



Classical Sociological Theory and Foundations of American Sociology

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PART I
MARX AND ENGELS

I. Eighteenth Brumaire

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“People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please.”

NOTE ON SOURCE: This selection is from an essay by Marx, originally published in a German magazine in New York City in 1852. It was republished and retranslated widely, first in English in 1869 as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Engels undertook a later translation into English in 1885, which translation was published by Progress Publishers of Moscow in 1937. In addition to selections from the essay, this section begins with a short historical description of the social context about which Marx was writing. It is important to note that this essay was a very timely one, written almost simultaneously with a fast-changing political landscape.

Introduction to the selection – historical overview

On December 2, 1851, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, the democratically elected president of France since the 1848 revolution and nephew to Napoleon Bonaparte, instituted a coup against his own increasingly oppositional government. This government had passed a law prohibiting Bonaparte from running for reelection at the end of his term in office in 1852. As Louis-Napoleon was very popular, the legislature had restricted universal male suffrage in an attempt to see him lose. On December 2nd, Louis-Napoleon's forces arrested the opposition leaders, dissolved the National Assembly, and restored universal male suffrage. Parliamentarians resisted this internal coup. Victor Hugo, the novelist, was one of the liberal leaders of this resistance. The resistance was no match for Louis-Napoleon, who had the military on his side. After much fighting and hundreds of deaths, a new Bonapartist regime was proclaimed. Instead of a Republic, Louis-Napoleon, now calling himself Napoleon III, would rule as Emperor. This period of rule would be known as the “Second Empire” and would last until 1870, when the republic was restored. In the first years after his ascension, the new Napoleon imposed censorship and harsh repressive measures against his opponents, sending many to death or the penal colonies. Others, like Victor Hugo, went into voluntary exile. Over time, the French empire under Napoleon III's rule would become more liberal, even as it remained fiercely nationalistic and extended its colonial rule into Asia, Africa, and even Mexico.

Marx wrote about these events between December 1851 and March 1852, as the coup was happening and being resisted. The title refers to the similarities between this taking of power by Napoleon III and the earlier seizure of power by his uncle, Napoleon I, which occurred on November 9, 1799, known as the 18th day of the month of Brumaire in Year VII of the French Republic. Napoleon I's 1799 seizure of power had ushered in the “First Empire.” In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx satirizes the pretensions of the nephew, giving us the famous phrase, that history repeats itself, “first as tragedy, then as farce.”

Important dates to remember as you read the passage:

February 1848: “February Revolution”; overthrow of King Louis-Philippe in France in favor of democratically elected government of the Second Republic

June 1848: “June Days Uprising”: rebellion in Paris by workers against increasingly conservative government (bloody but unsuccessful attempt at ending class rule)

December 10, 1848: Louis Napoleon Bonaparte elected President of Republic, largely with support of rural voters

December 2, 1851: internal coup by Bonaparte, creating Second Empire

The Eighteenth Brumaire *opening passages*

Hegel once remarked that all events and personalities of great importance in world history occur twice, but he forgot to add that the first time they occur as tragedies, and the second as farce.

People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such times of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus, Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95. In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.

From 1848 to 1851, only the ghost of the old revolution circulated. A whole nation, which thought it had acquired an accelerated power of motion by means of a revolution, suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch, and to remove any doubt about the relapse, the old dates arise again – the old chronology, the old names. The French, so long as they were engaged in revolution, could not get rid of the memory of Napoleon, as the election of December 10, 1848 was proved. They longed to return from the perils of revolution to the fleshpots of Egypt and December 2, 1851, was the answer. Now they have not only a caricature of the old Napoleon, but the old Napoleon himself, caricatured as he would have to be in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The social revolution of the 19th century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition with regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the 19th century must let the dead bury their dead. Then the words went beyond the content; now the content goes beyond the words.

The February Revolution was a surprise attack, a seizing of the old society unaware, and the people proclaimed this unexpected stroke a deed of world importance, ushering in a new epoch. On December 2nd the February Revolution is conjured away as a trick of a con artist, and what seems overthrown is no longer the monarchy but the liberal concessions that had been wrung from it through centuries of struggle. Instead of society having conquered a new content for itself, it seems that the state has only returned to its oldest form, to a shamelessly simple rule by the sword and the monk's cowl. Easy come, easy go. Meantime, the interval did not pass unused. During 1848-51 French society, by an abbreviated revolutionary method, caught up with the studies and experiences which in a regular, so to speak, textbook course of development would have preceded the February Revolution, if the latter were to be more than a mere ruffling of the surface. Society seems now to have retreated to behind its starting point; in truth, it has first to create for itself the revolutionary point of departure – the situation, the relations, the conditions under which alone modern revolution becomes serious.

Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm more swiftly from success to success, their dramatic effects outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds– but they are short-lived. On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossal-ness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out:

It is not enough to say, as the French do, that their nation was taken unawares. Nations and women are not forgiven the unguarded hour in which the first adventurer who came along could violate them. Such turns of speech do not solve the riddle but only formulate it differently. It remains to be explained how a nation of thirty-six million people can be surprised and delivered without resistance into captivity by three captains of industry.

Let us recapitulate in general outline the phases that the French Revolution went through from February 24, 1848, to December 1851. *The first period* –from February 24, the overthrow of Louis Philippe, to May 4, 1848, the meeting of the Constituent Assembly – the February period proper, may be designated as the prologue of the revolution. Nobody and nothing ventured to lay any claim to the right of existence and of real action. *The second period*, from May 4, 1848, to the end of May 1849, is the period of the constitution, the foundation, of the bourgeois republic. The bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe can be followed only by a bourgeois republic; that is to say, whereas a limited section of the bourgeoisie ruled in the name of the king, the whole of the bourgeoisie will now rule in the name of the people. The demands of the Paris proletariat are utopian nonsense, to which an end must be put. To this declaration of the Constituent National Assembly the Paris proletariat replied with the June insurrection, the most colossal event in the history of European civil wars. The bourgeois republic triumphed. On its side stood the aristocracy of finance, the industrial bourgeoisie, the middle class, the petty bourgeois, the army, the lumpenproletariat organized as the Mobile Guard, the intellectual lights, the clergy, and the rural population. On the side of the Paris proletariat stood none but itself. More than three thousand insurgents were butchered after the victory, and fifteen thousand were deported without trial. With this defeat the proletariat passes into the background on the revolutionary stage.

The proletariat attempts to press forward again on every occasion, as soon as the movement appears to make a fresh start, but with ever decreased expenditure of strength and always slighter results. As soon as one of the social strata above it gets into revolutionary ferment, the proletariat enters into an alliance with it and so shares all the defeats that the different parties suffer, one after another. But these subsequent blows become the weaker, the greater the surface of society over which they are distributed. The more important leaders of the proletariat in the Assembly and in the press successively fall victim to the courts, and ever more equivocal figures come to head it. In part it throws itself into doctrinaire experiments, exchange banks and workers' associations, hence into a movement in which it renounces the revolutionizing of the old world by means of the latter's own great, combined resources, and seeks, rather, to achieve its salvation behind society's back, in private fashion, within its limited conditions of existence, and hence necessarily suffers shipwreck. It seems to be unable either to rediscover revolutionary greatness in itself or to win new energy from the connections newly entered into, until all classes with which it contended in June themselves lie prostrate beside it. But at least it succumbs with the honors of the great, world-historic struggle; not only France, but all Europe trembles at the June earthquake, while the ensuing defeats of the upper classes are so cheaply bought that they require barefaced exaggeration by the victorious party to be able to pass for events at all, and become the more ignominious the further the defeated party is removed from the proletarian party.

The defeat of the June insurgents had now prepared, had leveled the ground on which the bourgeois republic could be founded and built, but it had shown at the same time that in Europe the bourgeois republic signifies the unlimited despotism of one class over other classes. During the June days all classes and parties had united in the party of Order against the proletarian class as the party of anarchy, of socialism, of communism. These forces of Order had saved society from the enemies of society. They had given out the watchwords of the old society – Property! Family! Religion! Order! to their army as passwords. Society is saved just as the circle of its rulers contracts, as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one. Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the shallowest democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an ATTEMPT ON SOCIETY and stigmatized as SOCIALISM!

Part Two

The history of the elected government since the June days is the *history of the domination and the disintegration of the republican faction of the bourgeoisie*. The exclusive rule of the bourgeois republicans lasted only from June 24 to December 10, 1848. The election of December 10th was a *reaction of the peasants, who had to pay the costs of the February Revolution, against the remaining classes of the nation; a reaction of the country against the town*. It met with great approval in the army and among the big bourgeoisie, which hailed Bonaparte as a bridge to monarchy. The period from December 20, 1848, until May 1849, comprises the history of the downfall of the bourgeois republicans. After having founded a republic for the bourgeoisie, driven the revolutionary proletariat out of the field, and reduced the democratic petty bourgeoisie to silence for the time being, they are themselves thrust aside by the mass of the bourgeoisie, which justly impounds this republic as *its property*.

Part Three

On May 28, 1849, the Legislative National Assembly met. On December 2, 1851, it was dispersed. This period covers the span of life of the republic.

During the first French Revolution, each group pushed the next further ahead. It is the reverse with the Revolution of 1848. The proletarian party first appears as an appendage of the petty-bourgeois-democratic party. It is betrayed and dropped by the latter in the June days. The democratic party, in its turn, leans on the shoulders of the bourgeois-republican party. The bourgeois republicans no sooner believe themselves well established than they shake off the troublesome comrade and support themselves on the shoulders of the party of Order. The party of Order hunches its shoulders, lets the bourgeois republicans tumble, and throws itself on the shoulders of armed force. It fancies it is still sitting on those shoulders when one fine morning it perceives that the shoulders have transformed themselves into bayonets. Each party kicks from behind at the one driving forward and leans over in front toward the party which presses backward. No wonder that in this ridiculous posture it loses its balance and, having made the inevitable grimaces, collapses with curious gyrations. The revolution thus moves in a descending line.

Legitimists and Orleanists formed the two great factions of the party of Order.¹ Was what held these factions fast to their pretenders and kept them apart from each other nothing but the House of Bourbon and House of Orleans, different shades of royalism? Under the Bourbons, big landed property had governed, with its priests and lackeys; under Orleans, high finance, large-scale industry, large-scale trade, that is, capital, with its retinue of lawyers, professors, and smooth-tongued orators. The Legitimate Monarchy was merely the political expression of the hereditary rule of the lords of the soil, as the July Monarchy was only the political expression of the usurped rule of the bourgeois parvenus. *What kept the two factions apart, therefore, was not any so-called principles, it was their material conditions of existence, two different kinds of property; it was the old contrast between town and country, the rivalry between capital and landed property.* That at the same time old memories, personal enmities, fears and hopes, prejudices and illusions, sympathies and antipathies, convictions, articles of faith and principles bound them to one or the other royal house, who denies this? Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire *superstructure* of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity. While each faction, Orleanists and Legitimists, sought to make itself and the other believe that it was loyalty to the two royal houses which separated them, facts later proved that it was rather their divided interests which forbade the uniting of the two royal houses. And as in private life one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must distinguish still more the phrases and fancies of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their

1. Both Legitimists and Orleanists were believers in monarchy, although they disagreed on which monarch was the legitimate heir (legitimists favored the Bourbon dynasty while Orleanists favored the Orleans dynasty). Marx goes further than most of his contemporary by looking behind these labels and analyzing what class interests were operating there.

reality. Orleanists and Legitimists found themselves side by side in the republic, with equal claims. If each side wished to restore its own royal house against the other, that merely signified that each of the two great interests into which the bourgeoisie is split – landed property and capital – sought to restore its own supremacy and the subordination of the other. We speak of two interests of the bourgeoisie, for large landed property has been rendered thoroughly bourgeois by the development of modern society. Thus, the Tories in England long imagined that they were enthusiastic about monarchy, the church, and the beauties of the old English Constitution, until the day of danger wrung from them the confession that they are enthusiastic only about ground rent.

As against the bourgeoisie, a coalition between petty bourgeois and workers had been formed, the so-called Social-Democratic party. The petty bourgeois saw that they were badly rewarded after the June days of 1848, that their material interests were imperiled, and that the democratic guarantees which were to insure the effectuation of these interests were called in question by the counter-revolution. Accordingly, they came closer to the workers. A joint program was drafted, joint election committees were set up and joint candidates put forward. The revolutionary point was broken off and a democratic turn given to the social demands of the proletariat; the purely political form was stripped off the democratic claims of the petty bourgeoisie and their socialist point thrust forward. Thus, arose social-democracy. The peculiar character of social-democracy is epitomized in the fact that democratic-republican institutions are demanded as a means, not of doing away with two extremes, capital and wage labor, but of weakening their antagonism and transforming it into harmony. However different the means proposed for the attainment of this end may be, however much it may be trimmed with more or less revolutionary notions, the content remains the same. This content is the transformation of society in a democratic way, but a transformation within the bounds of the petty bourgeoisie. Only one must not get the narrow-minded notion that the petty bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the special conditions of its emancipation are the general conditions within whose frame alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided.

Part Four

The law of May 31, 1850 was the *coup d'etat* of the bourgeoisie. All its conquests over the revolution hitherto had only a provisional character. They depended on the hazards of a new general election, and the history of elections since 1848 irrefutably proved that the bourgeoisie's moral sway over the mass of the people was lost in the same measure as its actual domination developed. The bourgeoisie answered by outlawing universal suffrage. The law of May 31st was therefore one of the necessities of the class struggle.

Part Five

As soon as the revolutionary crisis had been weathered and universal suffrage abolished, the struggle between the National Assembly and Bonaparte broke out again.

Part Six

With May 28 1851, the last year of the life of the National Assembly began.

Part Seven

The social republic appeared as a phrase, as a prophecy, on the threshold of the February Revolution. In the June days of 1848, it was drowned in the blood of the Paris proletariat, but it haunts the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost. The democratic republic announces its appearance. It is dissipated on June 13, 1849, together with its deserting petty bourgeois, but in its flight it redoubles its boastfulness. The parliamentary republic together with the bourgeoisie takes possession of the entire state; it enjoys its existence to the full, but December 2, 1851, buries it to the accompaniment of the anguished cry of the coalesced royalists: —Long live the Republic!

The bourgeoisie apotheosized the sword; the sword rules it. It destroyed the revolutionary press; its own press is destroyed. It placed popular meetings under police surveillance; its salons are placed under police supervision. It imposed a state of siege; a state of siege is imposed upon it. It supplanted the juries by military commissions; its juries are supplanted by military commissions. It subjected public education to the sway of the priests; the priests subject it to their own education. It jailed people without trial, it is being jailed without trial. It suppressed every stirring in society by means of state power; every stirring in its society is suppressed by means of state power. Out of enthusiasm for its money bags it rebelled against its own politicians and literary men; its politicians and literary men are swept aside, but its money bag is being plundered now that its mouth has been gagged and its pen broken.

The *first* French Revolution, with its task of breaking all separate powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation, was bound to develop what the monarchy had begun, centralization, but at the same time the limits, the attributes, and the agents of the governmental power. Napoleon completed this state machinery. The Legitimate Monarchy and the July Monarchy added nothing to it but a greater division of labor, increasing at the same rate as the division of labor inside the bourgeois society created new groups of interests, and therefore new material for the state administration. Every common interest was immediately severed from the society, countered by a higher, general interest, snatched from the activities of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity – from a bridge, a schoolhouse, and the communal property of a village community, to the railroads, the national wealth, and the national University of France. Finally the parliamentary republic, in its struggle against the revolution, found itself compelled to strengthen the means and the centralization of governmental power with repressive measures. ***All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it.*** The parties, which alternately contended for domination, regarded the possession of this huge state structure as the chief spoils of the victor.

But under the absolute monarchy, during the first Revolution, and under Napoleon the bureaucracy was only the means of preparing the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Under the Restoration, under Louis Philippe, under the parliamentary republic, it was the instrument of the ruling class, however much it strove for power of its own. Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. The

state machinery has so strengthened itself vis-à-vis civil society that the Chief of the Society of December 10 suffices for its head – an adventurer dropped in from abroad, raised on the shoulders of a drunken soldiery which he bought with whisky and sausages and to which he has to keep throwing more sausages. Hence the low-spirited despair, the feeling of monstrous humiliation and degradation that oppresses the breast of France and makes her gasp. She feels dishonored.

And yet the state power is not suspended in the air. Bonaparte represented a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small-holding peasants. Just as the Bourbons were the dynasty of the big landed property and the Orleans the dynasty of money, so the Bonapartes are the dynasty of the peasants, that is, the French masses.

The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is furthered by France's poor means of communication and the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, permits no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no multifariousness of development, no diversity of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient, directly produces most of its consumer needs, and thus acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. Thus, the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, *much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes. Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class.* Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power which subordinates society to itself.

But let us not misunderstand. The Bonaparte dynasty represents not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant; not the peasant who strikes out beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding, but rather one who wants to consolidate his holding; not the country folk who in alliance with the towns want to overthrow the old order through their own energies, but on the contrary those who, in solid seclusion within this old order, want to see themselves and their small holdings saved and favored by the ghost of the Empire. It represents not the enlightenment but the superstition of the peasant; not his judgment but his prejudice; not his future but his past... The bourgeoisie itself has violently strengthened the imperialism of the peasant class; it has preserved the conditions that form the birthplaces of this species of peasant religion. *The bourgeoisie, in truth, is bound to fear the stupidity of the masses so long as they remain conservative, and the insight of the masses as soon as they become revolutionary.*

Bonaparte would like to appear as the patriarchal benefactor of all classes. But he cannot give to one without taking from another.

Questions

1. The *Eighteenth Brumaire* is one of the only places in all of Marx's writings where he scrutinized and evaluated the class forces at play in real historical social movements. This is a surprising statement, but most of what Marx wrote was as an analysis and explanation of capitalism. It is only in this passage that he comes close to defining class and describing how classes work with or against each other in particular circumstances. When describing the June days revolution, which classes were allied with each other? Which class stood alone? What might explain these class alliances? Continue reading the remainder of this paragraph. What are the pitfalls that Marx names awaiting would-be communist revolutionaries?
2. Is Marx saying that the "party of Order" – all those groups that rally around the flag of order, family, property, and religion – is a con job by elites? How would you answer him? Do you see similar "rallying around the flag" calls to order today? Where is the proletariat in these fights?
3. When explaining the *real* reason behind the two factions within the Party of Order (Legitimists and Orleanists), Marx demonstrate the power of historical materialist analysis. He makes an argument that the principles motivating these factions are mere fig leaves for underlying material (class) interests. What interests does each faction represent? Can you employ this type of materialist analysis to help explain other political factions?
4. In part seven, Marx claims that the power under Napoleon III is greater even than the power that the original (first) French Revolution sought to undo. He makes the statement that all revolutions have perfected this state machinery, rather than bringing it to heel. What do you make of these statements? Does this passage give you a clue as to what Marx would have thought of the Soviet Union, as an experiment in communism?
5. What class does Napoleon III represent?
6. Part seven includes *the only known definition of "class" in all of Marx's writings*. What is this definition? What class does he use to illustrate this definition?
7. Explain the import of the final sentence.

Concepts

Class (and class factions)

Superstructure

Petty Bourgeoisie

Proletariat

Bourgeoisie

Social Democracy