

IDEOLOGICAL STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE PEASANTRY

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Miomir S. Naumović

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Republic of Serbia
E-mail: naumovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

Abstract. *The teachings of Marx and Engels present a clear view of a socialist society and the peasantry within such a society. They offered a reduced version of history, seeing it only as a class conflict. On the other hand, their expectations were not met. The socialist revolution was not carried out by the working class, but by the peasantry. The very same peasantry that they had nothing good to say about. The bourgeoisie did not become superfluous, the peasantry and the working class underwent a full evolution, while the so-called "socialist" societies did not put an end to social differences, the oppositions between the country and the city and the like. In this paper, the author discusses the ideological stereotypes which, later, during the building of "socialist" societies, had a detrimental effect on the peasantry.*

Key words: *ideology, peasantry, working class, revolution, socialism.*

The thoughts of the Marxist classics, regarding the essential questions of the peasantry were not of any special scope or intensity, but the mere mentions of the peasantry are frequent in their philosophical tradition. These thoughts left a deep trace in the very history of the development of socialist societies, and as such they deserve to be the subject matter of special sociological-cognitive discussions, and must not by any means be neglected or ignored.

Their particular type of teaching is characterized by a meshing of reality and ideological expectations. They often emphasized that the liberation of the working class should stem from the working class itself: "The liberation of the working class can only be brought about by the working class itself. It is understandable that it cannot place its liberation in the hands of capitalists or the landed gentry, its enemies and exploiters, or in the hands of the lower levels of the bourgeoisie and smallholders..." (Marx & Engels, 1973: 186). They predicted and hoped that socialism would develop on the soil of developed capitalist countries. This needs no special emphasis. In every existing text in which

they addressed the workers, they emphasized that socialism would be born in developed industrial countries. This kind of thinking stems from their concept of the historic development of capitalism. On the basis of mistakes of foresight of this magnitude, we can easily draw the conclusion that no teaching up to then had been as brilliant in its analysis of reality and so weak in its predictions about the future. Within the framework of such teaching, the peasantry was not considered the major factor of historic change, nor did people think that it could represent general human interest. What was claimed was that it "either had to fall into the ranks of the proletariat on its own", that is "become either an adversary of the working class or its extension".

How did Marx and Engels view the peasantry in their day and age, and how did they describe it? The peasantry, in their opinion, was not revolutionary. It belonged to those social forces which obstruct the wheels of history or want to turn them back in time. In the "*Manifesto of the Communist Party*" they wrote: "The middle class: the lower class industrial, the petty merchant, the craftsman, the peasant, they are all fighting against the bourgeoisie in order to ensure their continued existence as members of the middle class. Thus, they are not revolutionaries, they are conservative. They are, furthermore, reactionary, since they wish to turn back the wheels of history" (Marx & Engels, 1974: 49). Marx, in his "*Critique of the Gothic Program*", had a critical take on Lassalle and his opinion that "in comparison to the working class... these other classes are merely a reactionary mass". He noted that Lassalle knew the Manifesto of the Communist Party by heart, but pointed out that he had made a mistake when it came to the peasantry. Still, Lassalle was only diligently following Marx and Engels' basic idea: the smallholder was not a revolutionary, he was conservative, reactionary even. That was what the Manifesto stated, and Lassalle had drawn the most sensible conclusion from it. The Marxist standard writers did not see the peasantry as a subject of the revolution. Not only did they think that the peasantry was powerless when it came to changing the world, but they had never even envisaged them in the front lines of the battle for the socialist "dawn", the fight they had entrusted the working class with. In their understanding of the peasantry, they started from its historic fate. The peasantry was splintered into many smaller pieces, and its division to the greatest extent hindered the possibility of any joint agreements. For centuries, they had built up the habit of being subjugated, and were no longer accustomed to wielding weapons. Writing about the historical tendencies of capitalist accumulation, Marx in his "*Capital*" pointed out that private ownership is the basis of smallholding, that the fields smallholders plow, and their particular way of production, make up the basis for the division of land and production means. "To want to preserve these means of production would mean... giving a decree of general mediocrity" (Ibid.). According to him, smallholding, in the cases where the peasantry makes up the majority of the population, means the predominance of "isolated, asocial work," which "does not enable the abundance and development of reproduction... which in turn renders the conditions for rational culture impossible as well... smallholding creates a class of barbarians who in part stand outside society and who connect the crudeness of their primitive social forms with all the suffering and all the poverty of civilized countries" (Marx, 1961: 1547-1555). Was there any valley of light in the descriptions that Marx and Engels gave of the peasantry, were they able to solve the riddle of the sky and become the fighters for greater changes, for socialism? From volume to volume that the ideologists wrote, the idea that the peasantry was too small to change the world was confirmed over and over again, as were the ideas that

their minds resembled hopelessness in a dark chamber, that they were used to living in silence in the deafening thunder of historic events. Why did they think so? Marx, in his work *"The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"*, pointed out that the smallholders were a huge mass of people who lived under the same conditions "but did not develop different relations amongst themselves", that their means of production isolated them and separated them from one another. Their type of work did not enable the application of knowledge, the division of labor, or a multitude of social relations. Under such conditions the peasant tries to be self-sufficient, meaning that his family tries to produce everything, or almost everything, it needs to live. "This was how the great mass of the French nation was formed through the simple combination of entities of a similar size, just like potatoes in a sack make up a potato sack... therefore, they are unable to put forward their class interests in their own name... They cannot represent themselves, and thus must be represented by someone else" (Engels, 1949: 572-573). Marx described the life of the peasantry of his time as being in a state of despair and general indifference. He stated that it was a state of bleak hopelessness and the inability to alter reality. In the country we could find the "idiocy of peasant life", while the bourgeoisie itself had separated a segment of the population from it, thus greatly increasing the urban population¹. Engels, in his work *"The Housing Question"*, in addition to everything else, also dealt with the question of the peasantry. According to him, only the even distribution of population throughout the entire country and the merging of industrial and agricultural production could "wrench the peasantry from its isolated state and its backwardness, under which it has labored for thousands of years, without almost any change at all". In the text *"The Peasant Question in France and Germany"* he concluded that the peasantry from Ireland to Sicily, from Andalusia to Russia and Bulgaria is a "very important factor of population, production and political force". Nevertheless, he emphasized that "as the factor of political force, the peasant has so far manifested, mainly, only his indifference, whose roots can be traced to the isolated nature of country life. This apathy of the peasantry... is the greatest stronghold... of parliamentary corruption... and... despotism" (Engels, 1950: 393-394). The peasantry is part of the collective process and shares the collective fate and it cannot independently solve its problems. Marx unambiguously emphasized that the poor in the country would be ruled by the city proletariat. He wrote that where masses of the peasantry can be found as private owners "the following can happen: the peasantry will either prevent or put a stop to every working class revolution... or the proletariat (since the peasant-owner is not a member of the proletariat, and does not even believe himself to belong to the class his position prescribes for him) must by means of its own government take measures which will directly improve the position of the peasantry and which will thus win the peasant over for the revolution... but the proletariat must not make rough advances to the peasant, by, for instance, making public the abolishment of hereditary law or his rights of ownership... even less may the ownership over plots of land be strengthened by the increase in the size of the plots, simply by means of the division and allocation of greater estates to the peasants..." (Marx, Engels & Lenin, 1973: 89-91).

The aforementioned opinions unambiguously lead us to the following conclusions. Marx and Engels: 1. Thought that the working class was the only one which could liberate

¹ See Marx, 1974: 42.

itself and create a society without exploitation; 2. The peasantry was splintered into smaller pieces, used to being subjugated, not prone to revolution; 3. It was characterized by a general mediocrity and separation (both within itself and from the other social strata and classes); 4. Peasant work was isolated, asocial, and as such is not conducive to the conditions for rational culture; 5. The peasantry was thus a class of barbarians who were only to a certain extent part of society and who were characterized by the raw nature of primitive societies; 6. The peasant way of work on a small plot of land did not enable the application of knowledge, the division of labor and a multitude of social relations, which was why the peasants were a condensed force similar to potatoes in a potato sack; 7. The peasantry was incapable of putting forth its own interests and thus must be represented by someone else in a state of political turmoil; 8. The peasantry in its isolation and backwardness had been toiling away for thousands of years without any change; 9. As a factor of political life, it displayed only indifference, which was the greatest stronghold of parliamentary corruption and despotism; 10. Where the peasantry could be found in masses as private owners, we found danger of the prevention or destruction of each working class revolution, so the working class, once they attained power, should by no means strengthen the peasantry's hold over any plots of land by giving them greater estates. These kinds of conclusions follow from the numerous opinions of Marx and Engels, since practically no paper exists in which they did not at least mention the peasantry and did not, in one way or another, repeat the aforesaid opinions. In their approach to reality, they came across as ideologists of the working class. In our and foreign literature tentative conclusions, of course incorrect, can be detected about the fact that they had built this kind of attitude to the peasantry from the standpoint of the big city. This is based on one of Engels' letters which reads: "I could not last long without the liveliness of the big city. I have always lived in one. Nature is magnificent and I am always glad to return to it in order to rest from the movements of history, but history still seems to me to be a more magnificent than nature" (Engels, 1979: 26). In the works of Marx and Engels, all of the analyses of the peasantry were placed within the framework of the new society. The second question is whether during this process they erred and gave too bleak a description of farmers. The attitude of the big city dweller is the least noticeable one here, since the entire space is simply colored with the attitude of these ideologists in their studies, their attitudes as the authors of the ideology of the working class.

The question of the peasantry is the Achilles heel of Marxism. It is precisely in the attitude to the peasantry that we find reflected many of the limitations and inconsistencies of this approach to society. The peasantry is viewed primarily from the standpoint of the revolution and the standpoint of private ownership. It is a pretty limited approach, and so the analysis of the features of the peasantry thus led to the results that have been cited. In this kind of approach to the peasantry, the starting point is not the fact that social classes evolve over time, and that they differ from state to state, that the worker himself is a kind of transformed version of the peasant. In the peasantry they did not see the possibility of an educational transformation, improvement, alterations in accordance with the demands of society. At best, the working class ideology treats the peasantry as a static immature mass which needs to be led and focused, making this the most important feature of this social class. Any more detailed and all-around analyses of the peasantry are missing, although numerous texts have been written about it, texts in which the same viewpoint has been repeated over and over again. The peasantry as a social class is much richer, strati-

fied and complex, and thus the analysis of this class should be more appropriate. The choice of the working class as the subject of the revolution is a matter of the ideological approach in which there is much subjective affection and devotion. The state of the city in which the turmoil is taking place was taken for granted, as if it were unchanging, after which the nuances which could indicate a possible, alternate approach to the problem were excluded from a rich specter of possibilities. Still, Marx and Engels had the habit of creating black-and-white analyses, of simplifying the state of the society, of seeing only processes of exploitation in the social processes, of seeing only two classes: that of the exploiters and the exploited, which in their time amounted to the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) and the working class (the proletariat), respectively. The peasantry was a side issue and ideology touched upon it only with the aim of solving the question of private ownership, which it wanted to abolish as a heritage of civilization. The ideological approach to the peasantry as a social class thus led to a pretty one-sided picture, impoverished, and essentially incomplete. On the other hand, even though the analyses of the peasantry are not of the same quality as other analyses, the predictions regarding the future of the peasantry were in many ways correct. This occurred because the studies of the basic capitalist processes in the country were carried out in a detailed and all-around fashion.

Thoughts on the future of the peasantry in Marx and Engels' ideology were completely limited by the attitudes regarding the abolishment of private ownership. They unambiguously and on numerous occasions claimed in their work: "What we find to be of the utmost importance is not the question of the alteration of private ownership, but only of its destruction, not the "sweeping under the rug" of class differences, but the abolishment of class distinctions, not the improvement of the existing, but the founding of a new society" (Marx & Engels, 1949: 85). Private ownership would be limited with the help of progressive taxes, high inheritance taxes and the abolishment of inheritance by a supporting line (brothers, nephews) and the like, but also by forced loans. A gradual expropriation from the landowners, factory owners, and the like would also be carried out. All these plans were presented in detail in their numerous works (*The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *The Peasant War in Germany*, *The Critique of the Gothic Program*, *The Housing Question*). This begs the question of what the basic attitude of this ideology is towards the peasantry, a class which is also a private landowner, which owns land as private property. Marx and Engels did not approach the peasantry as a unique social class in a proprietary sense. They built a theory based on the peasant-landowner, the middle class peasant and the peasant without any land (the smallholder). The smallholders were the most numerous and the most important, since they were the owners (or renters) of a piece of land. These pieces of land were ones on which the smallholders worked with their families and which brought food to their table. As such, for the authors it was just the "remains of a type of production which belongs to the past". The smallholder owns his peasant estate and has free ownership of it, but does not participate in the use of earlier common land, since it practically does not exist. Such a peasant had been left without a part of his production, since the country had evolved from a natural and self-sufficient one, to one focused on goods and money, that is a market. In a materialistic sense, the smallholder is actually one of the poor and Marx and Engels thus conclude: "He is the future proletarian... Thus he should be willing to listen to socialist propaganda. But he is sometimes prevented from doing so by his deeply ingrained sense of ownership. The harder his struggle for his endangered piece of land, the stronger his grip on it..." (Engels, 1950: 394-396).

In their explanation of the future of the smallholder, they started from the capitalist way of production. The capitalist way of production penetrated into agriculture and it was obvious that smallholding would in some places decline more slowly than in others. This process was inevitable, as the concentration and centralization of capital is a characteristic of capitalism. It even acts as a law in the capitalist agriculture. The smallholders with plots of land would, thus, fail and would move to the city and join the proletariat, and what would remain, in the end, were huge estates. They could only resist this law of the development of capitalism to a certain extent, but not for long, and not with success. They could not last in the game with large estates where science was being applied, where specialization on the basis of increased division of labor as being applied, where capital as being accumulated. The smallholders not only hindered the capitalist socio-economical relations, but would also obstruct, they thought, the development of socialist relations. Thus, as such, smallholding must be abolished, and that could only be done through the development of a production force. Engels wrote: "it is quite correct... that we should predict the inevitable demise of the smallholder, but that we are by no means invited to speed it up... Individual estates, conditioned by individual ownership, have led the smallholder to his demise" (Ibid, 406-412). Another conclusion is that the "agriculture aristocracy is... to put it mildly, economically superfluous, and ... due to its tendencies of depopulation, it has become exceedingly harmful" (Engels, 1973: 147). In his "*Capital*" Marx wrote that the work of the heavy industry brought down the smallholder who was the pillar of the old society, and in his stead placed the wage earner². Thus, large landownership forced the majority of the population in the country into the city, into the hands of the industry, where farmers were turned into workers. These huge estates increased the power of their enemy, capital, industry, strengthening it with the poor who crossed over to the other side³. This is why Engels predicted the "imminent ruin of the smallholder... We know the economic truth that both the upper and the middle-class peasant will inevitably succumb to the competition of capitalist economy... which has already been proven by an ever increasing debt and the clearly noticeable demise of these peasants as well".

Marxism wanted to build a world with a new social order on the ruins of the capitalist world. The authors of this ideology displayed great enthusiasm in this direction and used up a great amount of internal energy proving that agriculture was not the vocation of the future and that, as such, it would die away. From it stemmed the socialist agricultural policy, aimed in the direction of forcing the peasantry off the land, and turning it into a working class. Socialism was mainly understood as society without the peasantry. In it, there was room for the favored working class and a peasantry which was slowly dying away and turning into the working class. The future with the greatest prospects for the peasantry lay in the transformation of farmers into workers on collective (social) farms. Thus, ideology took the peasantry into the deep spaces of an uncertain future, since many of the life problems of this social class had no importance for it, and thus were not studied in more detail.

² See Marx, 1958: 362-364.

³ See Marx, 1961: 206.

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IDEOLOŠKI STEREOTIPI O SELJAŠTVU

Miomir S. Naumović

Učenje Marksa i Engelsa predstavlja jasnu viziju socijalističkog društva i seljaštva u okviru takvog društva. Previše su suzili istoriju videći u njoj samo klasni sukob. S druge strane, njihova očekivanja nisu se ispunila. Nosilac socijalističkih revolucija nije bila radnička klasa, već seljaštvo. Ono seljaštvo o kome nisu imali mnogo lepih reči. Nije se dogodilo da buržoazija postane suvišna, seljaštvo i radništvo doživeli su korenitu evoluciju, a tzv. "socijalistička " društva nisu ukinula socijalne razlike, suprotnost sela i grada, itd. U radu autor razmatra ideološke stereotipe koji su, kasnije, u toku izgradnje, "socijalističkih " društava pogubno uticali na seljaštvo.

Ključne reči: ideologija, seljaštvo, radnička klasa, revolucija, socijalizam.