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FREDERICK ENGELS

THE ORIGIN
OF THE FAMILY,
PRIVATE PROPERTY
AND THE STATE

*In the Light of the Researches
of*

LEWIS H. MORGAN



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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW 1948

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*The present English translation has been
rechecked with the fourth German edi-
tion of 1891 prepared by Engels.*

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PREFACE

The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, one of the essential classics of Marxism, was written by Engels in 1884, after Marx's death. In his Preface to the first edition Engels pointed out that the book was to a certain extent the fulfilment of a bequest left by Marx, who had himself intended to expound, from the point of view of the materialistic conception of history, the results of Morgan's investigation into ancient society. For this purpose Marx had made an elaborate abstract of Morgan's *Ancient Society* and had jotted down in it a number of important critical remarks. However, Marx never got to the point of carrying out his intentions and so Engels stepped into his shoes.

Marx and Engels attached great importance to Morgan's research in ancient society. As Engels states in his Preface to this work, Morgan's great historic service consisted in discovering and reconstructing in its main outlines the primordial prehistoric warp of the texture called written history. In the gentile organization of the North American Indians he found the key to the then still unsolved riddles of ancient Greek, Roman and German history.

According to Engels, Morgan arrived at the materialistic conception of history spontaneously. He discovered once more, as it were, and "in his own way," the materialistic conception of history many years after it had been discovered and scientifically expounded by Marx and Engels. Morgan's researches were of particular importance because they corrobo-

rated the theory of historical materialism by a mass of carefully analyzed factual material on the history of ancient society. Morgan's work made it possible for Marx and Engels to develop and render concrete the theory of historical materialism as applied to the cardinal problems of the history of society. Engels did not write a mere exegesis of the conclusions to be drawn from Morgan's discovery, as might seem to be the case at first glance. Engels himself wrote that "there would be no sense to this thing if I were only to give an 'objective' exposition *without treating M[organ] critically*,"* without utilizing the results newly achieved, without presenting them in connection with our views and the conclusions already drawn." (Marx-Engels, Briefe, Teil I, S. 330-331, Leningrad 1933.) As a matter of fact, Morgan still took as his starting point, if not in substance, then at least in form, the traditional idealist propositions and schemata of the development of society according to which the development of society, the family, private property and the state is determined by the development of the human mind, the intellect, the development of the ideas of the family, private property and the state. Yet the development of the intellect, as Morgan himself shows, is the consequence of inventions and discoveries in the procuring of means of subsistence. Morgan's discovery of the organization of primitive society, which marked an epoch in the history of science, brought him spontaneously to materialistic conclusions which refuted the idealist schemata and principles from which he proceeded. Engels primarily disencumbered the results of Morgan's investigations from these schemata and principles and provided Morgan's discovery with the scientific *economic* substantiation which in Morgan's text was totally insufficient or wholly lacking and which only Marxism could provide. Thanks to this the

* M-E-L-I's italics.—Ed.

conclusions and results of Morgan's investigations, critically interpreted, substantiated and enriched by the achievements of the economic and historical theories of Marx, lent great impetus to the further development of social science.

In generalizing in his book the results of Morgan's research, Engels made use of Marx's critical remarks and drew on the works of numerous other students of the history of ancient society. In support of his conclusions he consulted a great variety of works on general history, special studies in the domains of ethnography, history of culture, history of primitive society, the family and marriage, as well as his own special researches into the history of the ancient Germans and Celts. Lenin had a high opinion of this book precisely because it was based on a wealth of historical and political material, stating that it was "one of the basic works of modern Socialism."

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Engels reveals the laws of development of the system of primitive communities, the principal stages of its development and the causes of its inevitable fall. He demonstrates the rise and development of the family, private property, classes and the state, i. e., those forces which blasted this primitive society from within and led to the formation of class society. Engels' book is a splendid illustration of the application of the method of dialectical materialism to the history of society in general and to the history of the development and fall of the primitive community system in particular.

Engels' work has inflicted a powerful blow upon the representatives of reactionary philosophy, jurisprudence and political economy, who endeavour to prove that private property and the forms of the family and of the state based upon it are "eternal." It also strikes hard at the reactionary ideas constantly harped upon by the importunate German chauvinists—that some

nations are "superior" while others are "inferior," that the German people has had an exceptional course of development, and that it is the mission of the Germans to rule the world. When viewed in the light of Engels' work the inanity of the "theories" of the fascist falsifiers of history—who claim that the history of the German people is to be explained by special racial qualities peculiar to the German tribes, that the German tribes never had any other form of family but the monogamian, that their form of family, marriage, society, and the state had always been immutable—stands out in bold relief. Engels demonstrates that historically all forms of family, property and state are transitory and corroborates this by a wealth of factual material derived from modern history, geography, ethnography and the history of culture.

But there is one inaccurate statement in Engels' Preface to the first edition of the book which must be noted, as it may give rise to erroneous views on the role played by the various conditions of material life in the development of society. There Engels wrote: "According to the materialistic conception, the decisive factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence;... on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other."

The family, however, cannot be placed on a par with labour, with material production, as a determining cause of social development. It goes without saying that the relations between the sexes in the process of "the production of human beings," or the propagation of the species, in one way or another

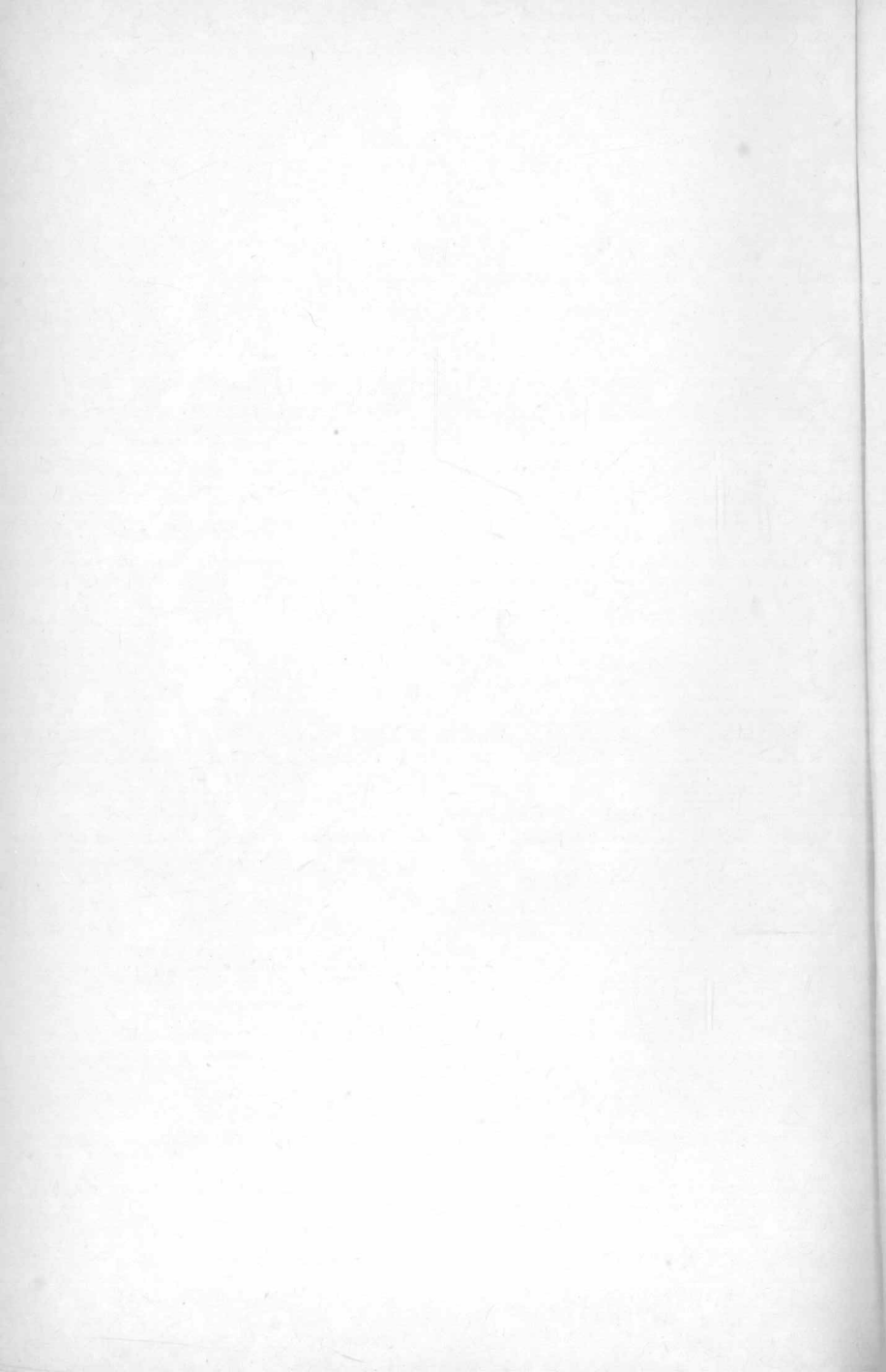
do condition the development of society, for they constitute a necessary condition of the material life of society. But the principal, the determining condition of the material life of people, the condition which determines society's whole physiognomy (including as well the relations between the sexes, the forms of the family and of marriage), is the method of procuring the means of life, the mode of production of the material values necessary for the existence of people and the propagation of their species. This precise, finished, classical formulation of the main proposition of the theory of historical materialism was elaborated by Comrade Stalin in his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

This proposition is fully confirmed also by the concrete factual material supplied by Engels himself in his book. It goes to show that the changes in the forms of the family and marriage, in the relations between the sexes, are brought about by the development of material production, of the material productive forces of society.

Lenin and Stalin developed further the basic ideas expressed by Engels in this book, particularly the question of the abolition of classes and of the state during the period of Socialism and of Communism. Lenin and Stalin have provided a clear historical perspective of the development of society, property, the family, classes and the state during this period of Socialism and of Communism.

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OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF THE SOVIET UNION (BOLSHEVIKS)

1947



FREDERICK ENGELS
THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY,
PRIVATE PROPERTY
AND THE STATE

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION 1884

The following chapters constitute, in a sense, the fulfilment of a bequest. It was no less a person than Karl Marx who had planned to present the results of Morgan's researches in connection with the conclusions arrived at by his own—within certain limits I might say our own—materialist investigation of history and thus make clear for the first time their whole significance. For in America, in his own way, Morgan had indeed rediscovered the materialist conception of history that was discovered by Marx forty years ago, and in his comparison of barbarism and civilization had been led by this conception to the same conclusions, in the main, as Marx had arrived at. And just as *Das Kapital* was for years both zealously plagiarized and persistently hushed up by the professional economists in Germany, so was Morgan's *Ancient Society** treated by the spokesmen of "prehistoric" science in England. My work can offer but a meagre substitute for that which my departed friend was not destined to accomplish. However, I have before me, in his extensive extracts from Morgan,** critical notes which I reproduce here wherever this is at all possible.

According to the materialistic conception, the decisive factor in history is, in the last resort, the

* *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization.* By Lewis H. Morgan, London, MacMillan & Co., 1877. This book was printed in America, and is remarkably difficult to obtain in London. The author died a few years ago. (Note by F. Engels.)

** The reference is to Karl Marx's *Abstract of Morgan's "Ancient Society," Marx-Engels Archive*, Vol. IX, Moscow 1941. —Ed.

production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite thereto; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other. The less the development of labour, and the more limited its volume of production and, therefore, the wealth of society, the more preponderatingly does the social order appear to be dominated by ties of sex. However, within this structure of society based on ties of sex, the productivity of labour develops more and more, and with it, private property and exchange, differences in wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labour power of others, and thereby the basis of class antagonisms: new social elements, which strive in the course of generations to adapt the old structure of society to the new conditions, until, finally, the incompatibility of the two leads to a complete revolution. The old society based on ties of sex bursts asunder in the collision of the newly-developed social classes; in its place a new society appears, constituted in a state, the units of which are no longer sex groups but territorial groups, a society in which the family system is entirely dominated by the property system, and in which the class antagonisms and class struggles, which make up the content of all hitherto *written* history, now freely develop.

Morgan's great merit lies in having discovered and reconstructed this prehistoric foundation of our written history in its main features, and in having found in the sex groups of the North American Indians the key to the most important, hitherto insoluble, riddles of the earliest Greek, Roman and German history. His

book, however, was not the work of one day. He grappled with his material for nearly forty years until he completely mastered it. That is why his book is one of the few (epoch-making) works of our time.

In the following exposition the reader will, on the whole, easily be able to distinguish between what has been taken from Morgan and what I have added myself. In the historical sections dealing with Greece and Rome I have not limited myself to Morgan's data, but have added what I had at my disposal. The sections dealing with the Celts and the Germans are substantially my own; here Morgan had at his disposal almost exclusively secondhand sources, and, as far as German conditions were concerned—with the exception of Tacitus—only the wretched liberal falsifications of Mr. Freeman. The economic arguments, sufficient for Morgan's purpose but wholly inadequate for my own, have all been elaborated afresh by myself. And, finally, I, of course, am responsible for all conclusions, wherever Morgan is not expressly quoted.

F. E.

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION 1891 *

The previous large editions of this work have been out of print now for almost six months and the publisher has for some time past desired me to prepare a new edition. More urgent tasks have hitherto prevented me from doing so. Seven years have elapsed since the first edition appeared, and during this period our knowledge of the original forms of the family has

* This Preface was originally published in *Die Neue Zeit*, Jahrg. 1890/91, Bd. 2, Heft 41, S. 460, in the form of an article entitled "On the History of the Primitive Family (Bachofen, McLennan, Morgan)."—Ed.