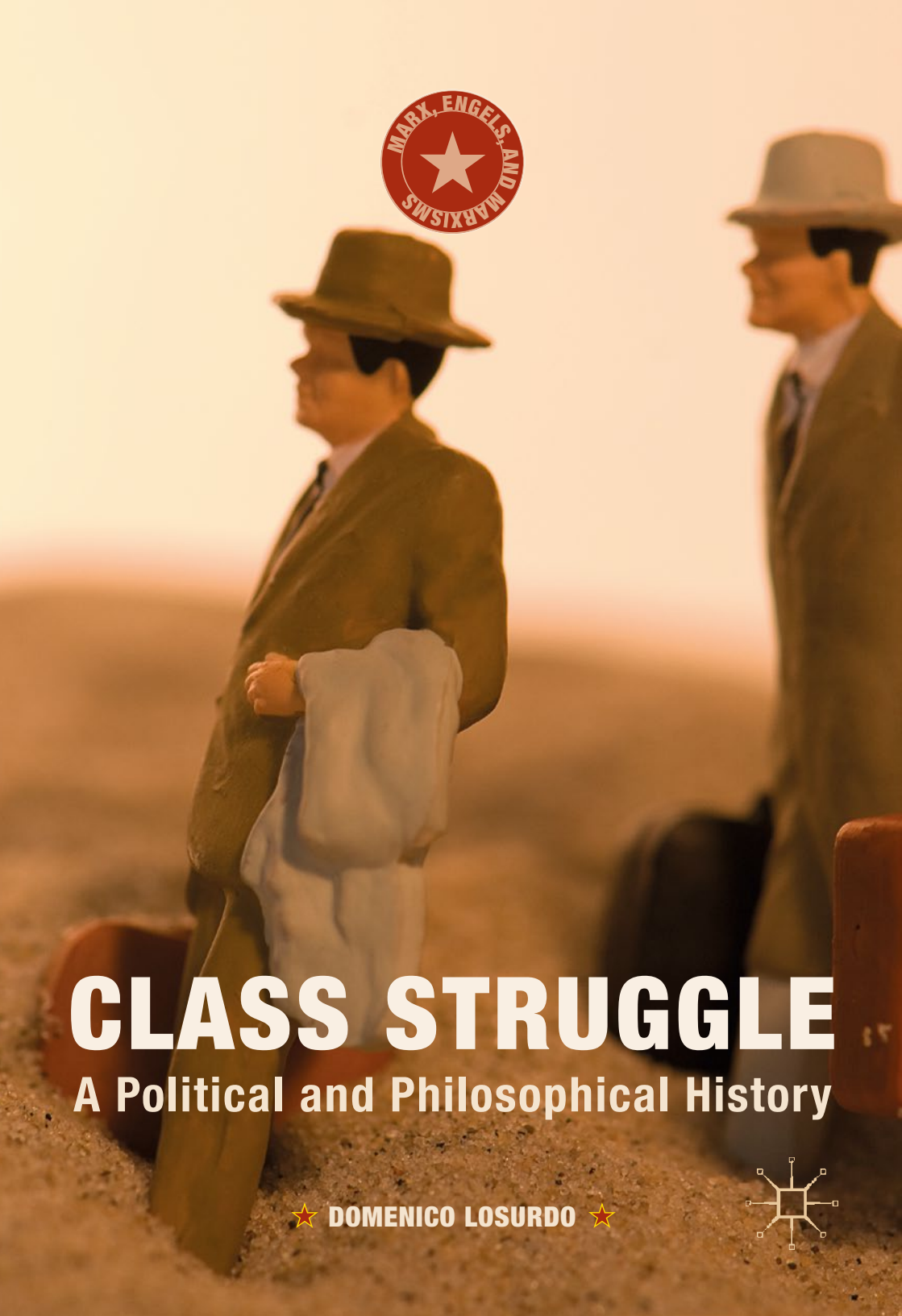

CLASS STRUGGLE

A Political and Philosophical History

DOMENICO LOSURDO

Marx, Engels, and Marxisms

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Translated by Gregory Elliott

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macmillan

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Marx, Engels, and Marxisms
ISBN 978-1-137-52387-7 ISBN 978-1-349-70660-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-70660-0

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016940579

Cover illustration: © bgwalker / Getty Images
Cover design by Oscar Spigolon

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Nature America Inc. New York
The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

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Acknowledgements

For their help in reading the manuscript and correcting the proofs, I am grateful to Stefano Azzarà, Paolo Ercolani, Giorgio Grimaldi, and Emanuela Susca.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Return of Class Struggle?

Amid an economic crisis that is exacerbating social polarization and rekindling memories of the 1930s Great Depression, condemning millions of people to unemployment, insecurity, constant anxiety about getting by, and even hunger, essays, and articles making reference to the 'return of class struggle' have become more frequent. So had it disappeared?

In the mid-twentieth century, sharply criticizing the 'dogma' of Marx's theory of class struggle, Ralf Dahrendorf summarized the achievements of the capitalist system: '[t]oday the allocation of social positions is increasingly the task of the educational system'. Property had lost any influence and been replaced by merit, 'making a person's social position dependent on his educational achievement'. And that was not all: 'the social situation of people [has] bec[o]me increasingly similar' and there was undoubtedly a tendency to a 'levelling [of] social differences'. The painter of this rosy picture was nevertheless obliged to criticize other sociologists for whom the world was spontaneously heading towards 'a state in which there are no classes and no class conflicts, because there is simply nothing to quarrel about'.[1]

These were years when an enormous number of men, women, and children from the global South and the countryside began to abandon their birthplace to seek their fortune elsewhere. This was also a mass phenomenon in Italy, where, hailing for the most part from the *Mezzogiorno*, immigrants crossed the Alps or stopped this side of them. Working conditions

D. Losurdo, *Class Struggle*, Marx, Engels, and Marxisms,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-70660-0_1

in north Italian factories can be illustrated in detail. In 1955, in order to suppress strikes and working-class militancy, hundreds of thousands of militants and activists from the CGIL—a trade union accused of unacceptable radicalism—were sacked.[2] Such practices were not confined to underdeveloped countries. In fact, the model was furnished by the USA, long characterized by yellow dog contracts, whereby, on being hired, workers and employees pledged (were forced to pledge) not to join any trade union organization. Was it really class struggle that had disappeared? Or was it substantive union freedoms, confirming the reality of class struggle?

Subsequent years witnessed the 'economic miracle'. But let us see what was happening in 1969 in the West's model country, giving the floor to a US periodical with an international diffusion ('Reader's Digest Selection'), engaged in propaganda on behalf of the 'American way of life'. 'Hunger in America' was the eloquent title of an article that had this to say:

> In Washington, the federal capital, 70 per cent of patients in the paediatric hospital suffer from malnutrition…. In America, food aid programmes cover only about 6 of the 27 million in need…. Having undertaken a tour of inspection in the Mississippi countryside, a group of doctors stated before a Senate sub-committee: 'the children we saw are obviously lacking in health, energy and vivacity. They are hungry and sick; and these are direct and indirect causes of death'.

According to Dahrendorf, what determined individuals' social position was solely or predominantly educational merit. But the US magazine drew attention to an obvious but wrongly ignored fact: '[d]octors are convinced that malnutrition impacts on the growth and development of the brain'.[3] Once again, the indicated question is, did such terrible poverty in a country of capitalist opulence have something to do with class struggle?

Subsequently, abandoning his illusory observations-predictions of the mid-twentieth century, Dahrendorf noted 'an increase in the percentage of the poor (often working poor)' in the USA.[4] The most interesting and disturbing observation was consigned to an inconspicuous parenthesis: even a job was insufficient to avert the risk of poverty! Long forgotten, the figure of the working poor reappeared and, with it, the spectre of class struggle, which seemed to have been exorcized for good. Even so, a famous philosopher—Jürgen Habermas—reiterated the positions now abandoned by the famous sociologist. What refuted Marx and his theory of class struggle was something obvious to everyone: the 'pacification of

class conflict' by the welfare state, which had developed in the West 'since 1945', thanks to 'a reformism relying on the instruments of Keynesian economics'.[5] What is immediately striking here is an initial inaccuracy: while this might apply to Western Europe, it certainly does not to the USA, where the welfare state never flourished, as is confirmed by the distressing picture just seen.

But that is not the main thing. Above all, Habermas's claim is marked by the absence of a question that should be obvious: was the advent of the welfare state the inevitable result of a tendency inherent in capitalism? Or was it the result of political and social mobilization by the subaltern classes—in the final analysis, of a class struggle? Had the German philosopher posed this question, perhaps he would have avoided assuming the permanence of the welfare state, whose precariousness and progressive dismantlement are now obvious to everyone. Who knows whether Habermas had subsequently had his doubts. In the West, the welfare state emerged not in the USA but Europe, where the trade union and labour movement is traditionally more deep-rooted; and it emerged when that movement was at its strongest, because of the discredit which two world wars, the Great Depression, and fascism had brought upon capitalism. But is this refutation or confirmation of Marx's theory of class struggle?

Habermas points to 1945 as the starting point for the construction of the welfare state in the West and the attenuation and disappearance of class struggle. The previous year, visiting the USA, the Swedish sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, reached a dramatic conclusion: 'segregation is now becoming so complete that the white Southerner practically never sees a Negro except as his servant and in other standardized and formalized caste situations'.[6] Two decades later, the slave-master relationship between blacks and whites had far from disappeared: '[i]n the 1960s, more than 400 men of colour in Alabama were used as human guinea pigs by the government. Suffering from syphilis, they were not treated because the authorities wished to study the effects of the disease on a "population sample"'.[7] Historically, the decades from the end of the Second World War to the successful 'pacification of class conflict' also witnessed the explosion of the anti-colonial revolution. The peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America threw off the yoke of colonialism or semi-colonialism, while the USA saw the development of the struggle by African-Americans to end the regime of racial segregation and discrimination, which continued to oppress and degrade them, relegate them to the bottom rungs of the labour market and even treat them as guinea pigs. Did this massive revolutionary wave,

which profoundly altered the division of labour globally and did not even leave it untouched in the USA, have something to do with class struggle? Or is the latter limited to the conflict pitting proletarians and capitalists, dependent labour, and haute bourgeoisie, against one another in a single country?

Such is clearly the opinion of a bestselling contemporary British historian, Niall Ferguson. In the major historical crisis of the first half of the twentieth century, 'class struggle'—'the supposed struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie'—played a very modest role. Decisive, instead, was what Hermann Göring, with his main focus on the conflict between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, defined as the 'great racial war' (see Chap. 5, Sect. 8). Does Nazi Germany's attempt to reduce Slavs to the condition of black slaves in the service of the master race, and the epic resistance to this war of colonial subjugation and actual enslavement—the 'great racial war' undertaken by the Third Reich—mounted by entire peoples, have nothing to do with class struggle?

For Dahrendorf, Habermas, and Ferguson (but also, as we shall see, for distinguished scholars of a Marxist or post-Marxist persuasion), class struggle refers exclusively to the conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie—in fact, to a conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie that has become acute and of which both parties are conscious. But was this Marx and Engels' view? As is well known, having evoked 'the spectre of communism' 'haunting Europe', and even before analysing the 'existing class struggle' between proletariat and bourgeoisie, the *Communist Manifesto* opened with a statement that was destined to become famous and play a prominent role in nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolutionary movements: 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'(*Klassenkämpfe*).[8] The transition from the singular to the plural clearly signals that the conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie is but one class struggle among others and the latter, running throughout world history, are by no means a feature exclusively of bourgeois, industrial society. Should any doubts remain, some pages later the *Manifesto* reiterates: 'the history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs.'[9] Not only 'class struggles' but also the 'forms' they take in different historical epochs, different societies, and different concrete situations are declined in the plural. But what are the multiple class struggles or the multiple configurations of class struggle?

To answer this question, we must reconstruct the significance of a theory, as well as the alterations and oscillations it has undergone, philologically and logically. But textual history is insufficient; we must also refer to real history. What is required is a double reinterpretation of a historico-theoretical kind. On the one hand, we need to throw light on the theory of class struggle formulated by Marx and Engels, integrating it into the history of their development as philosophers and revolutionary militants and their active engagement in the political struggles of their time. On the other, we must determine whether this theory is capable of shedding light on the rich, tormented history that starts out from the *Communist Manifesto*.

Hence, the first reinterpretation concerns the theme of class struggle in 'Marx and Engels'. But is this conjunction legitimate? I shall rapidly clarify the reasons for my approach. In the context of a division of labour and distribution of tasks that was jointly conceived and agreed, the authors of the *Manifesto* were in a relationship of constant collaboration and intellectual cross-fertilization. At least as regards politics proper and class struggle, they regarded themselves as members or leaders of a single 'party'. In a letter to Engels of 8 October 1858, after having raised an important theoretical and political problem (could an anti-capitalist revolution occur in Europe while capitalism remained in the ascendant in most of the world?), Marx exclaimed that '[f]or us, this is the difficult question'.[10] The indicated respondent is not an individual intellectual, however brilliant, but the leadership group of a political party in the process of being formed. In fact, the followers of this 'party' referred to Marx and Engels as an indissoluble intellectual and political partnership, as the leading group of a party that thought and worked in unison. The same was true of opponents, starting with Mikhail Bakunin, who in his criticism repeatedly conjoined 'Marx and Engels' or 'Messrs.Marx and Engels', or picked out 'Mr. Engels' as Marx's 'alter ego'.[11] Other opponents warned against the 'Marx and Engels clique' or waxed ironic over 'Mr. Engels, Marx's Prime Minister'.[12] So intimate was the association between the two that reference was sometimes made to 'Marx and Engels' in the singular, as if they were a single author and person (this was noticed by the first in a letter to the second of 1 August 1856).[13]

Obviously, we are dealing with two individuals, and the differences that inevitably arise between two distinct personalities must be borne in mind and, where necessary, indicated, but without thereby introducing a kind of posthumous split in a 'party' or party leadership group which proved capable of facing the countless challenges of the time united. So what did Marx and Engels understand by class struggle?

Notes

1. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959, pp. 59, 63–4.
2. Sergio Turone, *Storia del sindacato in Italia (1943–1969)*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1973, p. 259.
3. C.T. Rowan and D.M. Mazie, 'Fame in America', *Selezione dal Reader's Digest*, March 1969, pp. 100–2.
4. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Per un nuovoliberalismo*, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1988, p. 122.
5. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 348.
6. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1944, p. 41.
7. R.E.,'Clinton:"Usammoinericomecavieumane.Unavergognaamericana"', *Corrieredella Sera*, 10 April 1997.
8. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, London: Lawrence &Wishart, 1975–2004, Vol. 6, pp. 498, 481–2.
9. Ibid., p. 504.
10. Ibid., Vol. 40, p. 347.
11. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger (ed.), *Colloqui con Marx e Engels*, Turin: Einaudi, 1973, pp. 401, 356, 354.
12. Ibid., pp. 167, 296, 312.
13. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 40, p. 64.

CHAPTER 2

The Different Forms of Class Struggle

1 'Emancipation of the Working Class' and 'National Liberation'

Marx and Engels did not systematically expound and clarify a thesis central to their thought. However, to appreciate how reductive and misleading the habitual interpretation of the theory of class struggle is, it suffices to glance at the theoretical and political platform to be found in Marx (and Engels) from their early writings onwards. The starting point is well-known: although it had secured important results, the overthrow of the *ancien régime*, and abolition of monarchical despotism and feudal relations of production, was not the terminus of the requisite process of radical political and social transformation. It was necessary to go well beyond the 'political emancipation' that was the outcome of the bourgeois revolution, achieving 'human emancipation', 'universal emancipation'.[1] A new revolution was on the horizon, but what were its objectives?

The power of the bourgeoisie had to be overthrown to break the 'chains' imposed by it—the chains of 'the present enslavement of the worker' or 'wage-slavery'.[2] The 'emancipation of the working class', its 'economical emancipation', was to be achieved in and through 'the abolition of all class rule'.[3] Marx and Engels' attention to struggle that the proletariat was enjoined to wage against the bourgeoisie was constant. But is the struggle for 'human emancipation', 'universal emancipation', exhausted by it?

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DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-70660-0_2

Shortly before launching its final appeal for the 'communist revolution' and 'the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions', the *Communist Manifesto* invokes the 'national emancipation' of Poland.[4] Here we find a new watchword emerging. From his earliest writings and interventions, Engels supported the 'liberation of Ireland', or 'the conquest of national independence' by a people that had suffered 'five centuries of oppression'.[5] In his turn, having demanded the 'liberation' of 'oppressed nations' in late 1847, Marx never tired of calling for a struggle for 'the national emancipation of Ireland'.[6]

Let us take stock: the radical revolution invoked by Marx and Engels was geared not only to the emancipation of the oppressed class (the proletariat) but also to the liberation of oppressed nations. Having mentioned the problem of Poland's 'national liberation', the *Manifesto* closed with the exhortation: 'Working Men of All Countries, Unite!' This celebrated appeal also concludes the *Inaugural Address* of the International Working Men's Association, founded in 1864. But in that text ample space is devoted to a 'foreign policy' that would prevent 'heroic Poland', as well as Ireland and other oppressed nations, 'being assassinated', which was committed to the abolition of Black slavery in the USA, and which would put an end to Western Europe's 'piratical wars' in the colonies.[7]

The struggle for the liberation of oppressed nations is no less important than the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat. The two struggles were followed and promoted with the self-same passion. In August 1844, Marx wrote to Feuerbach: 'You would have to attend one of the meetings of the French workers to appreciate the pure freshness, the nobility which burst forth from these toil-worn men. …But in any case it is among these "barbarians" of our civilized society that history is preparing the practical element for the emancipation of mankind'.[8] Four years later, in an article of 3 September 1848, Engels drew attention to the dismemberment and partition of Poland, carried out by Russia, Austria, and Prussia. In the nation that experienced it, this tragedy elicited a well-nigh unanimous response. A liberation movement emerged in which the nobility itself participated. To put an end to national oppression and humiliation, that class was ready to renounce its feudal privileges and 'supported the democratic-agrarian revolution with quite unprecedented selflessness'.[9] The enthusiasm evident from this text should not be attributed to the ingenuousness and over-simplification for which Engels is often criticised. Marx expressed himself in even more emphatic terms in this connection: 'world history does not know another example of such nobility of soul'.[10] The 'nobility'

celebrated in French workers was now attributed to the Polish nobility and, indirectly, to a great national liberation struggle as such.

Yet we must not lose sight of the differences. While the proletariat is the agency of the emancipatory process that breaks the chains of capitalist rule, the alliance required to break the shackles of national oppression is broader. We have seen this in the case of Poland, but it also applies to Ireland. In a long letter of April 1870, Marx supported a union whose heterogeneous features stand out: it would have as its protagonists, British workers, on the one hand, and the Irish nation as such, on the other. The former were called on to support the 'Irish national struggle' and reject the policy pursued 'against Ireland' as a whole by 'aristocrats and capitalists'. The oppression by the British ruling classes was harsh and ruthless. Fortunately, however, the 'revolutionary character of the Irish',[11] taken as a whole, could be depended on. And such revolutionary enthusiasm was summoned to find an initial outlet in the national liberation struggle. While the oppressed nation was enjoined to wage its struggle on the widest possible national basis, the task of the proletariat in the oppressor nation was to nurture its antagonism towards the ruling class, thereby furthering its own 'human' emancipation and, at the same time, contributing to the emancipation of the oppressed nation.

Marx and Engels did not arrive at this theoretical platform without fluctuations: 'Ireland may be regarded as the earliest English colony', wrote the latter to the former in a letter of May 1856.[12] We are thus led to the non-European colonial world and, in particular, India, which three years earlier had been defined by Marx as 'the Ireland of the East'.[13] India's tragic situation had already been invoked in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which drew attention to a reality generally ignored by bourgeois economists intent on demonstrating capitalism's capacity for improving the condition of the working class. They lost sight of 'the millions of workers who had to perish in the East Indies so as to procure for the million and a half workers employed in the same industry in England three years' prosperity out of ten'.[14] Here the clash is between workers and workers; and it hinges on the difference in conditions between capitalist metropolis and colony. And now let us see the picture that emerges from an article by Marx dating from July 1853. Having described the tragic condition of India and the unrest in it following the encounter-clash with European culture (represented by British colonialists), the text continues: 'the Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the new ruling classes

shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether'.[15]

Two different revolutionary scenarios are envisaged here: the first (in Britain) casts the 'industrial proletariat' as the protagonist of anti-capitalist revolution; the second (in the subject colony) has as its protagonist the 'Hindoos'. Every time 'national emancipation' or 'national liberation' is at stake, the subject is the oppressed nation as such: the Poles, Irish, and Indians. Has the concern with class struggle vanished?

2 A Distraction from Class Struggle?

There has been no lack of interpreters who answer in the affirmative. The author of a very well-documented book on *Marx, Engels et la politique internationale* argues that, in the years immediately following the *Communist Manifesto*, 'foreign policy and the battle between nations took precedence over class struggle'. Indeed, 'Marx not only analysed political intrigues [of an international kind] in detail, but did so without any reference to economic and social forces and factors'. To take but one example, the articles published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 'seem completely disconnected from the body of his doctrine'.[16] The impression is that, where 'foreign policy' and the diplomatic and military 'intrigues' bound up with it begin, class struggle ends, and the 'doctrine' of historical materialism falls silent.

At this point a disconcerting conclusion might dictate itself: while they stress that 'every society' is shot through with class struggle throughout the course of its development, and that all historical struggles are class struggles, Marx and Engels resort to their theory only intermittently. But is this how things really stand? It is worth noting the testimony (dated summer 1872) of the French socialist Charles Longuet, who, having paid tribute to the 'martyrs' of the Paris Commune, proceeded thus when reporting from the 'temple of historical materialism', or the Marx household (which he knew well, being Marx's son-in-law): 'the Polish insurrection of 1863, the Irish rebellions of the Fenians in 1869, the Land League and Home Rulers in 1874: these movements of oppressed nationalities were followed from the battlements of this fortress of the International with no less interest than the rising tide of the socialist movement in both hemispheres'.[17] So interest in the 'movements of oppressed nationalities' was no less lively and constant than that reserved for the agitation of the

proletariat and subaltern classes. It would be difficult to challenge the reliability of this evidence: it is enough to leaf through editions of the collected works of Marx and Engels to realize just how many texts are devoted to the struggle of the Irish and Polish peoples and to denunciation of the policy of national oppression pursued by Britain and Russia, respectively.

The interest was intellectual and political, but with an emotional charge. On 23 November 1867, three Irish revolutionaries were hanged in Manchester, convicted of having orchestrated the armed liberation of two leaders of the independent movement, in an action that involved the death of a police officer. Some days later, Marx wrote to Engels referring to the reaction of his eldest daughter: 'Jenny goes in black since the Manchester execution, and wears her Polish cross on a green ribbon'.[18] The symbol of the national liberation struggle of the Polish people (the cross) was thus married with the green of the Irish cause. On receipt of his friend's letter, Engels answered immediately on 29 November: 'I need hardly tell you that black and green are the prevailing colours in my house, too'[19]—the colours of the mourning into which the Irish people's national liberation movement was thrown by the British executioner.

Marx and Engels compared the Mancunian victims to John Brown, the abolitionist who sought to spark a slave revolt in the Deep South of the USA and faced the gallows courageously.[20] And this comparison between the Irish independence fighters and the champion of abolitionism confirms the passion with which Marx and Engels followed the 'movements of oppressed nationalities' and the key role played by these uprisings in the process of human emancipation in their view.

Not only hostility but also indifference towards oppressed nations was harshly condemned politically and morally. The *Inaugural Address* reproved the 'upper classes of Europe' and, in particular, Britain for their anti-labour policy, but also for their support for the secessionist American South, as well as 'the shameful approval, mock sympathy, or idiotic indifference' with which they viewed the tragedy of the Polish nation.[21] Affecting an air of superiority towards this tragedy, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon merely exhibited 'cynicism' in Marx's view—and cynicism that was quite the reverse of intelligence (see Chap. 5, Sect. 1).

Does an interest in 'foreign policy' have nothing to do with class struggle? Is it in fact a distraction from the latter? In reality, according to Longuet's testimony, passionate sympathy for the 'movements of oppressed nationalities' burned in the 'temple of historical materialism'—the doctrine that

construed history as the history of class struggles. In any event, as early as July 1848, the same year as the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels evoked and invoked 'a democratic foreign policy'.[22] Sixteen years later, via Marx's pen, the newly founded International Working Men's Association stressed that a 'political economy of labour' was imperative, but insufficient. The 'working classes' had to be taught 'the duty to master … the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective Governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all the means in their power'. They must realize that the struggle for a 'foreign policy' supportive of oppressed nations was an integral part of 'the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes'.[23] How is so exacting an assertion to be explained?

3 'Class Struggles and National Struggles': 'Genus' and 'Species'

In addition to the 'direct exploitation (*Ausbeutung*) of labour', condemning workers to 'present enslavement' in any particular country, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, the *Communist Manifesto* and contemporaneous texts denounce 'the exploitation (*Exploitation*) of one nation by another' or 'the exploitation of some nations by others'.[24] In the case of Ireland, it must be remembered that 'the exploitation (*Ausbeutung*) of this country' was 'one of the main sources of [Britain's] material wealth'.[25] Was the exploitation that occurs in a single country the sole cause of class struggle? In the same year as the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx issued an authoritative warning: those who 'cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another' were even less well-equipped 'to understand how in the same country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another'.[26] Far from being of minor relevance from the standpoint of class struggle, the exploitation and oppression that obtain internationally are a precondition, at least methodologically, for understanding social conflict and class struggle at a national level.

As we know, along with the 'liberation' or 'economic emancipation of the proletariat', Marx and Engels demanded the 'liberation' or 'emancipation' of oppressed nations. Is the struggle for the liberation/emancipation of exploited classes a class struggle—but not the struggle for the liberation/emancipation of exploited (and oppressed) nations? Is the struggle whose protagonist is a class that has achieved its political emancipation,

but not its economic and social emancipation, a class struggle, whereas the struggle waged by a nation, yet to achieve its political emancipation, is not a class struggle?

Not having secured economic and social emancipation, the proletariat is currently subjected to 'enslavement'. This is a phrase that immediately puts us in mind of slavery in the strict sense. And once again a question is tabled: is the struggle whose protagonists are subject to 'present enslavement', 'emancipated slavery', or 'wage slavery', to 'the indirect slavery of the white man in England', a class struggle, whereas the struggle whose protagonists are subject to 'real slavery'—'the direct slavery of the Black men on the other side of the Atlantic'—is not a class struggle?[27] Is the struggle whose subject is defined by the *Grundrisse*, in an unusual phrase, as 'free labour' a class struggle, whereas the struggle whose subjects (in the words of *The German Ideology*) are 'the insurgent Negroes of Haiti and the fugitive Negroes [slaves] of all the colonies', is not?[28]

Take the terms in which Marx condemns bourgeois society. First of all, let us attend to *The Poverty of Philosophy*: '[m]odern nations have been able only to disguise slavery in their own countries, but they have imposed it without disguise upon the New World'.[29] Some years later, with the colonial rule imposed on India by Britain in mind, Marx reiterated: 'the profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked'.[30] Is it only the struggle challenging masked slavery and camouflaged barbarism that is tantamount to class struggle? I think it would be absurd to answer in the affirmative and decline to apply the category of class struggle precisely where exploitation and oppression are most overt and brutal.

But let us return to Longuet's testimony. Having referred to Marx's interest in and passion for the 'movements of oppressed nationalities', he continued: '[h]is philosophy was not casuistry: he would never have taken refuge in ambiguous quibbling when the clear, frank theory of class struggle was at stake'.[31] The nexus between national struggles and class struggles is clear. Is this interpretation correct?

In 1849, in *Wage Labour and Capital*, Marx investigated 'the *economic relations* which constitute the material foundation of the present class struggles and national struggles' (*Klassenkämpfe und Nationalkämpfe*); and stated his intention 'to trace the class struggle [*den Klassenkampf*] in current history'.[32] Judging from this passage, it would seem that 'national struggles' are to be subsumed under the category of 'class struggle' broadly

construed. Comparison with another passage, from the aforementioned letter of April 1870, where Marx proceeds to a more in-depth analysis of the Irish question, is in order. Let us read the conclusion: '[i]n Ireland, the *land question* has, so far, been the *exclusive form* of the social question; it is a question of existence, a *question of life or death* for the immense majority of the Irish people; at the same time, it is inseparable from the *national* question'.[33]

In Ireland, there was no 'social question' apart from the 'national question'. A *de facto* identity existed between the two, at least for a whole historical period, as long as independence had not been gained. The 'social question' is the more general category here—the genus—which, in the concrete situation of the unhappy island exploited and oppressed by Britain for centuries, takes the specific form of the 'national question'. For anyone who has not grasped the point, Marx reiterates it: the 'social significance of the Irish question' should never be lost from view.[34] The species cannot be understood if it is detached from the genus. We can argue similarly in connection with the passage from *Wage Labour and Capital* referring to 'class struggles and national struggles': class struggle is the genus which, in determinate circumstances, takes the specific form of 'national struggle'.

If classes and class struggle are formed and develop on the 'material base' of the production and distribution of the resources and means that ensure life, on the basis of 'social relations' and 'actual relations of life',[35] it is clear that we must bear in mind the 'division of labour' not only nationally but also internationally, never losing sight of the 'world market'.[36]

For peoples stripped of their independence, and especially for peoples subject to colonial rule and despoliation, the existing order reserves a particularly revolting division of labour. In the colonies (observed Marx in summer 1853 with reference to India), capitalism drags 'individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation'.[37] We know that Ireland too was a 'colony' and in it (observed Engels) there was not a trace of 'the English citizen's so-called freedom'; '[i]n no other country have I seen so many gendarmes'.[38] To be precise, Marx went further in an article of January 1859, what was involved was oppression evincing genocidal tendencies: 'the [British] landlords of Ireland are federated for a fiendish war of extermination against the cotters; or, as they call it, they combine for the economical experiment of clearing the land of useless mouths'.[39] The specific difference that characterized the social question and class struggle in the colonies by comparison with the capitalist

metropolis has to be registered. There the international division of labour converted the subject peoples into a mass of serfs or slaves over whom a *de facto* power of life and death could be wielded. Secondly, the victim of this condition was a whole people, the nation as such. Hence Britain, the country that had 'hitherto ruled the world market', imposed 'slavery' on Ireland and represented the 'dominant nation', was one thing; Ireland, reduced to 'simple pastureland to provide meat and wool at the cheapest possible price for the English market', and whose population had been drastically reduced 'through eviction and forced emigration', was quite another.[40]

Perhaps the meaning of the expression 'class struggles' (*Klassenkämpfe*) used in the *Communist Manifesto* is now becoming clearer. The plural is not employed to denote repetition of the identical, the continual recurrence of the same class struggle in the same form. It refers to the multiplicity of shapes and forms that class struggle can assume.

We may conclude on this point. Marx did not define the relationship between class struggle and national struggle, social question and national question, clearly and unequivocally; and only in fits and starts did he arrive at the more mature formulation which distinguishes between genus and species. But the interest and passion with which he followed the 'movements of oppressed nationalities' were an expression not of distraction from the class struggle and social question, but of an attempt to grasp their concrete manifestations. Oppressed nations are summoned to be the protagonists of the second great class struggle for emancipation.

4 The Condition of Women and the 'First Class Oppression'

The genus of emancipatory class struggles includes a third species. There is another social group that is so numerous as to form (or exceed) half the population; a social group that suffers 'autocracy' and awaits its 'emancipation' (*Befreiung*): women. Weighing on them is the domestic oppression exercised by the male.[41] I am citing a text (*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*) published by Engels in 1884. It is true that Marx had died the previous year, but as early as 1845–6 *The German Ideology*—a text to which Engels explicitly refers—observed that in the patriarchal family 'wife and children are slaves of the husband'.[42] In its turn the *Communist Manifesto*, which criticizes the bourgeoisie for

reducing the proletarian to the condition of a machine and instrument of labour, observes that 'the bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production', so 'the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production'.[43] The category used to define the condition of the worker in the capitalist factory is now applied to the social condition of woman in the patriarchal family.

Taken as a whole, the capitalist system presents itself as a set of more or less servile relations imposed by one people on another internationally, by one class on another in an individual country, and by men on women within one and the same class. We can now understand the thesis formulated by Engels drawing on Fourier, which was also maintained by Marx—namely, that women's emancipation was 'the natural measure of the general emancipation'.[44] For better or worse, the relationship between men and women is a kind of microcosm reflecting the total social order. In largely pre-modern Russia, subject to ruthless repression by their masters, the peasants (Marx observed) proceeded in their turn to 'awful beating-to-death of their wives'.[45] Or take the capitalist factory. While it affected all workers, the owner's despotic power was experienced by women (stressed Engels) in especially degrading fashion: 'his mill is also his harem'.[46]

It is not difficult to find voices denouncing the oppressive character of the female condition in the culture of the time. In 1790, Condorcet defined the exclusion of women from political rights as an 'act of tyranny'.[47] The following year, the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*, whose author was Olympe de Gouges, drew attention in article 4 to the 'perpetual tyranny' imposed by man on woman. More than half a century later, John Stuart Mill in Britain referred to the 'slavery of the woman', 'domestic tyranny' and legally sanctioned 'actual bondage'.[48]

But what were the causes of this oppression and of the widespread indifference to it? Condorcet condemned the 'power of habit', which dulled the sense of justice even in 'enlightened men'.[49] Mill argued in a similar vein, referring to the set of 'customs', 'prejudices', and 'superstitions' that needed to be overcome or neutralized through a 'sound psychology'. Although alluding to social relations, these were confined to 'social relations between the two sexes', which sanctioned the slavery or subaltern status of woman on account of 'inferiority in muscular strength' and the survival in this context of the 'law of the strongest'.[50]

The connection between the condition of women and other forms of oppression was not investigated. In fact, in Mill's view, the man/woman

relationship was portrayed as a kind of island where the logic of subjugation, which had largely disappeared in other contexts, persisted: '[w]e now live—that is to say, one or two of the most advanced nations of the world now live—in a state in which the law of the strongest seems to be entirely abandoned as the regulating principle of the world's affairs'.[51] From Marx and Engels' standpoint, by contrast, the relationship between capitalist metropolis ('the most advanced nations of the world') and colonies was more than ever one of domination and subjugation; and in the capitalist metropolis itself, economic (but not now legal) coercion continued to govern relations between capital and labour.

It was Mary Wollstonecraft who combined denunciation of the 'slavish dependence' reserved for woman with indictment of the existing social order.[52] Male domination seemed to go hand in hand with the *ancien régime*. While champions of the struggle for the abolition of slavery singled out the 'aristocracy of the epidermis' or the 'nobility of the skin',[53] the feminist militant targeted what, in her view, took the form of the aristocratic power of males. Denunciation of it was combined with condemnation of hereditary 'riches and inherited honours', with condemnation of 'preposterous distinctions of rank'. In any event, women would not be 'freed' 'till ranks are confounded' and 'till more equality be established in society'.[54]

At times, the British feminist and Jacobin seemed to challenge capitalist society itself. Women 'ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of the government'. But it should not be forgotten that in Britain workers too were excluded from political rights: 'as the whole system of representation is now, in this country, only a convenient handle for despotism, [women] need not complain, for they are as well represented as a numerous class of hard-working mechanics, who pay for the support of royalty when they can scarcely stop their children's mouths with bread'.[55] The condition of workers and the condition of women had things in common. As was the case for members of the working class, 'the few employments open to women, so far from being liberal, are menial'. Ultimately, in this wide-ranging critique of the relations of domination characteristic of the existing social order, women themselves (in particular, the better-off) must learn to question things. Instead, they displayed 'folly' in 'the manner in which they treat servants in the presence of children, permitting them to suppose that they ought to wait on them, and bear their humours'.[56]

The 'English Jacobin', who constitutes a brilliant exception, seems in a way to anticipate Marx and Engels, who established a link between the division of labour in the family and the division of labour in society. Engels, in particular, formulated the thesis that 'the modern individual family is based on the overt or covert domestic slavery of the woman'. In any event, the man 'is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat'.[57]

Of Marx and Engels' contemporaries, the one who developed an analysis that might be compared with theirs, albeit with a converse value judgement, was not Mill but Nietzsche. The implacable critic of revolution as such, including the feminist revolution, compared the condition of woman to that of 'sufferers of the lower classes', 'slave laborers [*Arbeitssklaven*] or prisoners';[58] and indirectly equated the feminist movement, the workers' movement and the abolitionist movement. All three were on the look-out for 'everything slave-like and serf-like', in order to indignantly denounce it, as if registering its existence did not serve to confirm that slavery was 'a condition of every higher culture'.[59]

Obviously, the theme of the link between the subjection of women and social oppression as a whole was developed much more amply and organically by Engels, with reference to *The German Ideology*, co-written by him with Marx and long unpublished: 'the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male'. This was a state of affairs with a long history behind it that had not yet arrived at its terminus:

> The overthrow of mother right was the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*. The man seized the reins in the house too; the woman was degraded, enthralled, became the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children [*Werkzeug der Kinderzeugung*]. This humiliated position of women … has become gradually embellished and dissembled and, in part, clothed in milder form, but by no means abolished.[60]

5 The Class Struggles of the Exploiting Classes

I have hitherto been concerned with the three major emancipatory class struggles, which are set to radically alter the division of labour and the relations of exploitation and oppression that obtain internationally, in a single country, and within the family. But we must not lose sight of the struggles whose protagonists are the exploiting classes.

Let us see how, in November 1848, Marx summarized the key events of that year: '[i]n Naples the *lazzaroni* are leagued with the monarchy

against the bourgeoisie. In Paris, the greatest struggle ever known in history is taking place. The bourgeoisie is leagued with the *lazzaroni* against the working class'.[61] The struggle whereby feudal reaction, availing itself of the support of lumpen elements, suppressed the democratic-bourgeois revolution in Naples is likewise class struggle; and so is the ruthless repression with which the French bourgeoisie, thanks again to the support of the urban lumpen-proletariat, quelled the desperation and rebellion of Parisian workers in the June days.

Finally, let us return one last time to Longuet's testimony. In confirmation of the 'clear, frank theory of class struggle' professed by Marx and his family circle, he added a further detail: '[i]n this house people never hesitate to take sides in conflicts where "different fractions of the bourgeoisie" can be recognized'.[62] As we can see, 'class struggle' is mentioned even in connection with conflicts between 'different fractions of the bourgeoisie'—that is, conflicts pitting exploiting classes, or fractions of them, against one another. As the *Manifesto* stresses, 'the bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times, with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries'. Where the struggle against the aristocracy prompted the revolutions heralding the collapse of the *ancien régime*, economic competition between the bourgeoisies of different capitalist countries can issue in an 'industrial war of extermination between nations'.[63] Reference is probably being made here to the wars of the Napoleonic era, whose main protagonists were two countries—Britain and France—that had left behind the *ancien régime* and fought on several continents for control of the world market. However, while it outlines a historical balance-sheet of the past, the 'extermination' in which the class struggle between opposing capitalist bourgeoisies results calls to mind the carnage of the First World War, which occurred more than 60 years after the publication of the *Manifesto*.

6 1848–9: A 'Class Struggle in Colossal Political Forms'

The intricate picture of class struggles, which is beginning to emerge, is not yet complete. We have seen them in operation in abstraction from one another. However, a concrete historical situation, especially a major historical crisis, is characterized by the conjunction of multiple, contradictory class struggles.