

asset to him. However, on the other hand, they may define out-group membership as a desirable trait in a doctor. For example, see Padilla, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-295.

- 25 Greer, *op. cit.*, p. 71.  
26 See *Ibid.*, p. 73.  
27 Wakefield, *op. cit.*, p. 270.  
28 See Hall, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

MARX AND WEBER:  
A THEORY OF HISTORICAL CHANGE

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Though historical sequences of Western civilization are capable of being described by a simple, unilinear, evolutionary theory of history, attempts to generalize unilinear theories beyond Western cultural areas have failed. Thus the attempts of modern "Marxists" to generalize Marx and Engels' "theory of history" beyond its scope of application, Western civilization, have met with the expected results. Their sequence of stages of history simply do not fit other cultural areas. The Marx-Engels theory of history was explicitly designed for a single case and has little or no application outside that case. The theory therefore has no explanatory power and may be viewed as simply a tool for *describing* a single case. Extension of the theory beyond that case would require modification, specifically conceptual elaboration, such that it becomes more than simply descriptive.

The basis of the stages of the Marx-Engels theory was to be found in the prevailing forms of ownership (or in other words, forms of division of labor). The first historical form was that of "tribal ownership" characterized only by a natural division of labor based on natural differences such as sex and age. In this stage there is no specialized production, and the people support themselves by hunting, fishing, or 'slash and burn' agriculture.

An increase in population brings about the second form of ownership, "state ownership," the result of the union of several tribes, some tribes becoming slaves to others, and the development of slaves as a means of production. Private property develops in this stage, and the country becomes divided from the city, with power concentrated in the latter. Marx and Engels seem to have had Rome in mind in their description of this stage.

The explanation of the transition from the stage of state property to the apparently more backward stage of feudalism is somewhat elusive. They explain that "Rome indeed never became more than a city; its connection with the provinces was almost exclusively political."<sup>1</sup> War,

they said, cannot explain history.<sup>2</sup> History is not a question of taking but of that which is taken, the productive forces.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Marx and Engels did not really explain why the barbarians were able to take Rome.

Nevertheless, with the downfall of Rome and all of its contending classes, the center of power shifts to the countryside, and the feudal stage begins. Here land and serfs rather than slaves form the basic means of production. Feudal organization was represented in the city by the guild; however, guilds were unable to monopolize the urban means of production. Thus the bourgeoisie appeared. Marx and Engels explained the rise of the bourgeoisie as a consequence of foreign markets, particularly those overseas; but this explanation seems to ignore the fact that industrial capitalism created its own markets by producing cheaply. This cheap production drew nearly all classes of society into the commercial market, whereas at all previous historical stages the majority were not involved. Nevertheless, neither the success of capitalism in foreign markets nor cheap production are sufficient to explain the rise of the bourgeoisie themselves.

The rest of the theory is well-known. The dialectic, heretofore strangely absent, now becomes the explanation of change. The bourgeoisie and feudal aristocracy battle until the success of the former who are, in turn, expected to struggle with the proletariat. The former resulted in capitalism, the latter should have resulted in communism.

It may be argued that Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was intended to present a more complete explanation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. While it is evident, as Marx and Engels claimed, that the existence of a bourgeoisie implies the existence of a proletariat, it is not at all obvious that the existence of the feudal aristocracy presupposes a bourgeoisie. The central explanatory problem of this transition was the explanation of the source of the bourgeois class. To Weber, given certain material conditions, the appearance of this class depended on the development of an ethic compatible with the notion of rational accumulation of capital. Feudalism is thus not itself a sufficient condition for the rise of the bourgeois class. Given the ethic, actions of the modern industrial type can begin, creating social relationships which become the material forces determining further developments.

As helpful as this addition is, it does not solve the central problem, unilinear development. Weber's concepts suggest a solution to this problem also. Feudal organization, in Weber's terms, is a subtype of "traditional" organization, decentralized patrimonial authority.<sup>4</sup> In its pure case it can best be described negatively: (1) power relations between those nominally super- and subordinate are not consistently effective, (2) the central power is not free to select his administrative staff, (3) governing powers are not centralized but are appropriated by

the staff along with their positions, (4) there is no clear separation of personal and administrative property, (5) there is no clearly defined sphere of competency nor impersonal rules, (6) there is no regular requirement of technical training, (7) salaries are not centrally fixed and graded, and (8) there is no rational division of labor.<sup>5</sup>

Those familiar with Weber's work will recognize the characteristics of feudal organization (or perhaps more accurately, feudal disorganization) to be a direct negation of the characteristics of bureaucratic organization. The relation between the two is almost dialectical with feudal organization posed as the antithesis to the thesis of bureaucratic organization. If bureaucracies are efficient organizations because administrators are trained, the division of labor is rational, positions are not owned or purchased, etc., then feudal organizations are inefficient because of their lack of such characteristics. If this inference is accurate, one might wonder why historical cases of feudalism have not been both very rare and very early in their presence. The greater efficiency of bureaucratic organizations suggests their triumph in any confrontation with feudal organizations. Not only should the bureaucratic army be more efficient, but bureaucratic economic enterprise should be more successful than such quasi-feudal structures as the manor and the guild. Given conditions of pure competition or pure conflict, we must theoretically accept these conclusions. But pure conflict, like pure competition, has been a rare empirical occurrence, and challenges of bureaucratic armies to feudal regimes have no clear cases in the Middle Ages.

On the other hand, under conditions of pure competition (as in China during the period of the "Warring States" or in religious organizations under the late Roman Empire) the most efficient (bureaucratized) organizations are selected.

Historically competition appears to fluctuate from relatively pure conditions to those which are less pure, and the advantage of bureaucratic over feudal organization is thus expected to fluctuate also. Consequently the presence of feudal organization is not necessarily synonymous with a short or transitional period. Nevertheless, given that bureaucratic organization always retains some advantage, it remains to be explained why feudal organization has not been confined to the earliest historical periods. Feudal organization, as a lack of rational organization, requires minimal social conditions for its establishment and maintenance. Means of communication need not be effective and may even represent a threat to its continuance. Political and military organization does not require a money economy, and trade and commerce may be minimal because of the lack of centralization. Institutions for training officials are not necessary, for formal training is not required. It is true that feudal organizations could exist in more developed social conditions; however, they are not forces which

implement social development and are conversely threatened by it.

In direct contrast, the establishment and maintenance of bureaucratic structures requires a specific development of social conditions. Remuneration in fixed money salary requires a developed money economy with few fluctuations. Centralization requires extensive commerce and effective lines of communication. Institutions are also needed for bureaucratic training. In order to assure these conditions over time political bureaucracies typically continually institute planning together with increasingly intensive administration. The increase of administrative tasks requires an increase in the size of the bureaucratic organization which in turn leads to further planning and administration because of increasing maintenance costs. But increases in size beyond a point determined by the administrative technology of the period, will result in a decline of the overall efficiency and thus require great increases in size relative to small increases in administrative capability. Furthermore, as bureaucracies develop over time they become traditionalized, statuses become inflated with administrators at all levels demanding more elaborate and expensive styles of life. The result of this we see around us, ever-expanding and more expensive administrative bureaucracies.

In the state property stage described by Marx and Engels development beyond the boundaries of a single city-state was eventually accomplished by bureaucratic political and military organization. These organizations, with their ever-expanding economic needs, were based on a more or less static, largely agrarian, subsistence economy. To the extent that political bureaucratization did not result in increasingly economic efficiency, the growth of the bureaucracy could be supported only by territorial expansion. Once the limits of territorial expansion were met, the economy could no longer support the expansion of the bureaucracy. Decentralization would save money, reduce pressure on trade and commerce, and allow payment in kind to administrators. Direct grants of land for maintenance of administrators could result in further simplification. The latter would result, of course, in feudalism.

Incorporating Marx and Weber eliminates the limitations of the unilinear perspective; historical change in the feudal and bureaucratic stages may be *either* unilinear *or* cyclic depending upon both the ethic and the ability to use available technology. When Rome reached the limits of its expansion, its bureaucracy grew as its tax base slowly declined, and the weakened structure collapsed into feudalism with the barbarian invasion. Fluctuations in China, however, more strongly favored bureaucratic organization over feudalism. Bureaucratic organization there had additional economic support because of irrigation by control of the river system. The more intensive exploitation of irrigation both supported and was supported by the centralized bureaucratic structure. As might be expected, China developed in a

feudal direction during times of flood and extreme natural disaster. But the economic advantage of river control and irrigation plus the efficiency of the bureaucracy supported by it, meant that the feudal rule would always be transitory.

Change between the two types of organization is dependent upon prevailing conditions and thus may be either unilinear or cyclic. It is strange that Marx, a so-called "economic determinist," did not consider the important effect of the economic system on the political system — perhaps it was the result of an overly simplistic view that the two are the same. Treating them as identical would eliminate the possibility of interdependence between them.

Modern bureaucratization does not rely on territorial expansion but on the constantly expanding basis of capitalism. The expansion of capitalism, since it has supported the expansion of bureaucracy, has tended to stabilize itself because of the ability of the bureaucracy to absorb the otherwise expected reserve industrial army. That, however, is another topic.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Publishers Co., Inc., 1947, p. 62.
- 2 See *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 3 See *ibid.*, p. 62.
- 4 See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. by A. Henderson and T. Parsons, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1947, pp. 347-348.
- 5 See *ibid.*, pp. 343-349.