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Karl Marx. Preface and Introduction to *A Contribution To The Critique Of Political Economy*. Foreign Languages Press. Peking 1976. First Edition 1976

PREFACE TO A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY ^[1]

I examine the system of bourgeois economy in the following order: *capital, landed property, wage-labour; the state, foreign trade, the world market*. Under the first three headings, I examine the economic conditions of existence of the three great classes into which modern bourgeois society is divided; the interconnection of the three other headings is obvious at a glance. The first section of the first book, which deals with capital, consists of the following chapters: 1) the commodity; 2) money or simple circulation; 3) capital in general. The present part consists of the first two chapters. All the material lies before me in the form of monographs, which were written at widely separated periods not for publication but for self-clarification, and reworking them coherently according to the plan I have indicated will depend upon external circumstances.

I am withholding a general introduction* I had drafted, since on closer consideration it seems to me confusing to anticipate results which still have to be proved, and the reader who

* See below, pp. [8-45](#) --Ed.

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really wishes to follow me will have to decide to advance from the particular to the general. A few brief remarks regarding the course of my own study of political economy may, however, be appropriate here.

Although my special field of study was jurisprudence, I pursued it only as a discipline subordinate to philosophy and history. In the year 1842-43, as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*,^[2] I first found myself in the embarrassing position of having to discuss so-called material interests. The deliberations of the Rhenish Landtag on thefts of timber and the division of landed property; the official controversy started by Herr von Schaper, then *Oberpräsident* of the Rhine Province, against the *Rheinische Zeitung* about the conditions of the Moselle peasantry, and finally the debates on free trade and protection gave me the first occasion to occupy myself with economic questions. On the other hand, an echo of French socialism and communism, slightly tinged by philosophy, became audible in the *Rheinische Zeitung* at a time when the good will "to go forward" greatly outweighed knowledge of the subject. I objected to this dilettantism, but at the same time frankly admitted in a controversy with the *Allgemeine Augsburger Zeitung*^[3] that my previous

studies did not allow me to venture any opinion on the content of the French tendencies. When the publishers of the *Rheinische Zeitung* laboured under the illusion that it might be possible to secure a remission of the death sentence passed on the paper by a more compliant policy on its part, I eagerly grasped the opportunity to withdraw from the public stage to the study.

The first work I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical review of the Hegelian philosophy of right, the introduction to which appeared in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* issued in Paris in 1844.^[4] My inquiry led to

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the conclusion that neither legal relations nor forms of state could be grasped whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but on the contrary they have their origin in the material conditions of existence, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term "civil society"; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. I began the study of the latter in Paris and continued it in Brussels, to which I moved owing to an expulsion order issued by M. Guizot. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarized as follows. In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or -- what is merely a legal expression for the same thing -- with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution

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begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic, in short, ideological, forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such an epoch of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the

social forces of production and the relations of production. A social order never perishes before all the productive forces for which it is broadly sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the womb of the old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it can solve, since closer examination will always show that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the process of formation. In broad outline, the Asian, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as progressive epochs of the socio-economic order. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production -- antagonistic not in the sense of an individual antagonism but of an antagonism growing out of the social conditions of existence of individuals; but the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society simultaneously create the material conditions

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for the solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society therefore closes with this social formation. Frederick Engels, with whom I maintained a constant exchange of ideas by letter after the publication of his brilliant sketch of the critique of economic categories^[5] (in the *Deutsch Französische Jahrbücher*), arrived by another road (compare his *The Condition of the Working Class in England* ^[6]) at the same result as I, and when in the spring of 1845 he too came to live in Brussels, we decided to set forth together our view as opposed to the ideological one of German philosophy, in fact to settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience. The resolve was carried out in the form of a critique of post-Hegelian philosophy.^[7] The manuscript, two large octavo volumes, had long ago reached its place of publication in Westphalia when we were informed that owing to changed circumstances its printing was not permitted. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose -- self-clarification. Of the scattered works in which we then presented one or another aspect of our views to the public, I shall mention only the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, jointly written by Engels and myself, and *Discours sur le libre échange (Lecture on Free Trade)*, which I myself published. The decisive points in our view were first outlined in a scientific, although polemical, form in my *Misère de la philosophie (The Poverty of Philosophy)* ^[8]. . . , which was aimed at Proudhon and which appeared in 1847. The publication of an essay on *Wage-Labour* ^[9] written in German in which I brought together the lectures I had given on this subject at the German Workers' Association in Brussels,^[10] was interrupted by the February Revolution and as a result my forcible removal from Belgium.

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The publication of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* ^[11] in 1848 and 1849 and subsequent events interrupted my economic studies, which I could only resume in 1850 in London. The enormous amount of material on the history of political economy which is accumulated in the British Museum, the favourable vantage point afforded by London for the observation of bourgeois society, and finally the new stage of development which the latter seemed to have entered with the discovery of gold in California and Australia,

induced me to start again from the very beginning and to work critically through the new material. These studies led partly of themselves into apparently quite remote disciplines on which I had to dwell at greater or lesser length. But in particular it was the imperative necessity of earning my living which reduced the time at my disposal. My collaboration, continued now for eight years, with the *New York Tribune*,^[12] the leading Anglo-American newspaper, necessitated extraordinarily scattered studies, for it was only exceptionally that I wrote newspaper correspondence in the strict sense. Since articles on significant economic events in Britain and on the Continent formed a considerable part of my contributions, I was compelled to become conversant with practical details which lie outside the sphere of the science proper of political economy.

This sketch of the course of my studies in the domain of political economy is intended merely to show that my views -- no matter how they may be judged and how little they coincide with the interested prejudices of the ruling classes -- are the outcome of conscientious research carried on over many years. At the entrance to science, as at the entrance to hell, the demand must be made:

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*"Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto
Ogni viltà convien che qui sia morta."**

Karl Marx

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* Here must all mistrust be left;
All cowardice must here be dead.

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, English translation, Illustrated Modern Library, Inc., 1944, p. 22.) --Ed.