

# How Slick-City-Boy-Karly Got the Country-Folk Killed

Marx praised the emerging bourgeoisie for developing capitalist production.

Joseph Winogrand

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Nature played a big part in the 1960s Revolution, more than just flower-power and communes. Many of us left the city for natural living, for our physical and mental well-being. We sought freedom from a mercantile world of wage-slavery. We read *Mother Earth News*. Gardens were planted; fields were cultivated. New ideas of untainted healthy food flourished together with a new-born environmentalism and deep ecology. The chauvinism of the 1950s was confronted by movements of peace, civil rights, women's rights, environmental rights, consumer rights and so on.

Many of us also read Karl Marx and admired his condemnation of oligarchy and the disenfranchising of commoners in Europe. One of the strongest drawing cards of *Capital* was its depiction of the super-rich Lady Sutherland in Scotland and her hapless peasant population:

"In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the (Scottish) Gaels were both driven from the land and forbidden to emigrate, with a view to driving them forcibly to Glasgow and other manufacturing towns. As an example of the method used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 'clearings' made by the Duchess of Sutherland will suffice here. This person, who had been well instructed in economics, resolved, when she succeeded to the headship of the clan, to undertake a radical economic cure, and to turn the whole county of Sutherland ... into a sheepwalk."

Between 1600 and 1850, a broad enclosure of the commons in Europe stripped natives of their hereditary farms. This ended all the ancient folklaw rights of common. Lost to us, perhaps forever, were all the commons of betterment, the estovers right, at will, to collect from Nature the necessities of survival, called the commons of houseboot, ploughboot, crateboot, harrowboot, stakeboot, hedgeboot, fireboot or turbary, and the commons of piscary, denes and strands, pannage, mead-reading or dole-mead, herbage or vesture, also known as sweepage.

These inalienable rights, to be in Nature and take Nature's bounty at will, even from private estates owned by dukes and barons, are so flown out of our legal memory that for most people, and this computer, the words mean nothing (fifteen words above italicized by the computer in red, all once our lawful rights of common).

Between 1814 and 1820, the Duchess of Sutherland cleared 3000 families—about 15,000 people—from her estates. All the old villages and farmsteads were destroyed or burned and there were skirmishes, mostly undocumented, between natives and soldiers. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of the cottage she refused to leave. By 1825, the 15,000 Scottish commoners had been replaced by 131,000 sheep. Land totaling 794,000 acres were made into twenty-nine huge sheep farms each inhabited by a single employed family.

We have three things to be grateful to Karl Marx for: One, was his condemnation of monopolistic oligarchy; another was his condemnation of the enclosure of the commons and the clearings of estates; and the third was the idea that private property is wrong, at odds with the common ownership—folkland—found among native peoples which does not give to the owner incorporeal corporate powers.

The third idea, by the way, that archaic societies had no private property in land, that land was held in common, or collectively, and that only rarely was it held by individuals, contributed greatly to the field of anarcho-primitivism a century later. Friedrich Engels, Marx's collaborator, was fascinated with Lewis Henry Morgan's anthropological

studies of American Indians, and produced, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), which grew into a primitivist anthropology exemplified by Richard B. Lee's *Reflections On Primitive Communism* (1965), Stanley Diamond's *In Search of the Primitive* (1974), Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State* (1974; *Archaeology of Violence* (1980) and others.

Anarcho-primitivism holds that all agriculturalists were enslaved to farm domestication, that they were neither free nor wild, being slaves to their domestic duties, but many of the natives of rural Europe practiced transhumance migration and collected much of their necessities from the wild. Compared with today's office-workers, European farm families were self-subsistent, had no bosses to report to, lived every day outside in Nature, and were, comparatively speaking, wild as hell.

The point is that Marx's affection for the Sutherland commoner-farmers is contradictory. The political cause of the rural population was a conservative one. They wanted to conserve their culture as it was; not drawn into the developing modern world of factories, mines, and markets which Marx and Engels designated as progressive. This kind of contradiction in terms and values is what can be called "being inside the snake's mouth," where the snake bites its own tail; where polar opposites fuse or suffer reversals. Liberating the working class that capitalism had created was the objective of nineteenth-century socialism. Peasant life was of little interest to Marx who saw its Old Ways as an obstruction to revolution and contemptuously described it as "rural idiocy."

Conservatives saw the movement toward industrial progress and away from traditional agriculture as an uprooting of families that would end their age-old ties to neighbors and kinfolk. To be forced to work in a mill in a city, even if it were safer, was to be absorbed into an anonymous existence of alienation and commercialization. The closeness to Nature that country living represented, the mutual affection and support of family and friends, the more leisurely and contemplative existence of farm life, all would be lost with hectic city living and emergence in industrial production.

Progressive social reformers saw rural life as old-fashioned and authoritarian. They believed that backwards farmers were incapable of the maturity and wisdom that would come with education. A modern critical theory believed it to be necessary to deprovincialize all the peasant-farmers by means of education and enlightenment. Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) contrasted the ignorance of country folk with the urban bourgeoisie.

In *Capital*, Marx depicted the peasant society as an older order that would disappear with historical progress. He saw the peasant family as an unfit economic enterprise, "the most habitually indolent and most irrational type of enterprise imaginable." He saw the French peasants who backed Napoleon III as a barbarian, reactionary class, unlike the modern progressive "rustic who struggles to escape the conditions of his social existence, namely his little plot of land...not the country folk who seek with their own reserves of energy and in alliance with cities to overthrow the old order, but rather the fuzzy-minded ones..."

Engels also blasted the "thick-headed ignorance, blindness...and obtuse stupidity" of farmers, calling them, "barbarians in the midst of civilization."

In the dogmatic *Geneva Manifesto* issued at the 1864 London founding of the International Workingmen's Association of which Marx was a part, large-scale collective farms became a permanent platform of socialist doctrine, stated thusly: "small-scale peasant agriculture is irrevocably and implacably condemned to a gradual death by the omnipotence of capital, the role of science...and the interests of society as a whole."

The Marxist anti-family-farm dogma was opposed by the French socialist-anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon at the Second Congress of the International in 1867. Proudhon called for an ideal rural society made up of small peasant farmers working on land that was their own, a philosophy of rural anarchist poverty, autarky, and autonomy. This incensed Marx, who called his former friend Proudhon a "petty bourgeois." Although broad opposition arose to Marx's call for the eradication of the small family farm, the next two congresses approved resolutions calling for universal land-nationalization. Undeterred, Engels continued supporting Marx's position in his 1894 *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, where he wrote, "capitalist mass production will trample over the impotent, antiquated small farm just as a train crushes a pushcart."

The thrust of 19<sup>th</sup> century economic and social scholarship and research avoided the subjects of peasants and pre-industrial life. Most academic and labor leaders had urban backgrounds. Their research focused on the advances of city life, education, science, industrialism, and collectivism. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, increases of large corporate-farm productivity resulted in massive surpluses and accompanying government farm subsidies. Three-

quarters or more of all small European independent farms disappeared from the landscape, thanks to corporatism and oligarchy and “progress,” not socialism. But in the Soviet Union, because of Marx’s early demonization of small farmers, something more dreadful occurred:

Within the Soviet Union, the forced transition to mass scale farming occurred between 1927 and 1932. By the end of the first Five Year Plan, 61 percent of family farms had been collectivized; by 1932 it was 90 percent. Stalin achieved this remarkable transition by hiring itinerant goons, most of rural origins, to round up Kulaks, middle-class farmers who refused to budge from their family land. In the end, Stalin deported and liquidated five million Kulaks who represented one-quarter of the twenty million who died in the vast genocide perpetrated during Stalin’s reign.

Thanks a lot, Karl.

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