APPRECIATION MAXIMILIEN RUBEL

One of the century's greatest Marx editors, Rubel placed Marx's critique of the modern state on an equal footing with Marx's critique of political economy. An erudite scholar who in his Marx *Oeuvres* I–IV (1963–1994) pointed repeatedly to differences between Marx and Engels, he became a thorn in the side of Stalinist Marx editors, especially in France. Volume IV of Rubel's Marx *Oeuvres*, published less than two years before his death, offers a good vantage point from which to measure his overall contribution.

Maximilien Rubel, 1905–1996, Libertarian Marx Editor

by Kevin Anderson

IN WHAT WILL BE A REAL LOSS to Marx scholarship, the internationally known editor of Marx's work Maximilien Rubel died in Paris at the age of 90 on February 28, 1996. Rubel's most recognized achievement was his edition of Marx's *Oeuvres*, from the first volume which was published in 1963, to volume IV, which appeared three years ago.[1] In the words of his longtime colleague Louis Janover, this edition 'provoked the most violent polemics from the Communist Party and its intellectuals' because 'they saw that their monopoly over the editions of Marx's works was disappearing' (1996:143).

In 1952, long after the first *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA) or Complete Writings begun in Russia in the 1920s by David Riazanov had ceased to appear, and when the only edition yet published of the less comprehensive *Collected Works* of Marx and Engels was in Russian, Rubel and Bracke-Desrousseaux published an attack in a French leftist journal on the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow for its 'silence' regarding 'the fate of Riazanov and his enterprise.' They wrote that Stalin, who had had Riazanov executed, would not 'tolerate the publication in its entirety of an oeuvre that stigmatized his despotism via the merciless struggle waged by

Marx and Engels against police regimes: those of Louis Napoleon, of Prussia, and of tsarism' (1952: 113).

Rubel's own edition of Marx's works began to appear a decade later as part of the prestigious Éditions Gallimard's 'Pléiade' series of great books. To date, two volumes of Marx's economic writings (1963 and 1968), a single volume on philosophy (1982), and the first of a projected two volumes on political writings (*Oeuvres* IV, 1994, hereafter cited as Marx 1994), have appeared. To complete the series, a volume of letters was also planned. These volumes, each of which averages about 2000 pages, contain a wealth of detailed and erudite commentary on Marx's life and work in the form of prefaces, introductions, and critical notes. For example, for the first volume of Marx's economic writings in 1963 Rubel wrote a lengthy chronology of Marx's life and work, later expanded into a book (Rubel and Manale 1975), while the 1994 volume of Marx's political writings through 1854 contains nearly 700 pages of Rubel's notes and prefaces, covering issues such as the old and the new MEGA, the relationship of philosophy to Marx's political theory, and the background and context of each selection.

Since Rubel's interpretation of Marx had always stressed the political dimension, perhaps an examination of the 1994 Marx *Oeuvres* IV, arguably the culmination of his life's work, will give readers a sense of his overall approach and contribution.[2] Rubel's foreword to the volume offers the clearest brief account I have seen of the various efforts to publish Marx's works. He covers Riazanov's unfinished MEGA, the more limited in scope Russian (1928-47) and East German (1956-85) editions of the works of Marx and Engels (the models for the present English-language *Marx-Engels Collected Works*), and the new MEGA, begun in 1975. He notes acerbically that 'the name of the initiator and director of the first MEGA (1927-35), D. Riazanov—appointed to his position by Lenin himself—was not even mentioned' by the new MEGA's editors in Moscow and East Berlin (Marx 1994: xvi). He also recounts briefly the situation of the new MEGA since 1991, now appearing under the overall editorship of the International Marx-Engels Foundation at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.

For a period after 1991, Rubel served as a member of the reorganized MEGA's advisory board, a board which now

includes a number of leading Marx scholars with a variety of points of view. Although he does not refer to it in his 1994 preface to *Oeuvres* IV, Rubel eventually resigned from the MEGA board, pointing in a 1995 interview to his 'disagreement on some editing principles, especially the absence of a plan to re-edit the volumes published during the Marxist-Leninist period.' He also implied that he was opposed to the MEGA's plans to publish most of Marx's notes and excerpts of books and articles, materials which have a similar structure to the already-published *Ethnological Notebooks*. As he stated in response to a question on whether we could expect important new material from Marx to be published in the MEGA: 'Frankly, I do not believe so. Riazanov only wanted to publish forty volumes quite simply because he thought it useless to publish the whole of the excerpt notebooks of Marx (more than two hundred!). These notebooks are no more than simple copies, often without personal observations, of what he was reading. For Marx was an obsessive reader.' (Weill 1995: viii).[3]

Rubel's 110-page introduction to his *Oeuvres* IV, taken together with his prefaces to the individual works included and his notes, constitute in effect an intellectual biography of Marx through 1854. Here he uses the new MEGA, which has published the letters to as well as those from Marx and Engels through 1857, alongside other sources to unearth some interesting material. For example, Rubel takes up a revealing incident in 1841, when, during the period that Marx was finishing his doctoral dissertation on Epicurus and Democritus, the somewhat older Bruno Bauer commented on the draft. Bauer wrote warning Marx that he should drop the now famous epigraph from Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, which includes the lines:

> *Better to be a servant of this rock*
> *Than to be a faithful boy to father Zeus*
>
> (cited in Marx [1841]1975: 31)

Bauer held, no doubt correctly, that keeping the above would bar Marx from becoming a professor in Germany, both because its content was too radical and because Aeschylus was not a recognized philosopher. Rubel also develops a richly informative analysis of a passage of a poem by Goethe on the Turkic conqueror Timur which was quoted by Left Hegelians

in the 1840s, where Goethe suggests that some good can come even out of terrible suffering. Here Rubel takes up Marx's debt to Hegel as well. However, Rubel's discussion of Marx's early philosophical thinking is somewhat disappointing despite its erudition, in large part because he makes Marx into a far too eclectic thinker, going out of his way to suggest the influence on Marx of Kant, Spinoza, Herder, and even Schelling, while minimizing that of Hegel. For example, when Marx at one point discusses a key Hegelian concept, 'negation of the negation,' Rubel fails to mention Hegel (Marx 1994: c), while in another place he writes somewhat incongruously that the 'concluding chapter of Capital ...returns to the "categorical imperative" of the Marxian ethic' (Marx 1994: xcvi), here making the mature Marx into a Kantian.

Rubel has some interesting comments on the development from Marx's early concept of alienated labour to that of political alienation. He argues provocatively that the writings reproduced in this volume on politics and on the state from the years 1848-54 predate those on political economy for which Marx is best known: 'Marx, the critic of politics, comes prior to Marx, the critic of political economy. The analyst of the alienated bifurcation of modern man into public and private man precedes the analyst of economic alienation. In his theory, the negation of the state is prior to the negation of capital, anarchism prior to communism' (Marx 1994: cxxvii-viii). I cannot agree fully with Rubel on this point, since Marx had already done much work on economic theory by the mid-1840s, and since Marx's differences with anarchism are explicit throughout his work. Nonetheless, Rubel has captured here (and elsewhere in his work) some of the libertarian spirit of Marx, an aspect of his thought which was often lost during the long years of the bureaucratic Second International and then of statist communism.

Rubel's most important contribution in this volume may lie less in his long introduction than in his over 500 pages of prefaces and explanatory notes accompanying the individual works by Marx he has selected. Since he had already included, from among what many consider Marx's political writings, the 1843 critiques of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right,* 'On the Jewish Question,' and the *Communist Manifesto* in earlier volumes of the Marx *Oeuvres,* the 1994 *Oeuvres* IV begins with selections from Marx's revolutionary journalism of 1848-49, and then

includes *The Class Struggles in France, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* a selection from his *New York Daily Tribune* articles on England, China, and India, as well as from his lesser-known writings such as those on the break-up of the Communist League, the Cologne communist trial, on Palmerston, on Spain, and on the 1853-56 Crimean War.

Rubel's 28-page editor's preface to the *Eighteenth Brumaire* takes up the history of the work's publication and his notes indicate the textual differences between the two editions of it published during Marx's lifetime. Rubel offers a moving account of Marx's early years in London, showing in graphic detail his isolation even from other revolutionary émigrés. Poverty, ridicule by the German establishment press, and even charges of being a police agent—Jenny Marx's half-brother was by then Prussian Minister of the Interior and leading the repression of the democrats and revolutionaries—dogged Marx during this period. Rubel also points astutely to some key differences in 1851 between Marx and Engels with regard to Poland, with Engels at this point coming close to opposing Poland's struggle for independence, and he takes up also Engels' well-known predilection for the military side of things. However, although Rubel has a well-earned reputation for exaggerating the differences between Marx and Engels, and for hostility toward Engels, he also in this same preface credits Engels with helping Marx to formulate the well-known opening lines of the Brumaire. He notes that in a letter of December 3, 1851, Engels had written to Marx on the Bonapartist coup in France, using the phrase 'the first time as great tragedy and the second as small farce' (Marx 1994: 1363).

Rubel's shorter preface to his selection from Marx's *New York Daily Tribune* material is less interesting than are his longer explanatory notes to this material, especially those on the controversial writings on India. Here Rubel once again brings in Goethe's poem on Timur, which Marx cites at the end of one of his 1853 India articles in which he argues that something positive could emerge out of British colonialism. Rubel brings Marx's relation to Hegel into his discussion of this passage, which he links to the notion of capitalism as a progressive development in history which Marx had carried over from the *Communist Manifesto.* On Marx's writings on the duplicitous and reactionary British Lord Palmerston, especially his charge that the latter was actually a tsarist agent,

Rubel cites a little-known early evaluation by Riazanov: 'This is therefore an error ...to make Palmerston into a principled friend of Russia.... His highest "principle" was the interests of the English oligarchy' (Marx 1994, 1532).[4]

For many years, as Raya Dunayevskaya once put it, 'incredible time and energy and vigilance' was expended by the Russian Stalinist regime to 'imprison Marx within the bounds' of its ideology (1988: 63). As part of this process, Marx was too often edited in a tendentious manner, defacing his liberatory and humanist writings with dogmatic and authoritarian prefaces and notes, and even delaying or suppressing publication of some of his most important writings. In this context, Rubel's editions of Marx stood out as an alternative. Along with Riazanov, he was one of the century's greatest Marx editors. In addition, Rubel produced a body of theoretical work on Marx.[5] Today, when many are trying to foster a return to Marx which would be at the same time a break with the legacy of totalitarian communism, his work will continue to help us to view Marx as a fundamentally democratic and humanist revolutionary thinker. In his last interview, Rubel stated confidently that Marx 'is a thinker of the twentieth and not the nineteenth century.' He added that the twin dangers to human emancipation that Marx pointed to throughout his writings, 'the state and a capitalist system in the process of globalization,' still 'weigh down on the fate of humanity, through weapons of mass destruction' (Weill 1995: viii), today more than ever.

Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Oeuvres* IV. *Politique* I. Édition établie, présentée et annotée par Maximilien Rubel. (Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1994: cxxxv, 1829. ISBN 2-07-011296-9. 540 francs). Referred to hereafter as Marx 1994.
2. See also the review of this volume by Bertell Ollman (1995).
3. For a highly illuminating report on the structure presently projected for the MEGA, including an account of some of the debates over scaling it back for financial reasons and a complete list of the volumes already published and currently projected, see Grandjonc and Rojahn (1995). This article appeared in the new journal *MEGA-Studien*, founded in 1994 and published by the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. This multi-lingual journal serves as an international forum for discussions on the history and present status of the MEGA.

4. Rubel cites this statement from the lengthy editor's notes to Riazanov (1920), a two-volume 1000-page collection, apparently the first translation into German of a large selection of Marx's *New York Daily Tribune* articles. Curiously, Riazanov did not include any of Marx's articles from the 1850s on India or China, concentrating on those on Western Europe, Russia, and Turkey.
5. See the fairly representative collection of his writings which appeared in English over a decade ago (Rubel 1981), and the tribute to Rubel by Bongiovanni (1981), as well as the more critical assessments of Dunayevskaya (1982) and my own earlier article in this journal (Anderson 1992).

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