliminary way, with one of the least studied areas in Marxist thought, the “Aboriginal question.” It is becoming increasingly clear that the desire of Aboriginal peoples for self-determination, expressed in the agitation for self-government, will not disappear. It is unlikely that the desire to preserve culture, and to resist any further encroachment by industry or by the modern state, will be articulated in any other political form than self-government. The overwhelming rejection of the Charlottetown proposals for self-government by Aboriginal peoples,<sup>1</sup> in the face of their acceptance by the leadership of four major Aboriginal organizations (the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Council of Canada, the Métis and the Inuit Tapirisat) indicates that there is little agreement over what self-government should entail. However, despite these powerful disagreements, few in the various Aboriginal communities located in the northern half of that land mass which many Aboriginal people call Turtle Island dispute the need for self-determination.

What the people said “no” to was not self-government but rather the political arrangements proposed by the Federal government. The Charlottetown Agreement would have given more power and resources to the Chief-in-Council in return for concessions on treaties.<sup>2</sup> The rejection had two sources. First, many people feared a self-government arrangement that would put even more power in the hands of the Chief-in-Council, elected under the Federal *Indian Act* and ultimately answerable to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Second, many people worried that the proposed agreement would finalize and constitutionalize the process of transforming the relationship between Aboriginal nations and the Canadian state from a treaty-based, nation-to-nation relationship to a custodial relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Marxists, though, cannot use this rejection as an excuse not to theorize about their position on the struggle for self-determination. Historically, Aboriginal peoples have not seen much of value in Marxist thought. There are many reasons for this. Many Marxists have not paid sufficient attention to the various critiques from Aboriginal leaders and Elders, to the detriment of Marxist theory and revolutionary practice. I propose to take seriously these criticisms, to try to discover what Marxism may be able to learn from them and to see what, if anything, Marxism has to offer to Aboriginal people in their struggle.

The most immediate challenge that the Aboriginal liberation struggle presents to Marxist theorists is that the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island are not proletarians, nor do they want to become proletarians. Unlike Black South Africans, their struggle does not take the form that Marx anticipated

the overthrow of capitalism would take. Even if Aboriginal peoples share with Marxists a loathing for capitalism, they do so for different motives and with different expectations. Russell Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement, argued that the

only manner in which American Indian people could participate in a Marxist revolution would be to join the industrial system, to become factory workers or “proletarians” as Marx called them (1983:26).<sup>4</sup>

The irony is not lost on Aboriginal leaders. To prevent the destruction of their cultures by the forces of capitalist economic activity, they must become modernized and industrialized, thus abandoning their cultures, Means continued, arguing that Marx was

very clear about the fact that his revolution could occur only through the struggle of the proletariat, that the existence of a massive industrial system is a precondition of a successful Marxist society (Means, 1983:26).

The question is more than one of revolutionary strategy. It involves a critique of the most profound and basic values motivating Marxist thought. Marxism, like all Western thinking, is committed to the values of consumption and production. Marxism may call for more equitable distribution of the social product, more democratic control over the processes of production, but at bottom, it—like the capitalist economic relationships it seeks to replace—is committed to a view of humans as producers and consumers. Nature is an object to be dominated and manipulated and humans overcome their alienation from nature by consuming it (Deloria, 1983:114-15). Thus the relationship between modern, Western societies and nature is one of struggle. Progress, for bourgeois *and* for Marxist thinkers, is measured by the degree to which nature is pacified. The relationships in the West between humanity and nature, and between men and women, are modelled after the metaphor of rape. Nature and women are passive, inert, formless matter, to be shaped and dominated. Aboriginal critics of Marxism see in such an attitude a disrespect for nature, an erotic attachment to domination identical to that of bourgeois society.<sup>5</sup> “Marxists,” writes Frank Black Elk, “are hung up on exactly the same idea of “progress” and “development” that are the guiding motives of those they seek to overthrow” (Black Elk, 1983:141). The Aboriginal critique of the Marxist acceptance of the Western ideology of progress takes three forms: progress as inevitable; progress as homogenizing and universalizing all human cultures; progress as good. Marxism's commitment to the idea of laws of historical development, and the progressive nature of this development, has been the basis for much of the most intelligent criticisms of Marxism by Western philosophers. Leo

Strauss and Eric Voegelin, for example, saw Marxism as the apogee of modernity.<sup>6</sup> The Aboriginal critique similarly links Marxism to trends in the history of Western thought.

George Tinker writes that if

Marxist thinking and the notion of a historical dialectic were finally proven correct, then American Indian people and all [I]ndigenous peoples would be doomed. Our cultures and value systems, our spirituality, and even our social structures, would give way to an emergent socialist structure that would impose a notion of the good on all people regardless of ethnicity and culture (Tinker, 1992:15-16).

Marxists have been insensitive to the demands for self-government and cultural survival made by Aboriginal peoples because they see Aboriginal culture as inevitably swept away by the tide of industrialism, regardless of whether this modernization is carried out by the historical epoch of capitalism or by its replacement, socialism. Aboriginals object to the Marxist vision because it sees all history unfolding after the fashion of the European model. The Marxist commitment to industrialization as the precondition of proletarian revolution means destruction for non-industrialized societies (Means, 1983:25). Even the terminology of “primitive” “precapitalist” etc. is Euro-centric, failing to take seriously the differences between Western and Aboriginal cultures and the value of the latter.<sup>7</sup> If Marxists are to make their ideas relevant to the Aboriginal liberation struggle then we are going to have to seriously address these arguments. It is not simply a matter of looking through the corpus of Marxist writings and pulling out his ideas on progress. Marx's writings (and, by extension, Marxism) are not so much a coherent philosophy as a series of ideas and insights that are more or less systematic and consistent. There is no doubt that Marx can be read as proposing a historical law of development in which human societies evolve from more “primitive” modes of production to more advanced, and that there is little that can be done about it. In the remainder of the paper I will argue that this is not the only possible reading of Marx, nor is it one that should be adhered to by present day Marxists.

## Part Two

The revolutionary power of Marxism comes, in large measure, from its confidence that the evils of capitalism cannot last forever, that they will of historical necessity be replaced by a socialist society of justice and plenty. Capitalism will fall, despite the overwhelming power its supporters presently have at their disposal. The inevitable will only happen, however, when all

of humanity has been incorporated into the capitalist world. Marx imagined that the revolution against capitalism would occur when all cultures had been submerged by a world culture.<sup>8</sup> The laws of economic development thus spell the end for local, non-industrialized cultures. Capitalism destroys all national cultures and replaces them with a universal, homogeneous culture of industrial production. Thus the economic forces that make socialist revolution inevitable destroy local culture. In his famous articles in the *New York Daily Tribune* on the consequences of British domination in India, Marx wrote that the English, in introducing capitalist relations into India

dissolved these small semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities, by blowing up their economical basis, and thus produced the greatest, and to speak the truth, the only *social* revolution ever heard of in Asia.

Now, sickening as it must be to human feeling to witness those myriads of industrious patriarchal and inoffensive social organizations disorganized and dissolved into their units, thrown into a sea of woes, and their individual members losing at the same time their ancient form of civilization, and their hereditary means of subsistence, we must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies (Marx, 1968:88).

Not even the most isolated villages could retain their cultural integrity in the face of capitalist advancement.

Avineri wrote that although Marx was critical of the effects of capitalism on non-capitalist social formations he did not mistake such a condemnation “for a romantic search after the idyllic preindustrial times.” It is true that capitalism is the most brutalizing and dehumanizing economic system history has yet known. Yet to Marx, capitalism is still a necessary step toward the final solution, since only capitalism can create the economic and technological infrastructure that will enable the free development of every member of society according to his or her capacities (Marx, 1968:3). European expansion is necessary to create the conditions of the universalization of capitalist relations, in spite of its horrors (Marx, 1968:12;17). The writings of Marx and Engels are replete with examples of such an analysis. In his letter on “French Rule in Algeria” Engels wrote that “the modern bourgeois, with civilization, industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord or to the marauding

noble, with the barbarian state of society to which they belong" (Engels, 1968:43).

Imperialism is a necessary fact of life in a bourgeois world economy, and is one of the stages economic history passes through. It is also a good thing *insofar as* it destroys an oppressive, local social order. India and Algeria were not free, egalitarian societies, and so Marx and Engels seemed to welcome European domination as the first step on the long road to liberation.

At times, however, Marx and Engels backed away, in part at least, from this evaluation of progress. Engels' protests against a too literal reading of the economic determinism of historical materialism are well known. In his writings on Russia, Marx too argued that the predicted two-stage revolution (first the revolutionary overthrow of feudalism by capitalism, then its replacement by socialism) was not inevitable. Marx concluded that his theoretical categories were not intended to be absolute prescriptions or predictions. Different societies may follow different paths. The Russian commune system in the villages offered the opportunity to introduce socialism without passing through the destructive phases of capitalism. Nostalgia for such a historical phase is misplaced because it cannot stand up to the forces of capitalist development, but the peasant village can serve as the basis for socialism if: 1) collective cultivation is permitted; and 2) before the communal ownership is completely destroyed by capitalism,

a proletarian revolution is successfully carried out in Western Europe, creating for the Russian peasant the preconditions requisite for such a transition (Marx, 1972:673; 1968:443-44).

Marx is more ambivalent about the value of progress than his Aboriginal critics (or Strauss or Voegelin) would allow. Progress is tragic in the classical sense. It is our fate, which can only be avoided under exceptional circumstances and with exceptional effort.<sup>9</sup> The most extensive theoretical discussions of non-capitalist social formations by Marx and Engels are found in the *Grundrisse* and in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Their tragic view of progress is most clearly presented here. Marx had borrowed from Hegel the idea that history unfolds dialectically. That is, the original unity of experience is broken and history proper is the story, the adventure, of the return to unified experience. The adventure is often painful, however. Even when the journey ends (in the scientific attitude for Hegel and in communism for Marx), humanity never quite gets over the yearning it has for the era when the unity of experience was immediate and directly sensed. Marx interpreted this historical process of alienation and its overcoming as the separation of labour from the natural conditions of laboring and its eventual recovery. Human societies which

exist without individual property ownership and without industrialization experience no alienation because each person labours directly on nature, without any mediating relations of hierarchy or domination. The labourer is not separated from the product of her or his labour.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the ancient conception, in which man always appears (in however narrowly national, religious or political a definition) as the aim of production, seems very much more exalted than the modern world, in which production is the aim of man and wealth the aim of production. In fact, however, when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive 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 seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming? A bourgeois political economy—and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds—this complete elaboration of what lies within man, appears as the total alienation, and the destruction of all fixed, one-sided purposes, as the sacrifice of the end in itself to a wholly external compulsion. Hence in one way the childlike world of the ancients appears to be superior; and this is so, in so far as we seek for closed shape, form and established limitation. The ancients provide a narrow satisfaction, whereas the modern world leaves us unsatisfied, or, where it appears to be satisfied with itself, is *vulgar* and *mean* (Marx, 1965:84-85).

Engels echoed similar sentiments in his anthropological work. He mixed together a belief in the inevitable destruction of Aboriginal social formations with a profound sense of loss.

The power of these primordial communities had to be broken and it was broken. But it was broken by influences which from the outset appear to us as a degradation, a fall from the simple moral grandeur of the ancient gentile society (Engels, 1983:98).

This sense of the tragedy of progress is an immediate sensing at the level of moral conscience of the ambiguity in the Marxian (and Hegelian) concept of history. Engels ended *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* quoting Lewis Henry Morgan's apocalyptic belief that the integrity and justice of the gentile society would return from its diremption but in a "higher form" (Engels, 1983:175). As Marxists we believe in the moral and spiritual value of the overcoming of alienation, and so we believe in the final

goodness of the progress of history. However, what do we say to those people who have yet to experience the alienation for which socialism is the answer (Deloria, 1983:115-116), who see goodness as much in the non-dialectical solidity of the past as in the future?

### Part Three

There is within Marxism the possibility of building a practical relationship with, and a theoretical understanding of, Aboriginal peoples and their own unique revolutionary struggles. The starting point is “the national question.” The definitive position within Marxism on the national question was articulated by Lenin in the years just preceding the Russian Revolution. The Leninist position is made up of two intersecting tendencies: an internationalist outlook, and a support for the right of national self-determination. In his polemics against the Bund and against the various other ethnically based movements advocating cultural-nationalist autonomy, Lenin consistently combatted all nationalisms. “No one unobsessed by nationalist prejudices” wrote Lenin, “could fail to see that the breakdown of national and cultural isolation and identity was a positive step forward” (Lenin, 1971:17). Further, he wrote that “our [i.e. The Bolsheviks] slogan is: the international culture of democracy and the world working class movement” (Lenin, 1971:11). Lenin’s internationalist perspective was based on his belief: 1) that nationalism, at least as it currently was manifested, was a feature of bourgeois society, and was doomed to extinction when the essentially internationalist proletarian revolution occurred; and 2) that class loyalty must supersede any nationalism or ethnic loyalty which is transclass. Lenin assumed that, in broad outline, history was moving toward a more internationalist arrangement, that the future proletarian culture would be universally shared. Those who stood against the unity of the world proletariat were anti-revolutionary and were condemned. Witness the last days of the Second International.

Lenin’s opposition to cultural nationalisms, however, was based on more deeply held principles than a commitment to an abstract form of internationalism. He opposed *certain* nationalisms because they were regressive, tying together the local proletariat and “their” bourgeoisie. So that, at the same time as he polemicized against local chauvinisms he asserted the absolute, unconditional right of peoples to self-determination, including secession from a future socialist state (Lenin, 1971:98). It is “beyond doubt that in order to eliminate all national oppression [in the Socialist Russia of the future] it is very important to create autonomous areas, however small, with entirely homogeneous populations” (Lenin,

1971:37). This would provide a homeland for those who wished to preserve their culture, language etc. To prevent socialist Russia from becoming a "prison house of nationalities" the right to secede must be unequivocally supported and defended.

While some nationalist movements are regressive and may not be actively encouraged by Marxists, defense of the right to self-determination can help forge links between peoples that transcend cultural and ethnic tensions. Lenin cited the example of the Swedish proletariat's support for the Norwegian secession movement. The working classes of the two groups were brought closer together because the Norwegian workers realized that the Swedish proletariat was not supporting their national oppression by the Swedish state (Lenin, 1971:72). The decision to actively support a secession movement through encouragement or simply to support the principle of self-determination while arguing against secession in a particular case, depends upon the revolutionary consequences of the specific case. Whether support for the cultural aspirations of an ethnic group is in effect supporting the Indigenous bourgeoisie against the proletariat, or is serving to further the revolutionary struggle is the definitive question. In so far as Marxists will actively encourage ethnically based Aboriginal liberation struggles will depend upon whether such "nationalism" is reactionary or progressive. (This issue of the reactionary or progressive nature of Aboriginal liberation struggles that are based on ethnicity will be discussed at the end of the paper.)

Muga recently (1988) addressed the question of the possibility of forging a link between Marxists and Aboriginal movements for independence. The Aboriginal struggle is by definition ethnic; therefore the key to linking it to proletarian, class based movements is to combine ethnic and class struggles. Muga argues that the conjoining concept is imperialism. Both the proletariat and Aboriginal peoples are oppressed by trans-national capital in their efforts at achieving self-determination. The proletariat are oppressed through the control exercised over their labour time, the Aboriginal peoples by the control exercised over their land (Muga, 1988:37-38). In both cases capital prevents people from achieving any real autonomy. The nationalist struggle is not purely an ethnically based movement, that is, one in which one set of cultural values and customs, language etc. is replaced by another as proponents of the back-to-the Indian movements such as Russell Means argue. Rather, it is tied to the more general struggle against the power of capital. Ethnic nationalism is the form that such liberation movements take when the oppressed peoples are not oppressed as workers, but rather as possessors of resources who are being dispossessed and marginalized. The proletariat cannot succeed in overthrowing capitalism while supporting the imperialist destruction of Aboriginal com-

munities. Traditionally, the idea of nation-building has been associated in Canada with the development policies of the federal government. Such things as Macdonald's railway construction projects and the transformation of the Prairies into farm lands created the Canadian state. As such it has been applauded by all, across class lines. Progressive nationalists are critical of free trade because they want more such nation-building. To Aboriginal peoples, however, nation-building has meant dispossession, disease, starvation and cultural and political genocide. They cannot survive any more nation-building. In supporting more development, even in the name of national interest, the Canadian proletariat and its social democratic leaders are supporting more (imperialist) exploitation. This does not further the liberation struggle; it further strengthens and supports the Canadian bourgeoisie. Similarly, Aboriginal resistance to modernity must have as an ally the power of labour.

The interests of a popular alliance does not counterpoise a worker's movement and ethnosocial formation as competitive organs for overall political leadership of emancipatory struggles. The fight against the imperialistic tendencies of a capitalist economic order requires political unity and an understanding of the ultimate link between self-determination of an ethnoformation and workers' class emancipation. Neither are isolatable factors (Muga, 1988:39).

Even if both Aboriginal persons and workers are oppressed by a similar economic formation it does not follow that they are necessarily allies. This common trait does help relieve some of the sting from the criticisms of Russell Means that a Marxist-led working class is necessarily an enemy of Aboriginal peoples. However, it does not go far enough in answering the Means critique. Nothing short of real experience can ever answer the concerns of Aboriginal peoples that Marxism is committed to its own, but equally destructive, version of modernity. All that can be accomplished theoretically is to demonstrate the possibility of such an alliance.

An example of a relationship between a socialist society and Aboriginal peoples is the case of the Miskito people in Nicaragua. In 1979 the Sandinista's founded an organization, Misurasata, which included representatives of the Sandinistas and the three main Aboriginal peoples residing within the territorial boundary of Nicaragua: the Miskitos, the Sumos and the Ramas. Its purpose was to revolutionize the Aboriginal peoples, to incorporate them into the Sandinista movement. By 1981, Phillippe Bourgeois was led to write in classic overstatement that "the objective class interest of the Amerindian population coincides with the goals of the Sandinista Revolution" (Bourgeois, 1981:33).

Bourgeois' analysis, which was effusive with praise for the Sandinista

regime, completely misread the real situation. Rather than supporting the Sandinista regime and its attempts to develop the region, the Miskitos in particular reacted angrily, many even joining the Contras. The important questions for us are, why did they reject the policies of the Sandinistas and how were the Sandinistas eventually able to win them back?

The Miskito people rebelled against plans by the Sandinistas to modernize their region. The Miskitos traditionally lived in the rain forest as hunters and gathers while cultivating staples. The Sandinistas attempted to introduce industrial and agricultural development into Miskito territory. This involved infrastructure construction, development of the timber and mining resources and the large scale introduction of cash crops such as coconuts (Sollis, 1989:500). The Sandinistas tried to solve the problems that the Miskito faced after 200 years of colonial oppression by stimulating economic growth. This attempt was premised on the soon to be discovered false premise that the Miskito were essentially a proletarianized people. They had been forced into industrial labour first by British and then by American corporations and the Sandinistas assumed that this had created a proletarian ideology in the Miskito (Sollis, 1989:500-501). The Miskito reaction, facilitated by the liberationist rhetoric of the Sandinistas, was to reject any attempts to further their proletarianization, even if it was socialistically inspired.

By 1984 the Sandinistas were beginning to realize their mistakes. In July 1985 the Natural Commission of Autonomy released its report which called for the self-determination of the Indigenous peoples within their traditional territory. They were provided with cultural and language rights and the right to use the land and its resources as they saw fit. Autonomous regions based on these rights would be established for each of the Aboriginal peoples. The limit, a crucial one given Lenin's argument in favour of the right to secede, was that the territorial integrity of Nicaragua was inviolate (Ortiz, 1987:54-57).

## **Part Four**

The critical question for Marxists which is raised by the issue of a potential alliance between the left and Aboriginal people is how to maintain the struggle against capitalism, and, at the same time, retreat from a commitment to progress. The possibility of such an alliance for Marxists rests on the fact that a planned economy, one not driven by the iron laws of profit and the market, can make room for those who wish to preserve a self-contained economy and culture. The value of an alliance of Aboriginals and the left lies with the substantiality, the compact content, of Aboriginal

spirituality which can help fill the void faced by a future proletarian culture as it tries to create a world on the moral and philosophical wreckage left by capitalism. Finally, this alliance can be made real by the left treating the rights asserted by Aboriginal Natives as transitional demands.<sup>11</sup>

Socialism offers at least the possibility of preventing the complete destruction of Aboriginal culture. The appetite of the capitalist market and drive for profit is insatiable. A capitalist economy cannot rest content with exploiting only a fixed amount of land, resources and people. It must grow and expand to prevent stagnation and collapse. James Bay I gives way to James Bay II until all of Turtle Island is subdued. There is no need for a socialist society to act differently. It, too, can stop at nothing until all of nature has been transformed into a reflection of its will. A planned economy geared to satisfying need and not to profit at least holds out the possibility of respecting Aboriginal culture and stopping the process of transforming nature. Writing of the abolition of national oppression, Lenin argued that by “transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the *possibility* of abolishing national oppression; the possibility becomes *reality* “only”—“only”!—with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres” (Lenin, 1971:116-117). Democracy is no guarantee of sympathy for Aboriginal peoples by the masses. In the absence of such feeling there is no hope. However, as things stand presently there is little even a sympathetic population can achieve. Furthermore, the drive for profit pits the immigrant society against Aboriginal peoples. All those, and they are currently the majority, who accept the idea of production for profit—including not only the owners but the workers in the pulp industry, the commercial fisheries etc.—must needs see Aboriginal people as an obstacle.

The left, therefore, can offer the Aboriginal liberation struggle the power of labour. Aboriginal people in North America are in a uniquely weak position. Their labour is not needed, and so they have no real weapon with which to fight. Aboriginal people tried using guns at Kahnawake and Kanesatake, but they were quickly overwhelmed although no other Aboriginal nation was as well positioned to fight as the Mohawks. In short, the Aboriginal struggle for survival cannot succeed without allies, and the only possible ally is organized labour. Presently, labour is the enemy of Aboriginal peoples because its leadership is tied to reformist policies. Labour sees its own advantage furthered by a flourishing capitalist economy. They are as opposed to Aboriginal treaty rights as the bourgeoisie—witness the confrontations between the Haida and loggers. With a more radical agenda, though, labour can provide the strength Aboriginals lack in their struggle to preserve their culture.

Aboriginal people can offer the left a concrete spiritual content, a value system beyond the purely abstract ideas of freedom and self-development.

Proletarian culture and spirituality are based on a commitment to ideals which are by definition ideal and future directed only. Partly because of this, and partly because such values grow out of and extend the abstract rights of persons which the enlightenment posed for early liberal bourgeois societies, the Marxist vision of the future involves a destruction of the present and its replacement by a society in which each person creates themselves after their own will. The citizen of the future classless society will be stripped of all concrete content, and will be left with their own being as their existential project. Marx and Engels never ventured to speculate what this new way of being human would be like for the very reason that this new way would be based on the decisions taken by an ungrounded will. While we may not accept the dark analysis of a similar existential reality that Hegel offered in the *Phenomenology* when he described the link between freedom and terror, the need for meaning is great. Aboriginal classless societies can positively contribute to a future socialist society, and to revolutionary Marxist movements, as living examples of the political and economic and social arrangements possible in the absence of private property, and by giving us the spirituality needed to step back from the brink of unrestrained and limitless technological hubris. They can teach us that progress is not always good nor is it the aim of all cultures.

Finally, the way the left can forge an alliance with Aboriginal peoples is to treat their demand for cultural survival seriously. How this will be done will necessarily vary from region to region depending upon a number of factors: the degree of assimilation; the type of natural economy practiced and the degree to which it can still be practiced; the degree of national fragmentation etc. In New Brunswick, the Maliseet nation survived primarily on fishing salmon, on hunting deer and moose, on gathering berries, fiddleheads and so on, and on staple agriculture. A socialist society committed to the continued existence of Maliseet culture would have to make significant changes to the industrial development of the region. It is not enough simply to set aside some land and then pay out welfare. Cultural survival requires that the economic base of culture be preserved. This means saving old growth forests, stopping clear cutting close to stream beds and significantly reducing industrial activity on the major river arteries. Simple though these requirements seem, they would necessitate a significant retreat from the trends characteristic of modern western society. They involve a renunciation of the idea of progress as it is currently understood, and a vision of human existence in which producing and consuming no longer play a central role.

### Notes

1. There were many reasons for the rejection of the proposals. They were seen by many to be bad proposals. Some felt that treaty rights would have to be given up in the process of negotiating self-government. This, coupled with the recognition of the supremacy of Federal and Provincial laws over Aboriginal governments, meant that the historic claim of Aboriginal people to nation status would be abandoned. Voting for the Charlottetown Accord was to tacitly accept status as Canadians. Many Aboriginal people simply never vote because they cannot easily accept the status of Canadian as opposed to status within an Aboriginal society.
2. S.2a of the Draft legal text of the Charlottetown Accord, October 9, 1992.
3. Those Aboriginal peoples who have most strongly preserved their status as nations, for example the Mohawk and the Blood, do not vote and will not allow federal or provincial enumerators on their territory. Only three people voted in the October Referendum from the Blood community of 7,000 persons.
4. Means, 1983:26. Not all Aboriginal people reject Marxism. Although Marxism has not been a factor in the liberation struggles in North America, it has in South America, where Marxists have been more concerned with Aboriginal questions. This is so for two main reasons:
  - 1) There are far more Aboriginal persons in Central and South America. Their support is more critical to a successful revolution.
  - 2) Unlike Aboriginal persons in North America who are marginalized, the labour power of Aboriginal people in South America, especially rural labour, is critical to the economies. See, for example, Mariátequi, 1971, especially Chapter 2: "The Problem of the Indian."
5. McFadden, 1991:23, quoted Lorraine Canoe:
 

When Louis Henry Morgan wrote his anthropological book, *Living With the Senecas*, he put down the weave of our people, and described how we live. When his book was published it went into the library. Karl Marx came from Germany and lived in Brooklyn for one year, and he read Morgan's book, and he went back to Germany and what did he do? He wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, and it was put into practice. But what was omitted was the spiritual part.
6. Despite their many differences Strauss and Voegelin agree that Marxism, like modernity in general, is dedicated to the idea of progress. Both argue that Marx saw communism as the end goal of history, and that such an end is the historic destiny of humanity.

Anything that stands in the way, therefore, is reactionary and must be eliminated. Although neither Strauss nor Voegelin ever demonstrated the least concern with Aboriginal victims of modernity, their critiques of Marxism resemble those of Aboriginal commentators.

7. It is not possible to explain adequately the differences between Aboriginal and European outlook in a short space. An example will have to serve to illustrate not only that Aboriginal culture was not primitive or on the road to capitalism, but also that it differed profoundly from European thinking. Wampum 7 of the Great Law of Peace, establishing the Iroquois Confederacy (and is thus a major Iroquois constitutional document) obligates the sachem of the league to offer thanks to the "earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees" etc. before any discussion can occur.
8. Marx and Engels, 1972:350. E.J. Hobsbawm (Marx, 1965:12) describes the Marxist notion of progress as pointing to what is desirable. The strength of the Marxist belief in the triumph of the free development of all men depends not on the strength of Marx's hope for it, but on the assumed correctness of the analysis that this is indeed where historical development eventually leads mankind.  
Hobsbawm goes on to argue that progress, defined as the increasing "emancipation of man from nature and his growing control over nature" (*Ibid.*:13) is ultimately liberating as it culminates in communism. Yet in its course of development, ie. as we progress toward complete emancipation, the process is dehumanizing (*Ibid.*:14-15).
9. George Lichtheim argues (1961:152): But while his general scheme is linear, Marx does not altogether share the prevailing optimism in respect of "progress." There are hints that every advance has to be paid for by the relinquishment of achievements possible only under more primitive conditions.
10. Marx, 1965:67-68. Commentators on Hegel have long pointed to his fondness for Greek civilization. The immediate unity of self-consciousness that it displayed, while not as philosophically adequate as the modern scientific outlook, was immeasurably more satisfying.
11. By a "transitional demand" Trotsky meant a claim put forward, the actualization of which leads to revolutionary changes, even though the demand itself appears reformist. For example, the demand for one-person, one-vote seems less than revolutionary in North America. In South Africa, however, such a demand amounts to a call for revolution because it could only be implemented via a revolutionary transformation of South African society.

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