

has permeated the intellectual life of capitalist society, not least of all that of the working class. This is especially true in a country such as the United States, which has never known anything but capitalism, and desperately needs the introduction of new ideas among our people, new scientific evidence of the necessity and possibility of a new way of living. In this sense *Origins* is an exceptionally important blow for progress, a blow against obscurantism and reaction.

Does it have shortcomings? Yes. The main theoretical problem is Richard Leakey's failure to deal, in his sections on sexual inequality (particularly pp. 230-237), with "mother right." "Mother right" is the term used by the Swiss historian Johann Jakob Bachofen for the concept of the social equality of women in primitive society based on the tracing of family ties through the female line. The reason for female lineage was that in primitive society the nuclear, monogamous family did not exist; instead looser forms of pairing, and earlier group marriage, in which the paternity of children was generally not known, were characteristic. Thus social units were built around, and consanguinity was based on, the women, who enjoyed respect and certain privileges — mother right — unknown under capitalism and other forms of class exploitation.

Frederick Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, summarizes and makes fully scientific the studies of Bachofen and the U. S. anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, whose book *Ancient Society* Engels puts on an equal footing with Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Marx's *Capital* in terms of scientific importance. Engels makes clear that although mother right no longer exists anywhere, the evidence for its previous existence in literature (e.g. the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus), kinship terminology and traditions of various primitive peoples, proves that it did exist. He says, "...Just as Cuvier could deduce from the marsupial bone of an animal skeleton found near Paris that it belonged to a marsupial animal and that extinct marsupial animals once lived there, so with the same certainty we can deduce from the historical survival of a system of consanguinity that an extinct form of family once existed which corresponded to it." (International Publishers edition, 1942, p. 27) Mother right, then, is not an ideological concept invented by Marxism to justify the fight for women's equality, but an historically proven fact. Leakey, however, makes no mention of it, nor of the historical evidence for its existence. Instead, he deals with the problem of male dominance strictly from the standpoint of the greater importance of hunting (a male activity because of women's childbearing role) than gathering (a female activity) in primitive society. By limiting his investigation to this one question, he puts himself in the position of being unable to solve the problem of inequality because he does not state it in the proper way. Morgan and Engels see clearly that the historical inequality of men and women, while in the final analysis reducible to physical differences between the two sexes, and thus to an

historically determined division of labor within the tribe, is a social phenomenon which did not always exist. Inequality, the "overthrow" of mother right, came with the division of society into classes and the development of monogamy that went with it. For Morgan and Engels the "woman question" is a complex one, involving social factors (kinship, marriage forms, etc.) besides strictly economic and physical ones. For Leakey, however, the question reduces itself to one of hunting versus gathering, and he does not see the development of sexual inequality in its full historical context of the decay of gentile society (based on the female line), the development of class antagonisms, and with it monogamy and male supremacy. This notwithstanding the fact that his observations on the relation of women's status to the importance of meat in modern tribes are interesting and valuable, and not in themselves in contradiction to the theories of Morgan, Marx, and Engels.

Lacking a full historical perspective, Leakey must satisfy himself with a morally irreproachable but empty call for female equality based on women's physical differences with men no longer being economically important. But this is not enough. The "total restructuring" of society he calls for can only mean the abolition of antagonistic classes — socialism — which will alone create the conditions for the equality of women. To speak of such equality without speaking of getting rid of exploitation, which Engels shows gave rise to the inequality of women to begin with (op. cit., p. 58), is not satisfactory.

Leakey's problem is not that he fails to adopt a materialist standpoint in his discussion of sexual inequality; he does. It is that he does not see the total picture, the historical development of women's role as evidenced in ancient literature and the development of consanguine relations in primitive tribes. Now, if this is not true — i.e., if in the last hundred years of scientific study the theories of Bachofen, Morgan, Engels, et. al. have been disproven, and mother right itself shown to be wrong — then that should be stated and proof offered. Until that happens, however, the theory of mother right must be dealt with, along with the extensive evidence collected by Bachofen, Morgan, et. al. to support it.

The shortcomings in Richard Leakey's analysis result from his failure to be fully dialectical in his thinking, to see *all* the interconnections and historical factors influencing the role of women. He is in good company. Darwin, for example, was criticized by Marx for the same shortcomings, which, next to the vast riches of his work as a whole, were relatively unimportant. What *is* important, for the progressive movement as a whole and the communist movement in particular, is to see why such errors are made by even the best, most dedicated, most moral and most progressive scientists. And here our criticism must turn into a self-criticism, a self-criticism of the communist movement for having failed, during the past generation, adequately to attract to it and educate in Marxist theory many of the best elements of the intelligentsia in the