

land that constitutes the foundation of our existence as a people are not respected by the state and fellow citizens who belong to the mainstream population. In our societies the land and natural resources are the means of livelihood, the media of cultural and spiritual integrity for the entire community as opposed to individual appropriation.

The process of alienation of our land and its resources was launched by European colonial authorities at the beginning of this century and has been carried on, to date, after the attainment of national independence. Our cultures and ways of life are viewed as outmoded, inimical to national pride and a hindrance to progress. What is more, access to education and other basic services are minimal relative to the mainstream of the population of the countries to which we are citizens in common with other peoples.

Let it be understood, we do not advocate separatism, but assert the fundamental human right to maintain our cultural identity within the framework of united nations of Africa. We do not expect overnight change.

We trust that our modest plea in this most appropriate forum of the United Nations has been understood. We speak with the total conviction that respect for our differences strengthens unity and national identity in our countries and the world at large.

With the greatest respect to Mother Earth, the cradle of all life, I salute you all. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

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## FALSE PROMISES

### An Indigenist Examination of Marxist Theory and Practice

Ward Churchill

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**Hau, Metakuyeayasi.** The greeting I have just given you is a Lakota phrase meaning, "Hello, my relatives." Now, I'm not a Lakota, and I'm not particularly fluent in the Lakota language, but I ask you who are to bear with me for a moment while I explore the meaning of the greeting because I think it is an important point of departure for our topic: the relationship, real and potential, which exists between the Marxist tradition on the one hand, and that of indigenous peoples - such as American Indians - on the other.

#### Dialects

The operant words here are relatives, relationship and, by minor extension, relations. I have come to understand that when Lakota people use the word Metakuyeayasi, they are not simply referring to their mothers and fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, ancestors, nieces and nephews, children, grandchildren, cousins, future generations, and all the rest of human-kind. Oh these relatives are certainly included, but things don't stop there. Also involved is reference to the ground we stand on, the sky above us, the light from the sun and water in the oceans, lakes, rivers and streams. The plants who populate our environment are included, as

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are the four-legged creatures around us, those who hop and crawl, the birds who fly, the fish who swim, the insects, the worms. Everything. These are all understood in the Lakota way as being relatives. What is conveyed in this Lakota concept is the notion of the universe as a relational whole, a single interactive organism in which all things, all beings are active and essential parts; the whole can never be understood without a knowledge of the function and meaning of each of the parts, while the parts cannot be understood other than in the context of the whole.

The formation of knowledge is, in such a construct, entirely dependent upon the active maintenance of a fully symbiotic, relational - or, more appropriately, inter-relational - approach to understanding. This fundamental appreciation of things, the predicate upon which world-view is established, is (I would argue) common not only to the Lakota but to all American Indian cultural systems. Further, it seems inherent to indigenous cultures the world over. At least I can say with certainty that I've looked in vain for a single concrete example to the contrary.

The ancient Greeks had a term, *dialitikus*, the idea for which was borrowed from an Egyptian concept, and which I'm told the civilization of the Nile had itself appropriated from the people of what is now called Ethiopia, describing such a way of viewing things. The Greeks held this to be the superior mode of thinking. In modern parlance, the word at issue has become "dialectics," popularized in this form by the German post-theological philosopher Friedrich Hegel. As has so often happened in the history of European intellectualism, Hegel's notable career spawned a bevy of philosophical groupies. Among the more illustrious, or at least more industrious, of these "Young Hegelians" was a doctoral student named Karl Marx.

Indeed, Marx was always clear in his student work - much of which can now be read in a volume titled *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* - and forever after that it was the structure of "dialectical reasoning" he'd absorbed from Hegel that formed the fundament of his entire theoretical enterprise. He insisted to his dying day that this remained true despite his famous "inversion" of Hegel, that is: the reversal of Hegel's emphasis upon such "mystical" categories as "the spirit" in favor of more "pragmatic" categories like "substance" and "material."

Let us be clear at this point. The dialectical theoretical methodology adopted by Marx stands - at least in principle - in as stark an oppositional contrast, and for all the same reasons, to the predomi-

nate and predominating tradition of linear and non-relational European logic (exemplified by Locke, Hume, and Sir Isaac Newton) as do indigenous systems of knowledge. It follows from this that there should be a solid conceptual intersection between Marx, Marxism, and indigenous peoples. Indeed, I myself have suggested such a possibility in a pair of 1982 essays published, one in the journal *Integrated education*, and the other in an education reader produced by the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA.<sup>1</sup>

At an entirely abstract level, I remain convinced that this is in fact the case. There is, however, a quite substantial defect in such a thesis in any less rarefied sense. The most lucid articulation of the problem at hand was perhaps offered by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel in their book, *Unorthodox Marxism*:

[Marxist] dialecticians have never been able to indicate exactly how they see dialectical relations as different from any of the more complicated combinations of simple cause/effect relations such as co-causation, cumulative causation, or simultaneous determination of a many variable system where no variables are identified as dependent or independent in advance...for orthodox practitioners [of Marxian dialectics] there is only the word and a lot of "hand waving" about its importance.<sup>2</sup>

A substantial case can be made that this confusion within Marxism began with Marx himself. Having philosophically accepted and described a conceptual framework which allowed for a holistic and fully relational apprehension of the universe, Marx promptly abandoned it at the level of his applied intellectual practice. His impetus in this regard appears to have been his desire to see his theoretical endeavors used, not simply as a tool of understanding, but as a proactive agent for societal transformation, a matter bound up in his famous dictum that "the purpose of philosophy is not merely to

1 See "White Studies or Isolation: An Alternative Model for American Indian Studies Programs" (American Indian Issues in Higher Education, American Indian Studies Program, UCLA, 1982) and "White Studies: The Intellectual Imperialism of Contemporary U.S. Education" (*Integrated education*, Vol. XIX, Nos. 1-2, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, 1982).

2 Albert, Michael, and Robin Hahnel, *Unorthodox Marxism: An Essay on Capitalism, Socialism and Revolution*, South End Press, Boston, 1978, pp 52-53.

understand history, but to change it." Thus Marx, a priori and with no apparent questioning in the doing, proceeded to anchor the totality of his elaboration in the presumed primacy of a given relation - that sole entity which can be said to hold the capability of active and conscious pursuit of change, i.e.: humanity - over any and all other relations. The marxian "dialectic" was thus unbalanced from the outset, skewed as a matter of faith in favor of humans. Such a disequilibrium is, of course, not dialectical at all. It is, however, quite specifically Eurocentric in its attributes, springing as it does from the late-Roman interpretation of the Judeo-Christian assertion of "man's" supposed responsibility to "exercise dominion over nature," a tradition which Marx (ironically) claimed oft and loudly to have "voided" in his rush to materialism.

All of this must be contrasted to the typical indigenous practice of dialectics, a world-view recognizing the human entity as being merely one relation among the myriad, each of which is entirely dependent upon all others for its continued existence. Far from engendering some sense of "natural" human dominion over other relations, the indigenous view virtually requires a human behavior geared to keeping humanity within nature, maintaining relational balance and integrity (often called "harmony") rather than attempting to harness and subordinate the universe. The crux of this distinction may be discovered in the Judeo-Christian assertion the "man was created in God's image," a notion which leads to the elevation of humans as a sort of surrogate deity, self-empowered to transform the universe at whim. Indigenous tradition, on the other hand, in keeping with its truly dialectical understandings, attributes the inherent ordering of things, not to any given relation, but to another force often described as constituting a "Great Mystery," far beyond the realm of mere human comprehension.

We may take this differentiation to a somewhat more tangible level for purposes of clarity. The culmination of European tradition has been a homing-in on rationality, the innate characteristic of the human mind lending humanity the capacity to disrupt the order and composition of the universe. Rationality is held by those of the European persuasion - Marxist and anti-Marxist alike - to be the most important ("superior") relation of all; humans, being the only entity possessing it, are thus held *ipso facto* to be the superior beings of the universe; manifestations of rationality, whether cerebral or physical, are therefore held to be the cardinal signifiers of virtue.

Within indigenous traditions, meanwhile, rationality is more often viewed as being something of a "curse," a facet of humanity

which must be consistently leashed and controlled in order for it not to generate precisely this disruption. The dichotomy in outlooks could not be more pronounced. All of this is emphatically not to suggest that indigenous cultures are somehow "irrational" in their make-up (to borrow a pet epithet hurled against challengers by the Euro-supremacists of academia). Rather, it is to observe that, as consummate dialecticians, they have long-since developed functional and functioning methods of keeping their own rationality meshed with the rest of the natural order. And this, in my view, is the most rational exercise of all.

### Dialectical Materialism

In any event, having wholeheartedly accepted the European mainstream's anti-dialectical premise that the human relation is paramount beyond all others in what are termed "external relations," Marx inevitably set out to discover that which occupied the same preeminence among "internal relations" (that is, those relations comprising the nature of the human project itself). With perhaps equal inevitability, his inverted Hegelianism - which he dubbed "dialectical materialism" - led him to locate this in the need of humans to consciously transform one aspect of nature into another, a process he designated by the term "production." It is important to note in this regard that Marx focused upon what is arguably the most rationalized, and therefore most unique, characteristic of human behavior, thus establishing a mutually reinforcing interlock between that relation which he advanced as being most important externally, and that which he assigned the same position internally. So interwoven have these two relations become in the marxian mind that today we find Marxists utilizing the terms "rationality" and "productivity" almost interchangeably, and with a virtually biblical circularity of reasoning. It goes like this: The ability to produce demonstrates human rationality, thereby distinguishing humans as superior to all other external relations, while rationality (left unchecked) leads unerringly to proliferate productivity, thereby establishing the latter as more important than any other among humans (internally). The record, of course, can be played in reverse with equally satisfying results.

From here, Marx was in a position to launch his general theory, laid out in the thousands of pages of his major published works - *der Grundrisse, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and the three volumes of *das Kapital* - in which he attempted to explain

the full range of implications attendant to what he described as "the relations of production." Initially, he was preoccupied with applying his concepts temporally, a project he tagged as "historical materialism," in order to assess and articulate the nature of the development of society through time. Here, he theorized that the various relations of society - e.g.: ways of holding land, kinship structures, systems of governance, spiritual beliefs, and so on - represented, not a unified whole, but a complex of "contradictions" (in varying degrees) to the central, productive relation. All history, for Marx, became a stream of conflict within which these contradictions were increasingly "reconciled with" (subordinated to) production. As such reconciliation occurred over time, various transformations in socio-cultural relations correspondingly took place. Hence, Marx sketched history as a grand "progression," beginning with the "pre-history" of the "Stone Age" (the most "primitive" level of truly human existence) and "advancing" to the emergent capitalism of his own day. "Productive relations," in such a schema, determine all and everything.

One of Marx's theoretical heirs, the 20th century French structuralist-Marxist Louis Althusser, summed historical materialism up quite succinctly when he defined production as being the "overdetermined contradiction of all human history," and observed that from a marxian standpoint society would not, in fact could not exist as a unified whole until the process had worked its way through to culmination, a point at which all other social relations stood properly reconciled to the "productive mission" of humanity. In a more critical vein, we might note another summation offered by Albert and Hahnel:

Orthodox [Marxism] doesn't stop at downgrading the importance of the creative aspect of human consciousness and the role it plays in historical development. According to the orthodox materialists, of all the different objective material conditions, those having to do with production are always the most critical. Production is the prerequisite to human existence. Productive activity is the basis for all other activity. Therefore, consciousness rests primarily on the nature of objective production relations. Cut to the bone, this is the essence of the orthodox materialist [Marxist] argument.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

It is difficult to conceive of a more economistic or deterministic ideological construction than this. Indeed, the post-structuralist French philosopher Jean Baudrillard has pointed out in his book, *The Mirror of Production*, that Marx never so much offered a critique or alternative to the capitalist mode of political economy he claimed to oppose as he completed it, plugging its theoretical loopholes. This, in turn, has caused indigenous spokespersons such as Russell Means to view Marxism, not as a potential revolutionary transformation of world capitalism, but as a continuation of all of capitalism's worst vices "in a more efficient form."<sup>4</sup>

But, to move forward, there are a number of aspects of the marxian general theory - concepts such as surplus value, alienation and domination among them - which might be important to explore at this juncture. It seems to me the most fruitful avenue of pursuit lies in what Marx termed "the labor theory of value." By this, he meant that value can be assigned to anything only by virtue of the quantity and quality of human labor - i.e.: productive, transformative effort - put into it. This idea carries with it several interesting sub-properties, most strikingly that the natural world holds no intrinsic value of its own. A mountain is worth nothing as a mountain; it only accrues value by being "developed" into its raw productive materials such as ores, or even gravel. It can hold a certain speculative value, and thus be bought and sold, but only with such developmental ends in view. Similarly, a forest holds value only in the sense that it can be converted into a product known as lumber; otherwise, it is merely an obstacle to valuable, productive use of land through agriculture or stock-raising, etc. (an interesting commentary on the marxian view of the land itself). Again, other species hold value only in terms of their utility to productive processes (e.g.: meat, fur, leather, various body oils, eggs, milk, transportation in some instances, even fertilizer); otherwise they may, indeed must be preempted and supplanted by the more productive use of the habitat by humans.

This, no doubt, is an extreme formulation. There have been a number of "mediations" of this particular trajectory by 20th century marxian theorists. Still, at base, the difference they offer lies more in the degree of virulence with which they express the thesis rather

<sup>4</sup> Means, Russell, "The Same Old Song," in my *Marxism and Native Americans*, South End Press, Boston, 1983. The essay was originally presented as a speech at the 1980 Slack Hills International Survival Gathering (near Rapid City, S.D.). It has been published in various forms, under various titles in *Mother Jones*, *Lakota*, *Eyapaha*, and *Akwesasne Notes*.

than any essential break with it. All self-professing Marxists, in order to be Marxists at all, must share in the fundamental premise involved. And this goes for sophisticated phenomenological Marxists such as Merleau-Ponty, existential Marxists such as Sartre, critical theorists such as Marcuse and Adorno, and semioticians such as Habermas, right along with "mechanistic vulgarians" of the Leninist persuasion (a term I use to encompass all those who trace their theoretical foundations directly to Lenin: Stalinists, Maoists, Castroites, althusserian structuralists, *et al.*). To put a cap on this particular point, I would offer the observation that labor theory of value is the underpinning of a perspective which is about as contrary to the indigenous world-view as it is possible to define.

It goes without saying that there are other implications in this connection, as concerns indigenous cultures and people. Marx's concept of value ties directly to his notion of history, wherein progress is defined in terms of the evolution of production. From this juxtaposition we may discern that agricultural society is viewed as an "advance" over hunting and gathering society, feudalism is an advance over simple agriculture, mercantilism is seen as an advance over feudalism, and capitalism over mercantilism. Marx's supposed "revolutionary" content comes from his projection that socialism will "inevitably" be the next advance over capitalism and that it, in turn, will give way to communism. Okay, the first key here is that each advance represents not only a quantitative/qualitative step "forward" in terms of productivity, but also a corresponding rearrangement of other social relations, both of which factors are assigned a greater degree of value than their "predecessors." In other words, agricultural society is seen by Marxists as being more valuable than hunting and gathering society, feudalism as more valuable than mere agriculture, and so on. The picture should be becoming clear.

Now, there is a second facet. Marx was very straightforward in acknowledging that the sole cultural model upon which he was basing his theses on history and value was his own, that is to say European (or, more accurately, northwestern European) context. He even committed to paper several provisos stipulating that it would be inappropriate and misleading to attempt to apply the principles deriving from his examination of the dominate matrix in Europe to other, non-European contexts, each of which he (correctly) pointed out would have to be understood in its own terms before it could be properly understood *vis a vis* Europe. With this said, however, Marx promptly violated his own posited methodology in this regard, offering a number of non-European examples - of

which he admittedly knew little or nothing - as illustration of various points he wished to make in his elaboration on the historical development of Europe. Chinese society, to name a prominent example of this, was cast (really miscast) as "Oriental feudalism," thus supposedly shedding a certain light on this stage of European history. "Red Indians," about whom Marx knew even less than he did of the Chinese, became examples of "primitive society," illustrating what he wanted to say about Europe's stone age. In this fashion, Marx universalized what he claimed were the primary ingredients of Anglo-Saxon-Teutonic history, extending the *de facto* contention that all cultures are subject to the same essential dynamics and, therefore, follow essentially the same historical progression.

Insofar as all cultures were made to conform with the material correspondences of one or another moment in European history, and given that only Europe exhibited a "capitalist mode of production" and social organization - which Marx held to be the "highest form of social advancement" as of the point he was writing - it follows that all non-European cultures could be seen as objectively lagging behind Europe. We are presented here with a sort of "universal Euro yardstick" by which we can measure with considerable precision the relative ("dialectical") degree of retardation shown by each and every culture on the planet, *vis a vis* Europe. Simultaneously, we are able to assign, again with reasonable precision, a relatively ("dialectically") lesser value to each of these cultures as compared to that of Europe. We are dealing here with the internal relations of humanity, but in order to understand the import of such thinking we must bear in mind the fate assigned "inferior" (less valuable) external relations - mountains, trees, deer - within the marxian vision. In plainest terms, Marxism holds as "an immutable law of history" that all non-European cultures must be subsumed in what is now called "Europeanization." It is their inevitable destiny, a matter to be accomplished in the name of progress and "for their own good." Again, we may detect echoes of the Jesuits within the "anti-spiritualist" marxian construct.

Those who would reject such an assessment should consider the matter more carefully. Do not such terms as "pre-capitalist" riddle the marxian vernacular whenever analysis of non-European ("primitive") culture is at hand? What possible purpose does the qualifier "pre" (as opposed to, say, "non") serve in this connection other than to argue that such societies are in the process of becoming capitalist? And is this not simply another way of stating that they are lagging behind those societies which have already become capitalist? Or, to

take another example, to what end do Marxists habitually refer to those societies which have "failed" (refused) to even enter the productive progression as being "ahistorical" or "outside of history?" Is this to suggest that such cultures have no history, or is it to say that they have the wrong kind of history, that only a certain (marxian) sense of history is true? And again: Do Marxists not hold that the socialist revolution will be the outcome of history for all humanity? Is there another sense in which we can understand the term "world revolution?" Did Marx himself not proclaim - and in no uncertain terms - that the attainment of the "capitalist stage of development" is an absolute prerequisite for the social transformation he meant when he spoke of the "socialist revolution?" I suggest that, given the only possible honest answers to these questions, there really are no other conclusions to be drawn from the corpus of Marxist theory than those I am drawing here tonight. The punch line is that Marxism as a world-view is not only diametrically opposed to that held by indigenous peoples, it quite literally precludes their right to a continued existence as functioning socio-cultural entities. This, I submit, will remain true despite the fact that we may legitimately disagree on the nuance and detail of precisely how it happens to be true.

## The National Question

Up to this point, our discussion had been restricted to the consideration of Marxist theory. It is one thing to say that there are problems with a set of ideas, and that those ideas carry unacceptable implications if they were to be put into practice. The "proof," however, is in the practice, or "praxis" if you follow the marxian conception that theory and practice are a unified whole and must consequently be maintained in a dialectically reciprocal and interactive state at all times. Hence, it is quite another matter to assert that the negative implications of doctrine and ideology have in fact been actualized in "the real world" and are thereby subject to concrete examination. Yet Marxism offers us exactly this method of substantiating our theoretical conclusions.

To be fair, when we move into this area we are no longer concerned with the totality of Marxism *per se*. Rather, we must focus upon that stream which owes a special allegiance to the legacy of Lenin. The reason for this is that all "Marxist" revolutions, beginning with the one in the Soviet Union, have been carried out under the mantle of Lenin's interpretation, expansion and revision of

Marx. This is true for the revolutionary processes in China, Cuba, North Korea, Algeria, Kampuchea (Cambodia), Laos, Albania, Mozambique, Angola, and Nicaragua. Arguably, it is also true for Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), and it is certainly true for those countries brought into a marxian orbit by main force: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Mongolia, Tibet and Afghanistan. Yugoslavia represents a special case, but its differentiation seems largely due to capitalist influences rather than that of other strains of Marxism. One might go on to say that those self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxist formations world-wide which seem likely to effect a seizure of state power at any point in the foreseeable future - e.g.: those in Namibia and El Salvador - are all Leninist in orientation. They certainly have disagreements among themselves, but this does not change the nature of their foundations. There have been no non-Leninist marxian revolutions to date, nor does it seem likely there will be in the coming decades.

Be this as it may, there are again a number of aspects of Marxist-Leninist post-revolutionary practice which we might consider, e.g.: the application of Lenin's concept of "the dictatorship of the proletariat," centralized state economic planning and the issue of forced labor, the imposition of rigid state parameters upon political discourse of all types, and so forth. Each of these holds obvious and direct consequences for the populations involved, including whatever indigenous peoples happen to become encapsulated within one or another (sometimes more than one) revolutionary state.

It seems appropriate that we follow the lead of Albert and Hahnel in "cutting to the bone." We will therefore take up that aspect of Marxist-Leninist praxis which has led to indigenous peoples being encapsulated in revolutionary states at all. In the vernacular, this centers upon what is called the "national Question" (or "nationalities question").

The principle at issue here devolves from a concept which has come to be known as "the right to self-determination of all peoples," codified in international law by the United Nations during the 1960s, but originally espoused by Marx and his colleague, Frederick Engels, during the London Conference of the First International in 1865.<sup>5</sup> In essence, the right to self-determination has come to mean that

5 See Stekloff, G., *History of the First International*, Russell and Russell Publishers, NY, 1968.

each people, identifiable as such (through the sharing of a common language and cultural understandings, system of governance and social regulation, and a definable territoriality within which to maintain a viable economy) is inherently entitled to decide for itself whether or not and to what extent it wishes to merge itself culturally, politically, territorially and economically with any other (usually larger) group. The right to self-determination thus accords to each identifiable people on the planet the prerogative of (re)establishing and/or continuing themselves as culturally distinct, territorially and economically autonomous, and politically sovereign entities (as nations, in other words). Correspondingly, no nation has the right to preempt such rights on the part of another. For these reasons, the right of self-determination has been linked closely with the movement toward global decolonization, and the resultant body of international law which has emerged in this regard. All this, to be sure, is very much in line with the stated aspirations of American Indians and other indigenous peoples around the world.

But Marxism's handling of the right to self-determination has not followed the general development of the concept. Having opened the door in this regard, Marx and Engels adopted what seems (superficially, at least) to be a very curious posture. They argued that self-determining rights pertained only to some peoples. For instance, they were quite strong in their assertions that the Irish, who were even then waging a serious struggle to rid themselves of British colonization, must be supported in this effort. Similarly, Marx came out unequivocally in favor of the right (even the obligation) of the Poles to break free from Russian colonialism. On the other hand, Engels argued vociferously that "questions as to the right of independent national existence of those small relics of peoples" such as the Highland Scots (Gael), Welsh, Manxmen, Serbs, Croats, Ruthenes, Slovaks, and Czechs constitute "an absurdity."<sup>6</sup> Marx concurred, and proceeded to openly advocate the imposition of European colonialism upon the "backward peoples" of Africa, Asia and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Such positioning may initially seem confusing, even contradic-

<sup>6</sup> Engels is quoted abundantly on the topic in *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Shlomo Alvinari, in his book *Karl Marx on Colonization and Modernization* (Doubleday Publishers, NY, 1969), offer a truly remarkable selection of quotations from Marx on this subject.

tory. A closer examination, however, reveals consistency with Marx's broader and more philosophical pronouncements. The Irish and Poles had been, over the course of several centuries of English and Russo-German colonization (respectively), sufficiently "advanced" by the experience (i.e.: reformed in the image of the conquerors) to be entitled to determine their own future in accordance with the "iron laws" of historical materialism. The other peoples in question, especially the tribal peoples of Africa and Asia (and one may assume American Indians were categorized along with these), were not seen as being comparably "developed." A continuing dose of colonization - subjugation by superior beings, from superior cultures - was thus prescribed to help them overcome their "problem."

A second level of consideration also entered Marx' and Engels' reasoning on these matters. This concerns the notion of "economies of scale." Marx held that the larger an "economic unit" became, the more rationalized and efficient it could be rendered. Conversely, smaller economic units were considered to be inefficient by virtue of being "irrationally" duplicative and redundant. The Irish and Poles were not only populous enough to be considered among Engels' "great peoples," but - viewed as economic units - large enough to justify support in their own right, at least during a transitional phase in route to the consolidation of "world communism." The other peoples in question were not only too backward, but too small to warrant support in their quest(s) for freedom and independence; their only real destiny, from the Marxist perspective, was therefore to be consigned to what Leon Trotsky would later call "the dustbin of history," totally and irrevocably subsumed within larger and more efficient economic units.

The national question thus emerged for Marxists as a problem in determining precisely which peoples were entitled to enjoy even a transient national existence along the way to the "true internationalism" of world communism, and which should have such rights foreclosed out-of-hand. This in itself became quite a controversial discussion when Marxism faced the issue of adopting tactics with which to wage its own revolutionary struggles, rather than simply tendering or denying support to the struggles of others. At this point, things become truly cynical and mercenary. While Marxism is, as we have seen, hostile to the nationalistic aspirations of "marginal" peoples, it was simultaneously perceived by many Marxists that a certain advantage might be counted upon to sap the strength of the capitalist/colonialist status quo while Marxist cadres went about the real business of overthrowing it; in certain instances, "national minori-



ties" might even be counted upon to absorb the brunt of the fighting, thus sparing Marxism the unnecessary loss of highly-trained personnel. After the revolution, it was reasoned, the Marxists could simply employ their political acumen to consolidate state power in their own hands and revoke as "unrealistic" (even "counter-revolutionary") the claims to national integrity for which those of the minority nationalities had fought and died. It was also calculated that, once in power, Marxism could accomplish the desired abrogation of independent national minority existence either rapidly or more gradually, depending upon the dictates of "objective conditions." As Walker Connor has put it in his definitive study of the subject, "Grand strategy was ... to take precedence over ideological purity and consistency" where the national question was concerned.<sup>8</sup>

It is not that all this was agreed upon in anything resembling a harmonious or unanimous fashion by Marxists. To the contrary, during the period leading up to the Russian revolution, the national question was the topic of an extremely contentious debate within the Second International. On one side was Rosa Luxembourg and the bulk of all delegates, arguing a "purist" line that the right to self-determination does not exist in-and-of itself and should thus be renounced by Marxism. On the other side was a rather smaller group clustered around Lenin. They insisted not only that Marxism should view with favor any struggle against the status quo prior to the revolution, but that the International should extend any and all sorts of guarantees which might serve to stir national minorities into action. Towards this end, Lenin wrote that from the bolshevik perspective all nations have an absolute right to self-determination, including the right to total secession and independence from any Marxist revolutionary state. He also endorsed, as the party position on the national question, the formulation of Joseph Stalin that:

8 Connor, Walker, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 14.

9 Stalin, J.V., *Marxism and the National Question: Selected Writings and Speeches*, International Publishers, 1942, p. 23.

10 Connor, op. cit., P. 35.

11 Quoted in Clarkson, Jesse, *A History of Russia*, Random House Publishers,

The right to self-determination means that a nation can arrange its life according to its own will. It has the right to arrange its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign and all nations are equal.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, as Connor points out, "Lenin ... made a distinction between the abstract right of self-determination, which is enjoyed by all nations, and the right to exercise that right, which evidently is not, 'at least where small or 'marginal' populations are concerned."<sup>10</sup> Thus, shortly after the bolshevik attainment of power came the pronouncement that, "The principle of self-determination must be subordinated to the principles of socialism."<sup>11</sup> The result, predictably, was that of the more than 300 distinct nationalities readily observable in what had been the czarist Russian empire, only 28 - consisting almost entirely of substantial and relatively Europeanized population blocks such as the Ukrainians, Armenians, Moldavians, Byelorussians, citizens of the Baltic states, etc. - were accorded even the gesture of being designated as "republics," and this only after the matter of secession had been foreclosed. The supposed "right to enter into federal relations with other nations" was also immediately circumscribed to mean only with each other and with the central government which, of course, was seated in the former czarist citadel at Moscow. Those, such as the Ukrainians, who persisted in pursuing a broader definition of self-determination were first branded as counter-revolutionary, and then radically undercut through liquidation of their socio-cultural and political leadership during the Stalinist purges of the 1920s and '30s. There is simply no other way in which to describe the Soviet Marxist process of state consolidation other than as the ruthlessly forcible incorporation of all the various peoples conquered by the czars into a single, seamless economic polity. As Marx once completed the capitalist model of political-economy, so too did the bolsheviks complete the unification of the Great Russian empire.

In China, the practical experience was much the same. During the so-called "Long March" of the mid-1930s, Mao Tse Tung's army of Marxist insurgents traversed nearly the whole of the country. In the midst of this undertaking, they "successfully communicated the

NY, 1961, p. 636.

12 Connor, op. cit., p. 77.

13 Ibid., p. 79.



party's public position [favoring] self-determination to the minorities they encountered," virtually all of whom were well known to be yearning for freedom from the domination of the Han empire.<sup>12</sup> The Marxists gained considerable, perhaps decisive support as a result of this tactic, but, to quote Connor:

While thus engaged in parlaying its intermittent offers of national independence into necessary support for its cause, the party never fell prey to its own rhetoric but continued to differentiate between its propaganda and its more privately held commitment to maintaining the territorial integrity of the Chinese state.<sup>13</sup>

As had been the case in the U.S.S.R., the immediate wake of the Chinese revolution in 1949 saw Marxist language suddenly shift, abandoning terms such as secession and self-determination altogether. Instead, the new Chinese constitution was written to decry "nationalism and national chauvinism," and "the peoples who, during the revolution, were promised the right of political independence were subsequently reincorporated by force and offered the diminished prospect of regional autonomy."<sup>14</sup> Only Outer Mongolia was accorded the status of existing even in the truncated Soviet sense of being a republic.

In Vietnam and Laos, leaving aside the lowland ethnic Nungs (Chinese), the only peoples holding the requisites of national identity apart from the Vietnamese and Lao themselves are the tribal mountain cultures - often referred to as "montagnards" - such as the Rhade, Krak, Bru, Bahnar and H'mong. Insofar as they are neither populous nor "advanced" enough to comprise promising marxian-style economic units, they were never so much as offered the "courtesy" of being lied to before the revolution; national self-determination for the mountain people was never mentioned in Ho Chi Minh's agenda. Consequently, the "yards" (as they were dubbed by U.S. military personnel) formed their own political independence organization called the Front Unifié Pour La Liberation Des Races Opprimées (Unified Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Peoples, or, acronymically, FULRO during the early 1960s. The purpose of FULRO was/is to resist any Vietnamese encroachment upon montagnard national rights. Consequently, U.S. Special Forces troopers were able to utilize the FULRO consortium to good advantage as a

highland mobile force interdicting the supply routes and attacking the staging areas of both NLF main force units and units of the regular NVA (both of which were viewed by the mountain people as threats). Much to the surprise of U.S. military advisers, however, beginning in 1964 FULRO also started using its military equipment to fight the troops of the American-backed Saigon regime, whenever they entered the mountains.

The message was plain enough. The montagnards rejected incorporation into any Vietnamese state, whether "capitalist" or "communist." In post-revolutionary Vietnam, FULRO has continued to exist, and to conduct armed resistance against the imposition of Vietnamese hegemony. For its part, the Hanoi government refuses to acknowledge either the fact of the Resistance or its basis. The rather better known example of the Hmong in Laos follows very much the same contours as the struggle in the south. Such a recounting could be continued at length, but the point should be made. In no Marxist-Leninist setting have the national rights of any small people been respected, most especially not those of land-based, indigenous ("tribal") peoples. Their very right to exist as national entities has instead been denied as such. Always and everywhere, Marxism-Leninism has assigned itself a practical priority leading directly to the incorporation, subordination and dissolution of these peoples as such. This is quite revealing when one considers that the term "genocide" (as opposed to "mass murder") was coined to express the reality of policies which lead not simply to the physical liquidation of groups of individuals targeted as belonging to an identified "ethnic, racial, religious or national" entity, but to bring about the destruction of the entity itself, as such, through any means. Marxism-Leninism, viewed in this way, is a quite consciously and specifically genocidal doctrine, at least where indigenous cultures are concerned.

There has been no relaxation or deviation in this circumstance during the 1980s. Most notably, during the present decade there has been the situation in Nicaragua where three Indian peoples - the above-mentioned Miskitos, Sumos and Ramas - are resisting their forced incorporation into yet another revolutionary state, tacitly acknowledged by two of its principle leaders (D...

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

Tomas Borge) to be guided by Marxist-leninist principles. The Indian nations in question have historically maintained a high degree of insularity and autonomy vis a vis Nicaragua's dominant (Ladino) society, and they have also continued a viable economic life within their own territories on the Atlantic Coast. Their sole requirement of the Sandinista revolution has been that they be free to continue to do so, as an "autonomous zone" - by their own definition, and on their own terms - within revolutionary Nicaragua. The response of the "progressive" government in Managua has been that this would be impossible because such self-determination on the part of Indians would constitute a "state within a state" (precisely the sort of circumstance supposedly guaranteed in leninist doctrine), and because "there are no more Indians, Creoles or Ladinos...we are all Nicaraguans now."<sup>15</sup> In other words, the Miskito, Sumo and Rama are required by the revolution to cease to exist as such.

### What Choice May Nations Make?

None of what has been said herein should be taken as an apology or defense, direct or indirect, of U.S. (or other capitalist) state policies. American Indians, first and foremost, know what the U.S. has done and what it's about. We've experienced the meaning of the U.S. since long before there were Marxists around to "explain" it to us. And we've continued to experience it in ways which leave little room for confusion on the matter. That's why we seek change. That's why we demand sovereignty and self-determination. That's why we cast about for allies and alternatives of the sort Marxists have often claimed to be.

The purpose of our endeavor here has thus been to examine the prospects for collaboration with Marxism to the end that U.S. domination will be cast out of our lives once and for all. In doing so, we must ask - only fools would not - whether Marxism offers an alternative vision to that which capitalism has imposed upon us. And from the answers to this we can discern whether Marxists and Marxism

16 Muga, David A., "Native Americans and the Nationalities Question: Premises for a Marxist Approach to Ethnicity and Self-Determination," *Nature, Society, Thought*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Marxist Education Program, University of Minnesota, 1987.

can really be the sort of allies which would, or even could actually guarantee us a positive change "come the revolution." In this regard, we need to know exactly what is meant when a Marxist "friend" such as David Muga assures us, as he recently did, that the solutions to our present problems lie in the models offered by the U.S.S.R., China and revolutionary Nicaragua.<sup>16</sup> The answers (I would say) are rather painfully evident in what has been discussed above. Marxism, in its present form at least, offers us far worse than nothing. With friends such as these, we will be truly doomed.

So it is. But must it be? I think not. An increasing number of thoughtful Marxists have broken with at least the worst of marxian

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economism, determinism and human chauvinism. Salient examples such as Albert, Hahnel and Baudrillard have been mentioned or quoted herein. The German Green Movement, involving a number of Marxists or former Marxists like Rudi Dutschke and Rudolph Bahro, is an extremely hopeful phenomenon (albeit, it has thus far failed spectacularly to congeal in this country). All in all, there is sufficient basis to suggest that at least some elements of the marxian tradition are capable of transcending dogma to the extent that they may possess the potential to forge mutually fruitful alliances with American Indians and other indigenous peoples (although, at the point where this becomes true, one has reason to ask whether they may be rightly viewed as Marxists any longer).

The key for us, it would seem to me, is to remain firm in the values and insights of our own traditions. We must hold true to the dialectical understanding embodied in the expression *Metakuyeayasi* and reject anything less as an unbalanced and imperfect view, even a mutilation of reality. We must continue to pursue our traditional vision of a humanity within rather than upon the natural order. We must continue to insist, as an absolutely fundamental principle, upon the right of all peoples - each and everyone, no matter how small and "primitive" - to freely select the fact and form of their ongoing national existence. Concomitantly, we must reject all contentions by

any state that it has the right - for any reason - to subordinate or dissolve the inherent rights of any other nation. And, perhaps most importantly of all, we must choose our friends and allies accordingly. I submit that there's nothing in this game-plan which contradicts any aspect of what we've come to describe as "the Indian way."

I must say that I believe such an agenda, which I call "indigenist," can and will attract real friends, real allies, and offer real alternatives to both Marxism and capitalism. What will result, in my view, is the emergence of a movement predicated in the principles of what are termed "deep ecology," "soft-path technology," "anarchism" (or, probably more accurately, "minarchism"), and global "balkanization." But we are now entering into the topic of a whole different discussion.

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## COMMUNITY-DETERMINED LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

An Academic Program for Native Americans at  
The Evergreen State College

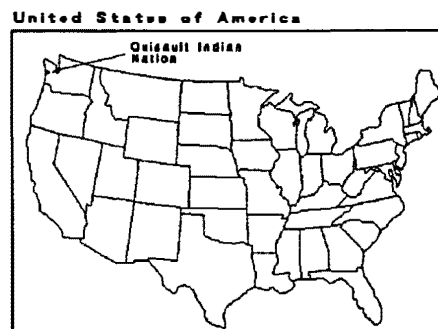
Russell Fox  
and  
Carol Minugh  
Members of the Faculty  
The Evergreen State College  
Olympia, Washington, U.S.A.

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Originally presented at the International Encounter on Participatory Research, sponsored by the International Network of Participatory Research of the International Council for Adult Education in Managua, Nicaragua, September 1989.

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Is access to formal educational systems essential for the survival of indigenous and oppressed peoples? Our response is yes, But .... More important questions are: Who has a right to create knowledge that is validated by schools or universities, and: Who controls the content and learning processes of formal educational systems?



All societies have mechanisms for teaching the young the patterns, norms and roles of their culture, of training youth for their roles in society, and for ongoing adult learning and development. The Fourth World populations of the world don't need to rely upon formal educational institutions to