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Marx's Best Polemic: Russo-Napoleonism and the Italian Question in *Herr Vogt*

"...'Vogt'...is certainly the best polemic you have ever written...."

Engels to Marx, 19 December 1860

Posterity has begged to differ from Engels' judgment of Herr Vogt. Despite being written in 1859-60 at the very pinnacle of Marx's analytic and literary prowess, despite running over 300 pages in the 1974 MEW edition, despite centering about the always-controversial topic of Russian diplomacy and despite being looked upon by its author as being of such gravity as to justify stopping work on Kapital, Herr Vogt remains the most obscure of Marx's major works.¹

The revolutionary wave of 1989-91 in Europe has improved the situation; probably owing to declining Russian influence on the Marx reception, there has been a new openness to Herr Vogt. The *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung* has led the way, publishing the provocative article by Karl-Heinz Leidigkeit and Willi Tonn, "The Polemic 'Herr Vogt' and the History of the Polish Question in the Excerpts and Notes of Marx" as well as drawing attention to the recent Herr Vogt research of Fumio Hattori.² Wolfgang Schieder's 1991 political biography, *Karl Marx als Politiker*³, broke from convention and openly asked the question of the place of Herr Vogt in Marx's politico-literary project as a whole. Methodical appropriation and critique of Marx's peak-performance polemic may now move forward without integument.

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Herr Vogt (1860) is a decisive polemic in the Marxian corpus because it marks the point where two principles of the 1848 Revolution--national self-determination and anti-Russian struggle--came into conflict, with Marx granting priority to the latter. The 'Russo-Napole-

¹ All German translations are the author's. The text of Herr Vogt used was that of the *Marx-Engels Werke* (MEW), Vol. 14, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974. Herr Vogt was also published in the *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA²), vol. I/18, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1984. Volume 18 of the MEGA is actually two volumes, one comprising the text, the other the scholarly apparatus thereto. Also consulted was the English translation issued under the title *Herr Vogt: A Spy in the Workers' Movement* by R.A. Archer (London: New Park Publications, Ltd., 1982). Another English translation of Herr Vogt is to be found in *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works*, NY: International Publishers, 1981.

² Karl-Heinz Leidigkeit and Willi Tonn: *Die Streitschrift "Herr Vogt" und die Geschichte der polnischen Frage in Exzerpten und Notizen von Marx*. In: *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung*. Neue Folge 1991. Studien zur Werk von Marx und Engels. Hamburg: Argument Verlag, 1991, S. 50-57. Fumio Hattori: *Ein Widmungsexemplar der Marx'schen Schrift "Herr Vogt"*. In: *Marx-Engels-Marxismus-Forschung*, Tokio, Nr. 4/1988 (jap.). See also Appendix to this article.

³ Wolfgang Schieder: *Karl Marx als Politiker*. München/Zürich: Piper Verlag, 1991. See also W.F. Drischler: *Karl Marx and Wolfgang Schieder: Toward an Introduction to Marx's Political Career as Russia-Basher*. Walnut Creek, CA, USA: *The Social-Democratic Appeal to Reason*, Pamphlet No. 15, 1992.

onic Plan' (russisch-napoleonischen Plan) of 1858 to effect Italian unification by simultaneously ousting the Habsburgs from Northern Italy and extending Russian influence through setting up a Russian port facility in the Mediterranean (*and* ending Austria's role as a bulwark against Russian ambition in the Balkans) meant a sweeping revision of Marx's earlier (1852) concept of 'Bonapartism', a concept which paid scant attention to the Franco-Russian nexus. Marx's analysis of Napoleon III's role in the Italian War of 1859--that of a *de facto* Russian agent--is quite distinctive; most of the literature on the conflict sees no decisive Russian influence. Though in the Foreword to Herr Vogt Marx sought to reserve judgment on factual matters and tactics for democratic forces in considering Louis Napoleon's actions in the Italian War of 1859, the actual thrust of the work is to thoroughly ostracize the Russo-Franco-Piedmontese coalition which contributed so heavily to the national unification of Italy. For the Marx of Herr Vogt the 1848 'honeymoon' with nationalist movements was over, and the respective leaders of French nationalism (Napoleon III), Italian national unification (Count Cavour), Hungarian independence (Lajos Kossuth) and even Swiss federalistic nationalism (James Fazy) were enshrined in Marx's pantheon of Russo-villains, a pantheon which by 1860 included Bismarck and Lord Palmerston and would eventually encompass William Gladstone as well. Does this portrayal of Herr Vogt jibe with the findings of Leidigkeit and Tonn? The answer is yes and no.

Leidigkeit and Tonn

The nub of Leidigkeit and Tonn's article on Herr Vogt is the following passage⁴:

The principal arena of the dispute had to be the varied evaluations of the democratic movement during and after the Revolution of 1849-49, as well as the contrary positions concerning solution of the national question advanced in the 1859/1860 period.

This is an excellent generalization since it leaves room for *evolution* of Marx's views ('varied evaluations...during and after') and recognizes Marx was aware his polemic might grate on the sensibilities of those who hadn't had a new idea since the failure of the 1848/49 Revolution. What is not-so-clear from this passage (and the remainder of the article) is that the net effect of Marx's disparagement of most nationalist leaders in Herr Vogt is to render dubious the cardinal political assumption of the Red '48ers, namely that mass nationalist movements in Europe necessarily had a democratic/revolutionary tilt. Unclear from this passage (though touched upon in other places in the article) is that the Marx of Herr Vogt had found a 'pole star' from which he conducted all navigation of his agitational writings--Russia. It may be added that recognition of Russia's status as the centerpiece of Marx's political analysis tends to draw into question Leidigkeit and Tonn's literary strategy of seeking to link Herr Vogt and Marx's Polish writings; though the two topics are clearly related, the Polish Question could never be much more than a penumbra or emanation of the Russian Question for Marx; that is to say, the Polish Question could serve as a pretext for another politico-literary offensive against the Russians--but not much more. Though insufficiently Russia-centered to bring Herr Vogt into full relief, the contribution of Leidig-

⁴ Leidigkeit and Tonn, Note 1, p. 51. The two authors also (p. 54) assert that for Marx and Engels the chief obstacle to a democratic solution to the problem of national unification of Germany and Poland was 'Czarist Russia' (*das zaristische Russland*). Especially regarding Marx, the insertion of the adjective 'Czarist' is rather misleading. For the Marx of Herr Vogt (as well as the *Neue Rhein. Zeitung*) the Russian government, nation and people usually represented an undifferentiated lump of universal reaction.

keit and Tonn is in any case replete with data and perspective and is likely an indispensable commentary on the text.

Bearing in mind the assertion that Herr Vogt marks a juncture at which Marx was growing ever more skeptical of European nationalist movements, let us turn to the concatenation of Russo-Napoleonism and the Italian Question.

Russo-Napoleonism and the Italian Question

"Only through the intervention of Russia was the Italian War possible. If Russia had had no further need of Louis Bonaparte to effectuate her plans-- ... then Louis Bonaparte would have been disposed of."

Marx, Herr Vogt, p. 515

Russo-Napoleonism is the political tendency made manifest by the 'Russo-Napoleonic Plan'⁵, the latter term a coinage of Karl Blind (1826-1907) Marx found amenable (not that he found Blind amenable). It describes the planning and execution of the Italian War of 1859, also referred to as the Northern Italian War of 1859, the Franco-Austrian War and--in Italy--as the Second War of Liberation. Ideology for the tendency and plan Marx labels 'Russo-Decembrist' (*dezembristisch-russische*; this could also be rendered 'Decembristo-Russian').⁶ The 'Decembrist' portion of the term refers to the initial date of accession to power of the future French Emperor Napoleon III (Louis Napoleon; Louis Bonaparte) on 10 December 1848, hence the appellation 'Man of December'.

The Italian War of 1859 was one of the purest specimens of a cabinet war in European history.⁷ After preliminary secret negotiations via intermediaries, Piedmontese chief minister Count Cavour and Napoleon III met at the Vosgian (French) resort of Plombières on 20 and 21 July, 1858 to plot a localized war. The chief goals of the plotters (according to Marx) were to secure a Mediterranean port for the Russian Navy⁸, (the absence of such a

⁵ Herr Vogt, p. 480. As Bierman (Note 7 to follow, pp. 213-214) recounts, Napoleon III dispatched his cousin, Prince Jérôme-Napoleon Bonaparte, to meet with Czar Alexander II in Warsaw in 1858 to finalize the Russian wish-list prior to commencement of hostilities in Italy.

The Bierman volume is also useful in constructing a pre-history of Louis Bonaparte's political Russophilia; the intimate relations between the Emperor's mother (Hortense de Beauharnais) and the reigning Czar Alexander I in 1814 may have had long-run effects.

⁶ Herr Vogt, p. 541.

⁷ The following works touching on the Italian War of 1859 were recently consulted. Jean-Paul Bled: *Franz Joseph*. Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1992. F.R. Bridge: *The Habsburg Monarchy among the Great Powers, 1815-1918*. NY/Oxford/Munich: Berg, 1990. John Bierman: *Napoleon III and his Carnival Empire*. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1988. Denis Mack Smith: *Cavour*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985. Geoffrey Best: *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770-1870*. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1982. William A. Jenks: *Francis Joseph and the Italians, 1849-1859*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1978. Christopher Leeds: *The Unification of Italy*. London/NY: Wayland Publishers/G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974. Muriel Grindrod: *Italy*. NY/Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968. H. Hearder: *Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, 6th Ed. London and NY: Longman, 1966. Wilhelm Knappich: *Die Habsburger Chronik. Lebensbilder, Charaktere und Geschichte der Habsburger*. Salzburg and Stuttgart: Verlag "Das Bergland-Buch", 1960. E. Lipson: *Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, 6th Ed. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1944.

From the perspective of Herr Vogt studies, Denis Mack Smith's *Cavour* is the best of the lot. Not only does Smith consider the role of Russia in orchestrating the Italian War of 1859, he also refers to the Russian naval base at Nice, quotes Cavour as admitting he is collaborating with the Russians and even refers to an article by Marx on Italy published in the period of the War.

⁸ Herr Vogt, p. 495. On this page Marx adverts to 'the naval port of Villafranca' but goes on to mention

port being a bone of contention of the Russians re the Crimean War settlement) as well as to transform the Habsburg Empire in Austria from a bulwark against Russian ambition in the Balkans to a 'tool' (*Werkzeug*)⁹ of the Russians. If the desired transformation of Austria occurred, Marx warned, increased Russian maleficence would hardly be confined to the Balkans; all Slavic-language areas of Central and even Western Europe would come under assault as well.¹⁰ So far as territorial aggrandizement was concerned, Lombardy-Venetia and the Duchies of Parma and Modena were to be added to Piedmont, while Nice and Savoy were to be ceded to the French. Louis Bonaparte's shaky regime would be shored up by an illustrious victory and territorial acquisitions; Count Cavour would go down in history as the founder of a vast Kingdom of Northern Italy; the peoples of Europe would be dragged into a war between legitimate and illegitimate counter-revolution; and Russian intrigue could proceed in earnest. (Indeed, it did proceed in earnest. The Russians began enjoying their spoils before a shot was fired and occupied their new naval base at Nice in August of 1858, just a few weeks after the Plombières agreement and an eye-opening nine months before hostilities broke out at the end of April, 1859. The Russians' status of being 'first to the booty' undergirds Marx's contention that they were in overall control of the operation.)

The war planners structured a division of labour of sorts. The wily Count Cavour was assigned the task of goading the youthful Austrian Emperor Franz Josef into attacking Piedmont. Louis Napoleon drew the assignment of hornswoggling the Swiss Confederation into renouncing its own principle of neutrality¹¹, this in order to facilitate transportation of French troops to the Italian theatre of war. But a prime diplomatic and strategic consideration for both men was to keep the war *localized*; if the Russo-Franco-Piedmontese coalition desperately *wanted* a neutralized Austria after the War, it desperately *needed* a neutralized Prussia during the War. It was this circumstance, Marx alleged in his reconstruction of events¹², that explained why much of the Russo-Decembrist propaganda was aimed at Berlin-Brandenburg-Prussia, especially veterans of the 1848 Revolution. As it turned out, Prussian intervention *would* be decisive in the 1859 struggle.

The War began auspiciously for the coalition. The numerically-superior Austrians absorbed defeats at Montebello, Palestro, Varese and the major battle of Magenta. Following Magenta the Austrian Field Marshall Gyulai was relieved and Emperor Franz Josef took personal command for the showdown at Solferino (24 June 1859). After an all-day battle with heavy losses on both sides the Austrians conducted an orderly retreat to the Quadrilateral--a fortification system protecting Venice that had never been taken in war; but this was an army that had suffered five consecutive defeats at the hands of an outnumbered foe. Prospects were grim.

Catherine II's efforts to obtain a Mediterranean naval station, thus referring the reader to the actual location of the Russian base, Nice, Villafranca being the venue of the final diplomatic disposition of the Russian military installment. All this apparently left the editors of the 1974 MEW in the dark since they write of 'the Port of Villafranca near Nizza' (*Hafens von Villafranca in der Nähe von Nizza*) (MEW, Bd. 14, S. 777, Note 425), a curious formulation in light of the fact Nizza lies ca. 220 kilometers west/southwest of Villafranca. The MEGA² I/18 Apparatus volume (1984, S. 799) also speaks of a naval port in Villafranca.

⁹ *Herr Vogt*, p. 521. In Chapter VII, "The Augsburg Campaign", Marx, in summarizing his Italian journalism of 1859, comments in a similar vein (pp. 472-73):

I demonstrated that the *Bonapartist* liberation of Italy was only a pretext...to transform Austria into a Russian instrument....

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 478; 490; 515.

Then, in early July of 1859, the Fates intervened to pull the Austrians' chestnuts from the fire. Or, more precisely, Louis Napoleon's chickens came home to roost. As Marx explained, the French Emperor had earlier decided to appeal to French chauvinism to generate enthusiasm for an obvious cabinet war in Italy. A preoccupation of French chauvinism of the day was the prospect of assimilating the Prussian Rhineland to the greater glory of the Empire; thus 're-taking' the Rhineland¹³ became a strategic constant of Russo-Bonapartism. Despite being initially inclined to savour Austrian defeats in 1859 since such would strengthen their hand in the intra-Teutonic struggle for control of the German Confederation (a loose union of small German states and cities belonging to neither of the two German great powers), the Prussians decided to trim the Frenchman's sails. The Prussians mobilized on Louis Bonaparte's Rhine frontier, the 'Man of December' decided he wanted no part of a two-front war, and so the Austrian and French Emperors in one hour concluded a lightning armistice agreement (Truce of Villafranca) on 9 July 1859. Count Cavour read part of a draft of the agreement (which called for Austria to retain Venice) and immediately resigned his ministry, but the resignation was largely theatrical; Cavour was back in office soon and the Italian unification movement marched forward under Garibaldi. Louis Bonaparte was to remain in office until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, though this was brief tenure indeed compared to Franz Josef, who was still at his post in 1916. The preservation of what Marx called Austria's 'tough' (*Zäh*)¹⁴ resistance to Russian expansionism could not, however, mask the fact the democratic forces had taken a beating in the War. By 1860 every one of the major pro-Russian leaders exposed in *Herr Vogt* was in office and more entrenched than before. Russophile former British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, who had, on Marx's version of events¹⁵, journeyed to the Continent in 1858 to expressly approve the campaign against Austria (and who was in any case Marx's *bête noire*) was audibly gloating. The Russo-Napoleonic tendency had successfully exploited the Italian Question for its own ends.

Marx's Literary Intent and Political Addressees

The Old Moor much preferred to leave military history to 'General' Engels and the publication date of *Herr Vogt* (1 December 1860) indicates it could not have been intended to affect the outcome of the Italian War. What was the intent of the work and who were its addressees?

The intent of the work was to expose ideologists of a certain direction. Marx writes:

I am, for my part, in this book only concerned with the views of Vogt and his clique. Even the views he *pretends* to hold...fall outside the parameters of my critique. I treat only the views he *actually* held. (*Herr Vogt*, p. 387)

The significance of the Italian War of 1859 for Marx's purposes was that it flushed this baleful current into the open.

The primary addressees of the polemic are clearly the veterans of the 1848-49 Revolution, especially in Germany:

The men who, already prior to 1848, were of one mind in supporting the independence of Poland, Hungary and Italy not only as a *right* of these lands but al-

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 400, 472, 527.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

so as being in the *interest* of Germany and Europe, arrived at completely contrary perspectives concerning tactics Germany should have used on the occasion of the Italian War of 1859. (Herr Vogt, p. 386)

Unfortunately, as it were, Marx then chooses to deny he is providing information concerning tactics to have been used in the Italian War:

This opposition of views sprang from contradictory judgments concerning *factual presumptions*, the judgment of which must be reserved for a later date. (Herr Vogt, p. 387)

Conclusion

Marx's claim in the Foreword to this book that he is not writing an exile history must be taken seriously; but the claim he is providing no material for judging the tactics used by national independence movements, including the Italian unification campaign of 1859, smacks of disingenuousness. Marx's incomparably-vivid skewering of the leadership of several nationalist movements on the European Continent makes the volume a significant resource for judging 'factual presumptions' about such movements.

Furthermore, regarding Marx-Engels research, it is likely time to begin criticizing discussions of 'Bonapartism' which make no reference to Russian intrigue--or to Herr Vogt.

Appendix:

The Herr Vogt Reception in the 1980's *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung* Outline for a History

Introduction

Upon the occasion of the publication of the 1984 MEGA² edition of Herr Vogt, as well as earlier (1980) the *Beiträge* provided several articles on Marx's best polemic. Contributions to No. 16 (1984) of the journal included articles by Karl-Heinz Leidigkeit ("Herr Vogt' - Expression of the Beginning of a New Stage in the Struggle for a Proletarian Party") [*"Herr Vogt" - Ausdruck des Beginns einer neuen etappe des Kampfes um die proletarische Partei*]; Günter Helmholz ("On the Influence and Distribution of the Polemic 'Herr Vogt'") [*Zur Wirkung und Verbreitung der Streitschrift "Herr Vogt"*]; and Willi Tonn ("On Some Questions Concerning the Position of Marx and Engels Toward the National Question, 1859-1860") [*Zu einigen Fragen der Position von Marx und Engels in der nationalen Frage 1859-1860*]. No. 6 of the *Beiträge* (1980) contained another article by Leidigkeit, "Concerning Work on Volume 18 of the First Edition of the MEGA" [*Zur Arbeit am Band 18 der ersten Abteilung der MEGA*].

Anti-Russianism and Nationalism

Like Leidigkeit and Tonn's 1991 Article (See Note 4 of the text), all the 1984 contributions and the 1980 contribution by Leidigkeit embodied the un-Marxist practice of seeking to distinguish 'Czarism' from Russia. Marx did not systematically distinguish the two and time and again characterized Russian aggression as universal and 'unchanging' (Herr Vogt, p. 498). This interpretation, namely that Marx partook of 'messianic' anti-Russianism, Willi Tonn characterized as a phantasm of 'bourgeois Marx-falsifiers' (*bürgerliche Marxver-*

fälscher) (*Beiträge* 16/1984, S. 131). Furthermore, Marx's vicious lampooning of virtually every nationalist leader in sight in *Herr Vogt*, a lampooning which renders nearly incontrovertible the contention his enthusiasm for nationalist movements had cooled, was ignored by Tonn (Ibid, p. 127), who blandly asserted that *Herr Vogt* demonstrates Marx's undiminished enthusiasm for 'the Nation' and that other perspectives come 'from the bourgeois side' (*von bürgerlicher Seite*) (Ibid).

In sum then, the first major contention of this article, namely that *Herr Vogt* marks a coming-to-fruit of the contradiction between 'messianic' anti-Russianism and enthusiasm for nationalist movements on the part of Marx, would be intrinsically implausible to the 1980's *Beiträge* contributors, since they recognized no such anti-Russianism and did not concede that Marx's enthusiasm for nationalist movements was waning. Tension between two phantasms would be insignificant. It might be noted here that the *Beiträge* contributors departed from the assumption 19th-century Russia had a distinctly Western economy, namely one run by 'feudal circles' (*Feudalkreise*) (*Beiträge* 16, S. 112). Since the work of Karl A. Wittfogel (1896-1988) (See W.F. Drischler, "Karl A. Wittfogel's Theory of Oriental Despotism", NY: *The New International Review*, vol. II, No. 1, 1978; also Drischler, *Marx and Russia*, Walnut Creeks, CA, USA: *The Social-Democratic Appeal to Reason*, Pamphlet No. 10, 1984 (1981)) serious Marxology has tended to view 19th-century Russia as embodying a peculiar version of the 'Asiatic mode of production'. The blithe assumption the Russian economy of the day was Western blocked comprehension of Marx's anti-Russian concept on the part of the *Beiträge* authors.

The Russo-French Alliance

The second major contention of the main article, namely that Marx's 1860 incorporation of elements of Russian influence in his concept of Bonapartism represented a significant deepening of the idea, a significant development beyond the provincial/national aspects of the original concept, is more consistent with the *Beiträge* research. Thus Willi Tonn in No. 16 of the *Beiträge* (S. 130) wrote of the 'Russo-French Alliance' (*russisch-französische Allianz*) manifest in 1859. To be sure, Tonn was treating Engels' *Savoy, Nice and the Rhine* and not *Herr Vogt*. Tonn also neglected to observe that the gloss on the 'Bonapartism' theory was in fact a major modification of it. But neither of these facts changes the situation that the 1984 *Beiträge* number pointed the way to a thoroughly-revised conceptualization of Bonapartism, namely *Russo-Bonapartism*.

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