

# THE MAORI IN PREHISTORY AND TODAY

By Ray Nunes

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**The great unknown past of the Maori people, together with a view of Maori nationalism today**

**A pro-Mao, Marxist Leninist analysis**

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## Introduction

by Daphna Whitmore

The following pamphlet by Ray Nunes is based on a reply to a former member of the now-defunct Communist Party of New Zealand (in which Ray Nunes earlier played a leading role) and whose letter contained criticisms of the standpoint of the Workers' Party of New Zealand as published in the party's monthly journal, *The Spark* of April 1994. At that time the Workers Party was a pro-Mao organisation.

In 2002 the Workers Party merged with Revolution Group and now identifies as a Marxist Party whose members hold a range of views about the role of Stalin, Mao and Trotsky.

Nunes draws on the work, and uses the terminology, of pioneering 19<sup>th</sup> century anthropologist Lewis Morgan. Morgan in his groundbreaking work developed a theory of stages of society. The terms are largely out of use these days and have pejorative connotations that were imposed after Morgan's time. While the categories have new names Morgan's stages are still valid.

John Bellamy Foster, in "Marx's Ecology" states: "The stages theory that Morgan described are still generally employed in anthropology, although the names have been changed, reflecting the negative connotations associated with the terms 'savagery' and 'barbarism.' Morgan's 'savagery' is now generally referred to as gathering (with marginal hunting) society – a form of subsistence that obtained throughout the Paleolithic period. Instead of 'barbarism,' today, reference is made to societies practicing horticulture. Domestication of plants is usually associated with the Neolithic revolution around ten thousand years ago." (p.216)

As an appendix is include a *Spark* article of 1998 on Maori Sovereignty.

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The Maori in prehistory and today

A reply to Comrade N.

Dear Comrade,

I am replying on behalf of the Workers' Party of New Zealand to your letter of April this year. I have had to delay replying because of pressure of work, but here are our views.

You make a number of charges in your letter, none of which is backed by factual scientific evidence. This includes, as I will show, the waiata\* you attach. In regard to this, as in your other points, you are sadly astray. As you assert that the article is un-Marxist, I shall firstly deal with what is Marxist in regard to anthropology and prehistory in general, and the Marxist approach to Maori history in particular.

Firstly, the Marxist approach to anthropology and prehistory in general is firmly established and substantiated in Engels' great work: *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. It is plain to us that, even if you may have read this work at some time in the past, you have not absorbed any of its content in regard to prehistory.

As you should know, Engels sets out the basic fact that both he and Marx regarded Lewis Morgan as the founder of a scientific prehistory. Both he and Marx considered that Morgan had, quite independently of them and by a different route, discovered historical materialism, for which they gave him unstinting praise. Engels says in *Origin* that Marx made extensive notes on Morgan's major work, *Ancient Society* which he himself made use of in writing *Origin*, Marx not having survived to do so.

Before going on to treat the world view of Morgan, Marx and Engels on prehistory, I suggest you note Engels' scathing criticism of the English school of the prehistory of the present-day family, with its fallacious theory of endogamous and exogamous tribes. What is particularly relevant is the 'conspiracy of silence' concerning Morgan's work, and the widespread chauvinism which was exacerbated by Morgan's 'speaking of a future transformation of society in words which Karl Marx might have used,' and for which 'McLennan indignantly charged him with having "a profound antipathy to the historical method."' 1

The point of this chauvinistic treatment of Morgan in Engels' day was not only the virtual suppression of Morgan's work by the English scientific establishment, but the fact that already, in that time, reaction was attacking Morgan's scientific work because it was so close to a Marxist, historical materialist view of the subject.

But the chauvinism Engels mentions was really only trifling compared with what was to come. The growth of Marxian socialism stimulated the bourgeoisie in the post-Engels period to ideological warfare against it. In his time, Marx spoke of 'the furies of private interest' unleashed by the publication of *Capital*, and the conspiracy of silence it earned from bourgeois political economists and the bourgeois media of his time.

Of course, the politics and economics of Marxism were the main target of bourgeois attack, but it extended, though in lesser degree, to all aspects of their ideology, including their views on prehistory. Consequently, even before the October Revolution of 1917, Morgan became something of a pariah in the field of official anthropology. After October, because of his similar views and conclusions to those of Marx and Engels, Morgan was the subject of a sustained campaign of hostility in the field of the prehistory of society.

This reached hitherto unplumbed depths in the modern era of anti-communism and McCarthyism. An academic in the US speaking up for Morgan as the founder of scientific prehistory, which he was, was almost sure of the sack or at the very least a vitriolic official campaign of the inquisition type. Any Tom, Dick or Harry wanting to make a name in prehistoric social studies had only to find a tiny tribe which he could quote as a refutation of Morgan to achieve instant reputation.

Hardly surprising, one may say, in the light of the enrolment of US anthropology in the ranks of the cold war. Just to give an example, in McCarthy's heyday, the doyen of US anthropology, Margaret Mead of world renown, wrote a book with Geoffrey Gorer entitled *The Russians*. In it they asserted, as a 'scientific finding' that the reason for 'Russian aggression' was the Russians' habit of swaddling new-born babies tightly, giving rise to their aggressive nature! And this piece of blatant cold war propaganda was taken up as scientific gospel by the social scientists of the bourgeoisie all over the world.

The prehistory establishment's part in the cold war was everywhere to denounce Morgan (an indirect attack on the historical materialism of Marx and Engels) and to create a new prehistory satisfactory to the bourgeoisie. Insofar as the Pacific peoples are concerned, this consisted of denying any validity to the idea that there ever was such a thing as primitive communism, and to advance a hybrid type of slave-feudal society as the basic form of society in all the Pacific Islands, including New Zealand. Never mind the evidence to the contrary, suppress Engels and Morgan and invent a fictitious past – that would kill off any Marxism that claimed early Pacific societies were primitive communist in nature.

I am afraid, like many others, you have swallowed this god-awful nonsense hook, line and sinker, imagining you are upholding the truth. Whether you are able to really do this we shall see from the following. Incidentally, I don't place too much blame on people, particularly ex-Communist Party members, for having only the vaguest understanding of early Maori society. It was hardly studied, even by the leadership, and seldom written about. As a result, a proper Party programme concerning the Maori question – and there is such a question, for the Maori are an oppressed nationality – could not be developed. Sid Scott\* did some thinking about the subject, but it was superficial. Wilcox†, on the other hand, avoided saying anything about any programme point relating to the Maori by simply asserting that the Communist Party could not develop a programme on the Maori question until we were able to recruit Maori scholars to do the job. That saved the need for any thought or statement on the subject by him or other party leaders. Of course, the Maori question in New Zealand is not comparable in importance to the national question

in Tsarist Russia, with its more than 150 nationalities. But Lenin devoted a great deal of time and many essays, to the subject, and treated it as something very important, though naturally subordinate to the dictatorship of the proletariat in regard to policy. As a result, he contributed greatly to the further development of Marxism in regard to the national question.

For your information, Lenin fully upheld *Origin of the Family* as a masterwork of research, and in his Sverdlov Lecture on the State wrote: 'This is one of the fundamental works of modern socialism, every sentence of which can be accepted with confidence, in the assurance that it has not been said at random but is based on immense historical and political material.'<sup>2</sup>

Now, what does Engels do in *Origin of the Family*? He traces the development of human society through the stages of savagery and barbarism, after Morgan, establishing that in these periods the prevailing form of society was primitive communism. The nature of those epochs was determined by the level of the development of the productive forces at society's disposal. He writes: 'The original communistic common household, which prevailed without exception until the late middle stage of barbarism, determined a certain maximum size of the family community, varying according to circumstances but fairly definite in each locality.'<sup>3</sup> And he also points out that only in the latest stage of barbarism does it begin to pass into civilisation because the further development of the mode of production brought into existence private property in the means of production and hence gave rise to commodity production and the emergence of money and also the emergence of definite economic classes, i.e., slaves and slaveowners. Neither was possible until the means of production available were capable of producing a regular surplus above the minimum necessary for a slave's subsistence. The material conditions for the production of a surplus and the growth of private ownership of the means of production existed in the old world; that is, in areas where a variety of animals existed that could be, and were, domesticated; and in areas where a variety of wild plants could be and were also domesticated. That is why slave society – the first form of civilisation – first emerged in these regions. Where such conditions were lacking, society could not emerge from the state of primitive, tribal communism. Not even in North America, where possibilities were greater than in the Pacific Islands, did society emerge from barbarism into civilisation.

In *Capital* volume 1, Marx comments that historical materialism is not just a scientific view of history – it is the only scientific view of history. You should know that Marx and Engels saw absolutely eye-to-eye on this. Marx gave historical materialism its classical formulation in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*.

**In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production**

**of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production. No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. 4**

However, when this was written Morgan had not yet published *Ancient Society*, and Marx referred to the ‘Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production’ as ‘progressive epochs in the economic formation of society.’ While Marx nowhere defined the ‘Asiatic’ formation in a definite fashion, he was well acquainted with the fact of the common ownership of land in many parts of the East, and with some of the types of society to which it gave rise. These were not slave societies such as existed in ancient Greece and Rome.

Morgan’s work gave the clue to the understanding of the origin of slave society, the first form of civilisation, as the outcome of an extremely long history of primitive tribal communistic society. Thereafter neither Marx nor Engels referred to the ‘Asiatic mode of production’, they referred to ‘primitive communism’. Engels (who wrote much more on this topic than Marx) continually uses this expression in *Origin of the Family*.

As you may well think that Lenin didn’t strictly adhere to Marx’s historical materialism, I will quote this much from *What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are*.

**Just as Darwin put an end to the view of animal and plant species being unconnected, fortuitous, “created by God” and immutable, and was the first to put biology on an absolutely scientific basis by establishing the mutability and**

**succession of species, so Marx put an end to the view of society being a mechanical aggregation of individuals which allows all sorts of modification at the will of the authorities (or, if you like, at the will of society and the government) and which emerges and changes casually, and was the first to put sociology on a scientific basis by establishing the concept of the economic formation of society as the sum-total of given production relations by establishing the fact that the development of such formations is a process of natural history.**

**Now, since the appearance of Capital – the materialist conception of history is no longer a hypothesis, but a scientifically proven proposition. And until we get some other attempt to give a scientific explanation of the functioning and development of some formation of society, mind you, and not the way of life of some country, people, or even class, etc – another attempt just as capable of introducing order into the “pertinent facts” as materialism is, that is just as capable of presenting a living picture of a definite formation, while giving it a strictly scientific explanation – until then the materialist conception of history will be a synonym for social science. Materialism is not “primarily a scientific conception of history”, as Mr Mikhailovsky thinks, but the only scientific conception of it.<sup>5</sup>**

There are, it is true, other conceptions of history and of social formations, particularly those belonging to prehistory. Some, without being Marxist, have simply aimed to elicit facts that could be useful for social science – such as those Australian missionaries to whom Engels gives credit for clarifying the nature of group marriage in Australia. Others, however, are directly in opposition to Marx’s historical materialism. One such conception appeared this century in the USA, known as the ‘functional school in sociology’. While this school purports to deal with the same sorts of facts as the materialist conception, what it does is to stand that conception on its head. A British school of ‘structural sociology’ also appeared. The person who developed the ‘structural functional’ conception which underlies your views was Bronislaw Malinowski.

Malinowski conducted a study of the social life of the Trobriand Islanders (off the coast of New Guinea). He is credited by most social anthropology textbooks with having established the practice of fieldwork in anthropological studies as of primary importance. He did indeed live among the Trobriand Islanders for two years\*, mastering their language in order to pursue his studies. Did Morgan, say, do anything comparable? He only lived among the Iroquois tribe – mostly the Seneca branch – for twenty five years, investigating every aspect of their culture. As Engels points out, Morgan demolished McLennan’s false theories about the history of the family, and through his discoveries about the ‘mother-right gens’†, founded a new basis ‘for the whole history of primitive society’. Moreover, through his work via international questionnaires assisted by the US government, he established the role of the gens internationally, including its relation to group marriage.

Engels further developed the economic side of the questions relating to consanguinity and the gens, so that for the first time a clear view of the origins of civilisation was possible,

and indeed, achieved. He pays tribute to Morgan's work in providing the basis for this, saying, in the preface to the first edition of *Origin*:

**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 the material for nearly forty years until he completely mastered it. That is why his book [*Ancient Society*] is one of the few epoch-making works of our time.**<sup>6</sup>

While recognising that much new data had been discovered since *Ancient Society* was published, Engels stated in the preface to the fourth edition of *Origin*, that 'In its main features, the order that he [Morgan] had introduced into the study of society holds good to this day.'<sup>7</sup> Soviet revisionist\*\*\*\*\* prehistorians have claimed that the factual side of Morgan's periodisation is now obsolete. That is not surprising seeing how the revisionists have rejected all basic Marxist principles. What the revisionist prehistorians are doing is simply replacing the main doctrines of Marxist-Leninist prehistory with bourgeois doctrines culled from their main schools. To us of the Workers' Party of New Zealand, the main Marxist doctrines of prehistory are still, as elucidated in *Origin*, fundamentally correct, and serve as a scientific basis for understanding Maori prehistoric culture and society from the standpoint of Marxism as opposed to that of bourgeois anthropology. This fundamental correctness was also the case in the USSR in Lenin's and Stalin's time. That can be seen in Lenin's Sverdlov lecture, *The State*, and in the section on Historical Materialism in Stalin's pamphlet *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

Although reluctant to make changes to such an historical document as *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels paid Morgan the tribute of adding a footnote to it recognising his achievement in elucidating 'the inner organisation of this primitive communist society,' adding: 'With the dissolution of these primeval communities society begins to be differentiated into separate, and finally antagonistic classes.'<sup>8</sup>

What I have given here in outline is the theoretical framework from which we approach Maori history, including Maori prehistory. You deny that we take a Marxist approach, but you evidently do not know what that is!

What is the current bourgeois sociological approach to the subject in New Zealand? It is based mainly on Raymond Firth's publications, particularly *The Economics of the New Zealand Maori*. Firth was a student under Malinowski, and adopted the same ideological viewpoint as the latter in his investigations of Maori culture and society. What was their viewpoint, essentially? Theoretically, it has superficial resemblances to Marxism. It asserts the necessity of taking each specific aspect of Maori social life as interconnected, not to be understood properly as a 'thing-in-itself'. And he does uncover certain aspects that were not previously considered. However, taking his cue from Malinowski, his overall standpoint is that the spiritual and intellectual aspects of Maori social life and custom are primary, and that it is to these one must look in order to see Maori society as a

whole. This is in opposition to the Marxist view – applying to all forms of society – that the production relations are the economic basis of society, and that these determine the ideas and general mental life of society. The level of development of the social productive forces – the land, the lakes, rivers and coastal waters, plus the working people together with the labour skills appropriate to the epoch, and the instruments of production likewise – these give rise to the relations of production which form the economic basis. To Marxists, this is all ABC. But in the sphere of Maori studies, Marxism is almost invisible. While the earlier anthropologists, such as Elsdon Best, knew of Morgan's division of prehistoric and tribal society into the stages of savagery, barbarism and civilisation, and the division of savagery and barbarism each into three sub-stages, with the highest stage of barbarism passing into civilisation, they were still not historical materialists. Best, while adopting the materialist viewpoint that modern society evolved from primitive society, attempted to place the Maori into the stage of barbarism, close to civilisation, but he was hampered by traditional religious conceptions in his approach.

Firth, on the other hand, set out to establish that Maori society was a class society, and managed to get this anti-Marxist view generally established among New Zealand departments of anthropology and Maori studies. Thus, what is mainly taught in these departments today is the division of Maori society into three classes: chiefly aristocracy, commoners and slaves. This is a thoroughgoing distortion of reality.

Our first question is based on Morgan's researches among the American Indians. These, be it noted, had developed a highly complex weapon, the bow and arrow. This was unknown to the Maori. So also was pottery. Lapita pottery, traces of which are found in some Pacific Islands, has not been found in New Zealand.

If one uses Morgan's classification, generally the early Maori falls into the middle stage of savagery, although some features of the upper stage and even of the lower stage of barbarism can be found. After summarising the middle stage of savagery, Engels wrote that: 'As a consequence of the continued uncertainty with regard to the sources of foodstuffs, cannibalism appears to have arisen at this stage, and continued for a long time. The Australians [aborigines, needless to say] and many Polynesians are to this day in this middle stage of savagery.'<sup>9</sup>

True, when Engels wrote *Origin of the Family* in 1891, much had not yet been done on the study of Maori society, but writings of the expeditions of Cook and the French explorers were available, as were those of some of the amateur ethnologists. In fact the writings of Banks, Cook, and other crew members of his ships are really the only source of direct experience of the pre-Pakeha Maori. Such was Engels' thoroughness in research, it would be surprising if he were not familiar with the main materials then available on the Pacific Islands and their inhabitants. In the preface to the fourth edition he notes that new data had been uncovered, but not to the extent of supplanting Morgan's original conceptions. In my opinion that is still true, Firth and his followers notwithstanding.

I cannot quote from any proper, direct historical materialist studies of the early Maori because there are none. What I can point to, however, is the clear, anti-scientific,



ahistorical bias of Malinowski, and also of Raymond Firth. They set out to combat the views of Morgan and the concept of primitive communism as the economic and social basis for tribal life in pre-historic times – i.e., before the advent of written history. Engels carried Morgan's studies further in respect of the economy and the significance of the gens in the relationship of brother gentes in the origins of class society, beginning with Ancient Greece.

Writers of the Firth school distort what is known of the forms of the family, endeavouring to establish the modern nuclear family as it exists in Western capitalist society as the basis for primitive Maori society, while Malinowski does the same in respect of the Australian aborigines. Firth quotes Malinowski on the aborigine as follows:

**Even in the classical home of the clan and alleged group marriage, Australia, Dr Malinowski has conclusively shown that the individual family has both form and function, that it is a definitely segregated unit, that it acts, indeed, as a fundamental basis of social organisation. In much of his subsequent general work the same basic point is given a wide theoretical reference and is shown with abundance of proof that the individual family is the core of all life in society.<sup>10</sup>**

This 'abundance' of proof is more like abundance of speculation and distortion. Group marriage is the most primitive form of marriage anthropology has uncovered. The Hawaiian 'punaluan family' is a much higher development, out of which the 'pairing family' grew. The researches of Morgan and Engels offer far more convincing evidence than Malinowski's 'abundance of proof', that the nuclear family did not appear until a much later stage in the development of the family. In his anthropological studies, Elsdon Best considered the family, as we know it 'a negligible factor' among the Maori, saying: 'True family life, as we know it, did not exist among the Maori.' But Firth, despite absence of evidence, must adhere to Malinowski and make the nuclear family the basis.

What is to be noted is the blatant contradiction between the concept of the nuclear family as husband, wife and children – which Malinowski and Firth claim as the basic social unit, and the reality that because of the fact that the nature of paternity was not known, either to the Australian aborigine, the Trobriand Islander or the Maori, the society was matrilineal, and in its higher forms comprised a woman, her brother and her children. This was common also among the Iroquois Indians. Best was perfectly right in his view of the negligible importance of the nuclear family, and Firth perfectly wrong in regarding the nuclear family of capitalism as basic. Best considered the whanau, or extended family as the basic unit of Maori life. However, while he is more correct, and had no axe to grind, he lacked a real understanding of historical materialism. He sees much of the significance of the hapu, but does not see the hapu as the close approximation to the gens which it was.

Firth's aim is that of his teacher, Malinowski, to combat the materialist view of prehistory and substitute bourgeois metaphysics for Marxism. On the question of the nature of the Maori family he follows Malinowski in asserting that there cannot be communist ownership of the means of production or common labour or distribution according to

need because there is real private ownership by family members of the nuclear-type family. Thus, he asserts that communism cannot exist in the sense of the Manifesto. What exists is a whole series of rights, incompatible with communism. But this is not rational argument. One has only to read *Origin of the Family* to discover that the Iroquois gens, the model for primitive communism, had numerous rights. (Engels lists them) – but remains communist! What is more, the Maori hapu had much in common with the Iroquois gens. The idea that because individuals owned ‘private property’ in the form of weapons, tools, certain rights within the gens, that this cancels out communism as described by Morgan is wholly fallacious. The Maori as an individual had little personal property. Firth counts the individual’s right to a part of the tribal land as private property. This is nonsense. There was no private ownership of land, although each hapu owned land collectively and that land was tribally-owned territory. Firth organises his facts concerning ‘rights’ of individuals and families (monogamous families, be it noted) to prove the incompatibility of such rights with communal ownership. But the simple fact is that land in pre-European times was not a commodity and could not be bought and sold as one. What nullifies all Firth’s attempts to exclude communism from early Maori society is the fact that land, the main means of production, is collectively owned, either by hapu or tribe. How the individual fitted in to that general framework is secondary. And after all his efforts to prove that Maori land is private property, he is finally compelled to admit that actually, chiefly ownership does not exist. Firth states that ‘the chief did not have a personal claim in all the lands of his tribe. To certain places he had an individual right derived from his ancestors, from occupation, or some other cause, and he also possessed a claim in pieces of land held in common with his relatives. His interest in the remainder of the tribal territory was of a socio-political rather than of an economic nature, i.e., he exercised great influence over matters of control but received no material benefit therefrom.’ 11

This must be kept in mind when one comes to the issues of slavery and class. In slave society as it developed in Ancient Greece and later in Rome, the slaveowner owned both land and slaves. The whole point of his ownership was that from it he derived ‘material benefit’ – i.e., surplus product and hence wealth, from such ownership. Ethical ‘rights’ do not constitute ownership!

Firth presents slavery as a long-standing feature of early Maori life, and talks of chiefs owning large numbers of slaves who did all the work of society. This is sheer baloney. There were slaves in Maori tribes in pre-European times, but they were few in number and were certainly not the private property of the chiefs. Writers before Firth noted the fact of slavery, but none went in for such exaggerated claims about it.

First – and even Firth has to recognise this – the stone age means of warfare practised by early Maori tribes was much too small-scale to yield many prisoners. Tribal warfare was mainly skirmishing on tribal boundaries. Not until the musket wars of Hongi Heka and later were any substantial quantity of prisoners involved. But that was already in European times.

The economic basis for slavery, as Engels points out, is the possibility of producing a regular and increasing surplus of production. That is the basis also for private property, that is why Engels treats the origin of both as linked. The early Maori had no such regular surpluses. For slavery to exist as a basic feature of society, the level of the productive forces must be high enough to provide for the maintenance of the slave and the ability of his labour to produce a surplus over and above that. Such conditions arose in the old world – the Middle East and parts of Asia – with the advent of the domestication of animals. Engels writes that this developed entirely new sources of wealth with the breeding of herds, and created entirely new social relationships. The advancing pastoral peoples ‘acquired possessions demanding merely supervision and most elementary care in order to propagate in ever-increasing numbers and to yield the richest nutrient in milk and meat ...’ 12

The first owner was undoubtedly the gens, but private property must soon have followed, with hereditary chiefs of the family or the gens appearing as the owners. ‘One thing, however, is certain’, says Engels ‘and that is that we must not regard him [the hereditary chief] as a property owner in the modern sense of the term.’ 13 Now we come to the crux of the matter for the primitive Maori tribe.

**For now slavery was also invented. The slave was useless to the barbarian of the lower stage. It was for this reason that the American Indians treated their vanquished foes quite differently from the way they were treated in the upper stage. The men were either killed or adopted as brothers by the tribe of the victors. The women were either taken in marriage or likewise just adopted along with their surviving children. Human labour power at this stage yielded no noticeable surplus as yet over the cost of its maintenance. 14**

This description of American Indian custom fits the early Maori custom like a glove. There were no domesticable animals in New Zealand, no sources of wealth accumulating in pastoral tribes to provide for chattel slavery, as there were no pastoral tribes.

There is a vast difference between the sporadic taking of slaves in the conditions prevailing in pre-and early European times among the Maori, and the chattel slavery which maintained slave society in Greece and Rome. There was no such thing as chattel slavery among Maoris. This is a creation of structural-functional anthropologists. The same holds good among all primitive Pacific Island populations. Your attached waiata is written in European times, when large numbers of prisoners were taken, as the reference to Hongi Heka proves. It certainly is not evidence for chattel slavery.

As for the classes of ‘aristocrats’ and ‘commoners’, these are also creations of the functionalists. They are essential to sustain the concept of class-divided society among the Maori, the aim being to counteract the Marxist standpoint of primitive, tribal society being an epoch of primitive communism. Bound up with this is your assertion that the state also existed among the Maoris. Actually, even the functionalists don’t make this claim. Firth sets out to prove that primitive communism, while accepted by Elsdon Best and other New Zealand writers on Maori society, never existed. That was on a par with

Malinowski's *raison d'être*. One encyclopaedia refers to the latter as follows: 'Viewing ethnology from a utilitarian standpoint, he believed that it should promote successful colonial administration under new historical conditions, through indirect government.' (My emphasis). That, of course, is a class point of view, an imperialist point of view. It had its influence on Firth, as can be seen from his invention of a hybrid class social structure for the New Zealand pre-European Maori.

Firth's view (and this holds for his followers in most anthropology circles in New Zealand) is anti-historical. The Maori travelled to this country with no previous history except that of legends (the 'great fleet' setting out from Hawaiki being one), and is always a fully-fledged class society from their arrival.

The Marxist view is that primitive communism constituted a specific mode of production, preceding that of slave society and its successors, feudalism, capitalism and socialism. The anti-Marxist schools of ethnology and anthropology cannot – and do not attempt to – explain the origin of slave society, which existed in the great slave empires of Egypt, the Middle East, Ancient Greece and Rome, from the previous stage of primitive communism. Inevitably they take the view that classes did not emerge historically, but always existed. The concept of different modes of production constituting the content of the main epochs in mankind's history specifically belongs to Marx. Those who deny it have no claim to the title 'Marxist'.

Engels, both in *Origin of the Family* and in *Anti-Duhring (The Force Theory)*, gives a perfectly clear picture of the break-up of primitive communist society as a result of the development of private property and commodity production, leading to the establishment of definite social classes. These cannot emerge where the productive forces are as primitive as they were in early Maori society. If you take the trouble to read Engels' summary of Morgan's three stages of savagery and barbarism in *Origin of the Family*, you will not have much difficulty in seeing that pre-European Maori society was much too undeveloped to reach the highest stage of barbarism, and at best lies at the border between the middle and upper stages of savagery.

The early Maori society was in many ways more highly developed than in most Pacific Islands\*\*\*\*\* still, it lacked certain essentials required to reach the middle or upper stage of barbarism, though their primitive agriculture along with advanced (for primitive society) methods of fishing, gives them some features of the lower stages of barbarism. What held the Maori back from further development towards slave society and civilisation was the difference between the natural endowments of New Zealand and the old world.

Speaking of the advent of barbarism, Engels writes:

**Up to this point we could regard the course of evolution as being generally valid for a definite period among all peoples. With the advent of barbarism, however, we reach a stage where the difference in natural endowment of the two great continents begins to assert itself. The characteristic feature of the period of barbarism is the**

**domestication and breeding of animals and the cultivation of plants. Now the Eastern Continent, the so-called Old World, contained almost all the animals suitable for domestication and all the cultivable cereals with one exception; while the Western, America, contained only one domesticable mammal, the llama, and this only in a part of the South; and only one cereal fit for cultivation, but that the best, maize. The effect of these different natural conditions was that from now on the population of each hemisphere went its own special way, and the landmarks on the borderlines between the various stages are different in each of the two cases.<sup>15</sup>**

I have quoted this passage at some length to illustrate that despite many natural endowments possessed by New Zealand, the Maori also was constrained by its limitations which, although the country was far larger than any other Polynesian territory, prevented the Maori from reaching the achievements of the Old World. They did a great deal within the limits of their environment, as did the North American Indians, but both lacked the art of pottery, from which point Morgan dates the transition to barbarism. Unless one counts the Maori dog, which played only a small role in Maori life, there were no domesticable mammals. Yet the latter were the main source of wealth in the Old World and provided the main economic basis for the development of commodity production, with its impact on the previously existing family and inheritance structure. True, the Maori cultivated the kumara and made good use of some native plants, and they were able to build huts and fortified pas, but these were features of the upper stage of savagery or at best of a few aspects of the lower stage of barbarism. Overall, however, there was much too much uncertainty in the production of food and other basic essentials to enable the production of a regular surplus sufficient to surpass the system of natural economy, of production for use.

Engels' summary of barbarism in Origin states:

**3. Upper stage. Begins with the smelting of iron ore and passes into civilisation through the invention of alphabetic writing and its utilisation for literary records ... it was traversed only in the eastern hemisphere.<sup>16</sup>**

Without domesticable animals, pottery and access to iron ore for making weapons and tools, the productive forces of the Maori were far below the level required to make the transition to slave society or civilisation. The pre-European Maori unavoidably had to remain a stone age people.

Though there was some barter, mostly it was at tribal level at the boundaries of different tribes. The form of value of such articles as were traded was the accidental or elementary form, with which Marx begins his analysis of the forms of value in Capital, volume 1.

Of course, the Firths and their followers had no conception either of historical materialism or of Marxist political economy, and can therefore conjure up social relations without an economic basis out of their heads, with no relationship to actual historical development. Was the Maori society a slave society such as existed in Ancient Greece or Rome? One would have to think so if one takes their viewpoint on the existence of

slavery. But in Greece and Rome, the population was comprised overwhelmingly of slaves – 90 per cent in the case of Greece. And did the chiefs form a social class of slaveowners, giving rise to violent class struggles such as divided the slave systems of the past? There is no sign of such class struggle among the Maori. In fact, the observations of the early explorers regarded the ‘slaves’ as no more than servants. And what of the so-called ‘commoners’? This is a word that comes from feudal class relations. It was never in use among the Maori or other primitive tribes. As for the ‘chiefly aristocracy’, certainly there were separate tribal chiefs – but there was no aristocratic ruling class such as is claimed by the opponents of Marxism.

You will find a proper explanation of the position of tribal chieftains in Anti-Duhring, in the chapter on ‘The Force Theory’. Engels writes:

**As men originally made their exit from the animal world – in the narrower sense of the term – so they made their entry into history; still half animal, brutal, still helpless in face of the forces of nature, still ignorant of their own strength; and consequently as poor as the animals and hardly more productive than they. There prevailed a certain equality in the conditions of existence, and for the heads of families also a kind of equality of social position – at least an absence of social classes – which continued among the primitive agricultural communities of the civilised peoples of a later period. In each such community there were from the beginning certain common interests the safeguarding of which had to be handed over to individuals, true, under the control of the community as a whole: adjudication of disputes, repression of abuse of authority by individuals; control over water supplies, especially in hot countries; and finally when conditions were still absolutely primitive, religious functions.<sup>17</sup>**

This was written before Morgan published Ancient Society, but corresponds essentially to the latter. Engels writes much more on specific features of the role of the gens in the transition from primitive communism to slave society, i.e., civilisation. For a fuller exposition you would need to read the chapters on the gens, particularly the chapter on ‘The Grecian Gens’ in Origin. Here you find how the state originates on the basis of commodity production and private property. Necessary features that led to the appearance of the state in Greece simply did not exist among the Maori.

These include a substantial development of production based first on stock raising giving rise to a regular surplus sufficient to maintain a system of production based on the exploitation of slaves; the growth of population which accompanied the growth of production; the transformation of the family from a system of pairing marriage to the patriarchal family; the establishment of walled cities, made possible by increased population; and the development of a centralised power arising from confederations of tribes, in order to maintain control of the cities.

By contrast, the Maori existed as separate tribes. Only on rare occasions did any confederation arise, and that only for purposes of warfare. Tribal disunity was the norm. There was no Maori nation, no cities (the fortified pa was no more than a defended tribal

village). The disunity made it possible for the British imperialists to carry out their annexation without too much trouble, though they got more than they bargained for.

Unfortunately there has never been any proper Marxist research into the nature of the Maori hapu and its role in the tribe. There are many clear similarities between the hapu and the primitive gens in Iroquois tribal society. Marriage between members of the same hapu was forbidden, as in most primitive gens, and some of the same exceptions stand out. For instance, where a girl was an heiress (in primitive society it didn't take much 'property' to be rich – cooking vessels, a cloak, some greenstone ornaments) then she was required to marry within the hapu so the latter might retain the fortune (?) This too is found in the Iroquois and Grecian gens, according to Morgan and Grote (whom Marx quotes) in his History of Greece. The reason is the same: 'Under the gentile constitution, the family was never a unit of organisation, nor could it be, for man and wife necessarily belonged to two different gentes. The gens as a whole belonged to the phratry, the phratry to the tribe, but in the case of the family, it half belonged to the gens of the husband and half to that of the wife.<sup>18</sup> Hence the concern to keep useful property within the gens overrode the usual requirement of marrying outside the gens.

Like the Iroquois chief, the Maori chief had no governmental power. Questions were decided in tribal assembly. So also they were in the early Grecian tribes as indicated by Homer in the Iliad and Odyssey. Engels writes of this Homeric period:

**At this time, when every adult member of the tribe was a warrior [the same was true of the Maori tribe], there was as yet no public authority separated from the people that could have been set up against it. Primitive democracy was then in full bloom, and this must remain the point of departure in judging power and the status of the council and of the basileus [military commander].<sup>19</sup>**

In Homer's Greece – a bronze age, and not a stone age – society, there was still no state, or 'public authority' with governmental power. But it had the ingredients within it of the state, unlike the Maori society. Engels writes in a brief and masterly summing up, of how the Grecian state emerged:

**Thus, in the Grecian constitution of the Heroic Age, we still find the old gentile constitution full of vigour; but we also see the beginnings of its decay: father right and the inheritance of property by the children, which favoured the accumulation of wealth in the family and gave the latter power as against the gens; differentiation in wealth affecting in turn the social constitution by creating first, rudiments of a hereditary nobility and monarchy; slavery, first limited to prisoners of war but already paving the way to the enslavement of fellow members of the tribe and even of the gens; the degeneration of the old intertribal warfare to systematic raids, on land and sea, for the purpose of capturing cattle, slaves and treasure as a regular means of gaining a livelihood. In short, wealth is praised and respected as the highest treasure, and the old gentile institutions are perverted in order to justify forcible robbery of wealth. Only one thing was missing: an institution that would not only safeguard the newly-acquired property of private individuals against the**

**communistic [that ‘unmarxist’ word again!] traditions of the gentile order, would not only sanctify private property, formerly held in such light esteem, and pronounce this sanctification the highest purpose of human society, but would also stamp the gradually developing new forms of acquiring property, with the seal of general public recognition; an institution that would perpetuate not only the newly-rising class division of society, but also the right of the possessing class to exploit the non-possessing classes and the rule of the former over the latter.**

**And this institution arrived. The state was invented.20**

Engels goes on to point out that how the state developed – i.e., how governmental authority superseded the gentile ‘people in arms’ – which we find with the Maori – is nowhere better traceable than in ancient Athens. The forms of the changes are described by Morgan; the economic content was largely added by Engels himself. As one studies the chapter on the Athenian state in *Origin*, it becomes still clearer that there were a number of stages in the development from no-state (primitive communist society) to the state as an instrument of public power. They included the growth of the division of labour, the replacement of common ownership by private ownership based on newly-developed commodity production, including private, individual ownership of land (which did not exist among the pre-European Maori), the huge growth in the number of slaves, the development of a whole new range of public offices – including the fighting forces, culminating in the constitution of Solon\*\*\*\*\*, with its defined class structure by law, giving the property-owning classes dominance. In this period the role of money becomes accentuated and aids the appearance of an aristocracy of wealth based on landed property worked by slaves. Engels writes:

**Movable property, wealth in money, slaves and ships, increased more and more; but instead of being simply a means for purchasing land, as in the first period with its limitations, it became an end in itself. This, on the one hand, gave rise to the successful competition of the new, wealthy industrial and commercial class with the old power of the nobility, but, on the other hand, it deprived the old, gentile constitution of its last foothold.21**

The Athenian state was a far cry from the old gentile society from which it eventually sprang; even though it was young it was already class society, differing in major qualitative respects from Maori society because it arose on a wholly different mode of production, that of slavery. To return to Engels, who had an encyclopaedic knowledge of history – unlike the functionalists –

**The class antagonism on which the social and political institutions rested was no longer that between the nobles and the common people, but that between slaves and freemen, dependents and citizens. When Athens was at the height of prosperity the total number of free Athenian citizens, women and children included, amounted to about 90,000; the slaves of both sexes numbered 365,000, and the dependents – immigrants and freed slaves – 45,000. Thus, for every adult male citizen there were at least eighteen slaves, and more than two dependents. (My emphasis). The large**



**number of slaves is explained by the fact that many of them worked together in manufactories with large rooms under overseers ... It was not democracy that caused the downfall of Athens, as the European schoolmasters who cringe before royalty would have us believe, but slavery, which brought the labour of the free citizen into contempt.<sup>22</sup>**

One doesn't have to be any genius to see how utterly different a real slave system authenticated by known history is, from what you evidently imagine to be a Maori slave society – which is simply a creation of the bourgeois ethnologists.

Engels also shows from real history how the gens and state developed in Ancient Rome – fundamentally along the same lines as that in Greece. Work at it as they may, the structural-functionalists of the Firth school cannot produce for the Maori any comparable picture of development, not even remotely. That is because they are basically ahistorical. For them there is no longer history; there might have been some once, but not any more. So they can construct a society out of their heads, to suit their bourgeois world outlook. For us it is not necessary to do more in regard to Rome than has been done in regard to Greece, and the same applies to the Celts and Germans. Taken in by bourgeois academic anthropologists, you want to place the pre-European Maori not only at a high level of barbarism – which they never achieved for reasons already stated – but at the level of civilisation such as existed in European slave society.

A few more words are necessary on the state. Contrary to your opinion, the state does not exist in primitive tribal society such as was Maori society. It arises only after the primitive communism of prehistory is broken up by the emergence of private property in the means of production and the growth of simple commodity production and exchange to a point where wealth is accumulated in both money and land, and this wealth is appropriated by a ruling class of slaveowners. This process is accompanied by a growth in population – particularly of slaves – and with it the unification of separate tribes into a city state based not on the kinship group as in former times but on the principle of territoriality, which pushes the old gentile forms into the background. Centralisation of population into walled cities, along with the contradiction between the relatively small ruling class and the mass of the slaves, necessarily gives rise to acute class antagonism between rulers and ruled, between slave owners and slaves and hence the need is created for a public power, apparently standing above society and aimed at preventing this antagonism from destroying society entirely. This public power is the state, and history shows that it soon develops into the state of the economically dominant class.

One must ask (a) where is that centralisation of population among the Maori which led to the walled cities of old Europe? (b) Where is the centralisation of political power such as one finds in Greece or Rome? (c) Where is the public power that moderates the class collisions between the classes of slaveowners and slaves? Where, indeed, is there the least evidence of antagonistic classes and class struggle, let alone a state of the slaveowners? The answer is, nowhere.

The Maori never lived in a class-divided society until the European settlement. The British imperialists brought with them capitalism and the capitalist state. As in the case of the invasion of Mexico and Peru by the Spanish, which put an end to independent development by those peoples, so the annexation put an end to further independent Maori development.

The primitive communist conceptions of tribal ownership of land, shared by most Maori tribes, came up against the conception of private capitalist ownership and were, of course, destroyed. Even after the annexation the Maori could not adapt to the standard capitalist treatment of land as an alienable commodity. What was obvious was that the Maori land was being alienated by force and fraud until most of it was in the hands of European settlers by the mid-19th century, a large chunk of it owned by the New Zealand Company. Since the Maori Land Court was established in 1865, there have been innumerable collective land claims by various Maori hapu and tribes. They are still going on. But they all revert back to the fact that the state in New Zealand did not exist in pre-European times, and the Maori claimants have until now had to prove occupation in the past, which ends in a fine bureaucratic system of deferring the claims till doomsday.

All discrimination against the Maori, all shortcomings in the standards of Maori education, health and welfare, all trace back to the colonialists' seizure of the country and the driving of the Maori off tribal land by fire and sword.

That the Maori had no centralised population or system of authority is made clear, although not precisely in those terms by historian Michael King, who is one of the better bourgeois liberals in his treatment of early Maori life. In his book *Maori*, he writes:

**Conditions in Maori settlements varied enormously, however, from district to district – so much so that it is difficult to generalise about Maori life in the latter half of the nineteenth century. One reason, of course, is that the basis of this life remained hapu and tribe. Maoris generally still did not view themselves as “Maori” (that is, as a single race or culture) even after the word Maori had come into use in the 1850s. Consequently there was as yet little incentive for them to behave in a homogeneous way, other than to continue – in characteristically tribal manner – to disparage and to compete with Maoris from other hapu and other places. The very persistence of tribal feeling had prevented the continuation of “nationalist” experiments such as the Kingitanga. It had prevented Maoris from acting as a pressure group commensurate with their numbers.<sup>23</sup>**

In the same chapter King notes that ‘in the 1870s and 1880s that large and lavishly catered meetings were becoming an increasingly common feature of Maori life since fighting was no longer available to provide excitement or a focus for a community effort. The larger and more lavish the hui, the more mana accrued to the host community – prestige in Polynesian terms being measured by what was given away rather than by what was accumulated’.<sup>24</sup> What! They were not enraptured by capitalist accumulation? Impossible!

Contrast this to the neo-capitalist approach to property and ownership which Firth and Co. father on to the early Maori. Elsdon Best, despite his idealist shortcomings was far closer to accuracy in defining Maori property relations as primitively communistic. In such society what counted was hapu and tribal ownership. Tribal conflict made a Maori state impossible, even when the danger existed, in the Treaty period, of all tribes losing their land as settlement grew at high speed.

I don't have the space or time to rebut Firth's attempts to equate individuals' ownership of weapons and tools with capitalist ownership. Engels and Morgan long ago made clear in their writings that such personal property existed under the primitive communism of Iroquois and other tribal society. Likewise I don't have the space or time to go deeply into the land question, and expose the phoniness of Firth's attempts to equate the individual's rights in tribally-owned land with capitalistic individual ownership. The two things are far from being identical, as Firth tries to make them.

Nearly all contemporary observers of the early Maori, and certainly most of the later significant writers on the subject – Best, Colenso and others – agree on the collective ownership of land as an article of binding force on the pre-European – and very largely on post-European – Maori. Nor are all modern anthropologists of Firth's opinion. Writing of a modern Maori community, Anthropology in the South Seas, says:

**When an informant was asked why certain owners had not cleared their land of second growth, the reply was: "Ask the Department; it owns the land." In traditional Maori society where land belonged jointly to all the tribe, rights of disposition were far more important than any concept of ownership as such. The Department's control was virtual ownership as far as some were concerned ... Common land ownership was regarded as a stronger tie than kinship by one man who said that if his brothers were to sell him their interests in the land he farmed, he could not expect them to stay with him or even to visit him again. 25**

Of course, the land question is a very big one, far too big to do more than touch on briefly. I merely want to establish here that historically, with the early Maori, common ownership was the norm, despite Firth's attempts to prove otherwise. And not only common ownership, but common labour in cultivation.

Michael King's photographic essay Maori contains a picture of Maori using the 'digging stick'. Under the caption 'Agriculture', the text says:

**The New Zealand Polynesians were experienced and sophisticated horticulturalists before the arrival of Europeans in the country. Their major crop in the North Island was the kumara, a smaller variety than the far more popular Hawaiian type that was introduced in the nineteenth century. Others included taro, yam, gourd and paper mulberry. These pictures were contrived by early ethnologists to demonstrate pre-European methods of cultivation ... Like most other Maori activities affecting the survival of the hapu, digging, planting and harvesting were carried out communally. 26**

Lastly, let me call as a witness Peter Buck. Possibly you know that near the turn of the century the Young Maori Party took shape, with Apirana Ngata, Peter Buck, Maui Pomare and some others as moving spirits.

Their object was basically to push forward a programme of assimilation of the Maori into a fully capitalist way of life. According to Michael King, both Buck and Pomare believed 'that the Pakeha and Western culture were to be permanent features of New Zealand life, and that the most promising future for the Maori lay in progressive adoption of Western practices, institutions and technology ... They also called for a strong degree of individualism in Maori life and the adoption of the Protestant work ethic ...'27

'Buck wrote in his annual report for 1906: "The [Maori] communism of the past meant industry, training in arms, good physique, the sharing of the tribal burden, and the preservation of life. It was a factor in the evolution of the race. The communism of today means indolence, sloth, decay of racial vigour, the crushing of individual effort, the spreading of introduced infectious diseases and the many evils that are petrifying the Maori and preventing his advance." '28

Disregarding for the moment the second half of Buck's adjurations, there can hardly be any doubt that he recognised that the early Maori lived under primitive communism, and that this form of society was, for its time and place, a successful mode of production, which produced the finest qualities among the early Maori of pre-European times. What he attacks as 'the communism of today' is the attachment of the Maori people to the former close-knit tribal and hapu social life, in opposition to enforced assimilation, their eviction from the land and the abolition of the productive activity connected with it, the suppression of their language and their treatment as a conquered race. He is criticising the people themselves for being demoralised as a result of conquest, not the real cause of having a colonialist system forced on them.

Since Firth, as Auckland history professor M.P.K. Sorrenson points out, 'The scholarly theses have become more and more detailed about smaller and smaller aspects of Maori culture. And no one has attempted a new and comprehensive study of Maori ethnography to replace Best's *The Maori As He Was*.'29 While Sorrenson, as a bourgeois historian, evidently accepts Firth's generally bourgeois standpoint on Maori economy, he does add, a little further on: 'If the functionalists virtually eliminated history from their studies – in reaction against the evolutionists [i.e., Best and Co.] – the modern anthropologists have restored it.'30 What he does not mention, however, is that their standpoint is still that of bourgeois anthropology, without a shadow of understanding of the materialist conception of history.

Firth's structural functionalism which is preached in various bourgeois New Zealand educational institutions is a sterile flower because it is totally artificial and metaphysical in character. There was never any such an eclectic junkheap as his Maori society in existence – based on slave exploitation, with a ruling aristocracy and a class of commoners in between. What existed was primitive, tribal communism in which slavery was tribal and only on a small scale (such also existed in the Iroquois tribes studied by

Morgan, but which nobody asserts was slave society); slaves were not a mass exploited class, chattels of slaveowners – Firth notwithstanding; the chiefs of tribes were not a ruling class, standing above the rest of society as in classical Greece and Rome; there is absolutely no mention by anyone of class struggle in myth or oral history, as there would undoubtedly have been if it existed; nor is there any mention of a state apparatus to serve a ruling class. Where you got this idea from is beyond me. Possibly you assumed that with Firth's invented society such a governmental apparatus had to exist. But a Maori state is not authenticated even by Firth. He was, as I have remarked, ahistorical, and so could not show any historical development resulting in the supersession of a tribal democracy by a state machine.

Just consider Lenin's definition of classes and you will see at once (one hopes) that Maori society was classless, as was all primitive tribal society. Here it is, for your information:

**Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.<sup>31</sup>**

These classes are, of course, economic classes, not related to the marriage classes of which Engels speaks in connection with the aboriginal people of Australia.

Perhaps you recall how Lenin flayed Kautsky's revisionist views of the state and peaceful transition in *The State and Revolution* by building on substantial references to Marx's and Engels' classic brief definition of the state ('Preface to Marx's *The Civil War in France*'): 'The state is nothing but a machine, for the oppression of one class by another'. And, in connection with the rise of a public power – as the growth of antagonistic classes took place resulting from the dissolution of gentile (primitive communist) society – "standing above society and increasingly alienating itself from it", Lenin comments, quoting Engels:

'Engels continues:

"As against the ancient gentile organisation, the primary distinguishing feature of the state is the division of subjects of the state according to territory."

'Such a division seems "natural" to us, but it cost a prolonged struggle against the old form of tribal or gentile society.

"... The second is the establishment of a public power, which is no longer directly identical with the population organising itself as an armed power [the Maori tribe]. This special public power is necessary, because a self-acting armed organisation of the

population has become impossible since the cleavage into classes. ... This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men, but of material appendages, prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds, of which gentile society knew nothing ... ‘ Lenin is quoting from Origin of the Family) ...

‘We are justified in speaking of special bodies of armed men, because the public power which is an attribute of every state is not “directly identical” with the armed population, with its “self-acting armed organisation.” ... A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But can it be otherwise?’<sup>32</sup>

This is the state in reality, from the standpoint of historical materialist science. Do you really imagine that every Maori tribe had its own ‘prisons and coercive institutions of all kinds’? Did each have ‘special bodies of armed men’, police etc.? Or do you regard Engels’ and Lenin’s views on the state as something totally different from what they actually were?

Either: the Maori people as a whole had a state, as you assert, and had also its ‘material appendages’ – for which neither you nor anyone else can supply the slightest tittle of evidence; or else there was no state, and hence, no ‘oppression of one class by another’, and hence no class struggle and likewise no class society.

I could have given you a short answer to your letter, but instead I have taken the trouble to provide a substantial refutation of your assertions, because (a) they are based on widely accepted bourgeois inventions which need to be refuted publicly, something we have in mind; and (b) you are buying our journal The Spark, and yet evidently misunderstand our viewpoint, while otherwise commending the paper.

Now perhaps it is necessary to explain to you why we consider it necessary to change both Pakeha and Maori views of the Maori of today and yesterday insofar as we are able. This is a question of winning Maori support for socialist revolution, not a simple matter considering that most Maori have been brought up on a steady diet of anti-communism.

The imperialist bourgeoisie in New Zealand pay a little lip service to ‘Maori culture’ from the standpoint of using flax-skirted Maori maidens doing poi dances as being a useful tourist attraction, along with male concert party groups performing hakas. But their main concern is indoctrinating Maori youth with bourgeois patriotism in order to use them as front-line troops in imperialist wars. In every imperialist invasion and suppression of national liberation, from the 1949 Malayan ‘emergency’ through Korea to the war in Vietnam, the Maori provided most of the volunteers. Politically they were backward and reactionary, ready to fight the ‘invading’ Chinese or North Vietnamese in ‘defence’ of freedom and our ‘way of life’ etc. etc. In other words they were brainwashed to the point of being anti-communist automatons, ideal for imperialist purposes. They had no idea whatever – and still have none – of their own past apart from pakeha-created legends about the great fleet and their prowess at exploring the Pacific.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, the same brainwashing process was directed at pakehas, but there was more resistance from class-conscious workers. The greatest Maori of this century was not Maui Pomare, Apirana Ngata or Peter Buck, but Te Puea Herangi, who led the Waikato Maori tribes to refuse enlistment in the First World War, an imperialist war from beginning to end. Her tribe, the Tainui also refused to back the Gulf War.

While there was increased Maori radicalism over Bastion Point, Waitangi celebrations and the 1981 tour, and while land protests still take place in some areas, there is still hardly any socialist consciousness among the Maori people. What they do not know, and what we endeavour to publicise, is that their greatest achievements took place when they were living under communism, primitive though it was.

In our view, the Maori never became a nation – they lacked several of the basic features of a nation. True, they had a common language and to a certain extent a community of culture. But they lacked a community of economic life. Stalin's Marxism and the National Question is an excellent analysis of the historical development of nations which analyses specific features common to nations, but the lack of one or other of which can prevent a particular people being regarded as a nation.

In his analysis Stalin asks, 'What is a nation?' and answers: 'a nation is primarily a community, a definite community of people.

'This community is not racial, nor is it tribal,'<sup>34</sup> He goes on shortly afterwards:

'Community of territory is one of the characteristic features of a nation.

'But this is not all. Community of territory in itself does not create a nation. This requires, in addition, an internal economic bond which welds the various parts of a nation into a single whole.'<sup>34</sup>

Stalin quotes the example of Georgia. Earlier, Georgia constituted a single territory but did not constitute a nation because it was composed of a number of different principalities, economically disunited. Stalin writes:

**Georgia came on to the scene as a nation only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the fall of serfdom and the growth of the economic life of the country, the development of means of communication and the rise of capitalism, instituted a division of labour between the various districts of Georgia, completely shattered the economic self-sufficiency of the principalities and bound them together into a single whole.<sup>35</sup>**

Lastly, Stalin speaks of community of psychological makeup manifested in a community of character. He soon reaches the following important conclusion: 'That there is, in fact, no single distinguishing characteristic of a nation. There is only a sum total of characteristics, of which, when nations are compared, one characteristic (national character), or another (language) or a third (territory, economic conditions) stands out in

sharper relief. A nation constitutes the combination of all these characteristics taken together.’<sup>36</sup>

Simply, looking at the Maori from the point of view of the combination of the essential characteristics examined by Stalin, the Maori cannot possibly be considered a nation except by artificially pasting this concept on to them.

This is hardly surprising. As Stalin shows, the process of the formation of nations belongs to the epoch of rising capitalism. ‘The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism was at the same time a process of amalgamation of people into nations. Such, for instance, was the case in Western Europe.’<sup>37</sup>

Of course, the Maori never went through any such stages in their development as slavery, feudalism and capitalism, as was the case with Western Europe. Nor were any alternative roads open to them. They were not in the epoch of rising capitalism – they still lived in the stone age – part neolithic, part paleolithic, the epoch of primitive communism.

As I showed earlier, the economic prerequisites were lacking for the Maori to break out of primitive communism into slave society and civilisation. But still, they had some attributes of a nation, although objectively they could not reach the status of one, and once British imperialism annexed the country there was no question of its achievement. Soon after the annexation they were rapidly outnumbered by Europeans, driven into the back country and swamplands, subject to high mortality through their lack of resistance to settler-introduced diseases, so that their population dropped to about 42,000 (King). Only in about 1960 did they constitute as much as ten per cent of the population. Now it is still only twelve per cent. How then should they be described? In our opinion, as an oppressed nationality, which is how we regard them in our programme.

Since World War 2, there has been a major shift of the Maori population to the cities, where they exist as wage workers or unemployed. Today the majority of Maori, 70 per cent of them, are part of the working class. Many, however, still retain links with their earlier maraes, and one cannot dismiss the Maori problem as of no consequence, as used to be the practice of the old Communist Party of New Zealand leadership.

Naturally, we regard the dictatorship of the proletariat as the principal question for the working class, including Maori workers. If we did otherwise we would not be Marxist-Leninists. Nevertheless, there is still a Maori question, arising not only in regard to land and language – although these are the two principal issues – but also in regard to discrimination still practised in various fields – housing, jobs, education, health, etc. Pacific Islanders’ experience is much the same, but I am confining this reply to the Maori question.

In our view there are certain immediate tasks facing genuine communists. In particular, a two-sided campaign is needed, addressing the question of Maori equality. The first is to educate Pakeha workers and democrats in understanding that anti-Maori propaganda is in the service of the exploiters; and second to educate Maori in the need to oppose



movements such as Syd Jackson's 'separate unionism' tactics which also split the workers to the advantage of the bourgeoisie. Our programme takes account of both approaches. The unity of Pakeha and Maori workers for socialist revolution has to be approached from both sides – combating racism among Pakeha workers, which is still only too common, as you must be aware, and combating Maori separatism in the working class.

Many Pakeha workers know little or nothing about Maori or early New Zealand history – including general New Zealand history. Such people often regard Maori land claims as unjustified demands for special treatment, to get money from the state, demands which they themselves cannot make. As for the general run of Maori people, they are imposed upon by tribal leaders like Latimer and the Maori Council, who are groomed for the role of a Maori bourgeoisie which they use to maintain not chiefly rule, but chiefly elitism for their own enrichment. They play the role of bell-wethers for the bourgeoisie, distorting history so as to adapt the Maori people to complete acceptance of past injustice and support for British and New Zealand colonialism.\*\*\*\*\* The Treaty of Waitangi was a legal cover for robbery and seizure of Maori tribal land. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were some Maori who recognised that character of the Treaty and agitated against it. Nowadays the chiefly elite praise it and claim it can be used for Maori benefit – they mean their own. So they participate in official celebrations and dangle the bait of everyone benefiting from a one-off payment to put an end to all Maori claims. This is a recipe for forcing the Maori to accept the rightness of imperialism and all its works.

In order to fight against imperialism and further the struggle for socialist revolution it is a duty of a Marxist-Leninist party to expose the falsification of history by the servants of imperialism and that includes the bourgeois academicians such as anthropologists of the Firth variety who persistently propagate bourgeois ideology. The struggle against this is part of the theoretical class struggle that has to be waged by the advanced workers as well as the economic and political struggle.

I suggest it is time you re-thought your position to see just where your stand leads you.

\* Waiata: a song or a song-poem

Engels, Origin of the Family, Preface to the 4th edn, 1891.

\*\* Sid Scott: General Secretary of the Communist Party of New Zealand from 1936 to 1951 approximately.

† Vic Wilcox: Scott's successor from 1951 to 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Lenin, VI, The State, coll. wks., vol. 29, p.473.

<sup>3</sup> Engels, F, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Marx-Engels sel. wks., 1951 edn, vol. 2, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, K, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Progress Publishers Moscow, Marx-Engels sel. wks., 1977 edn, vol. 1, pp. 328-329.

<sup>5</sup> Lenin, VI, What the 'Friends of the People' Are, coll. wks., vol. 1, p. 142.

\*\*\* Between 1915 and 1918. See The Ethnography of Malinowski, by Michael Young.

\*\*\*\* Gens: an extended kinship grouping.

<sup>6</sup> Engels, F, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Marx-Engels sel. wks., 1951 edn, vol. 2, p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 168.

\*\*\*\*\* Revisionist: One who propagates bourgeois ideology, attacking the basic principles of Marxism under the cloak of Marxist phraseology.

<sup>8</sup> Marx, K & Engels, F, Manifesto of the Communist Party, ch., 1, (footnote), sel. wks., vol. 1, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2 vols.

<sup>9</sup> Engels, F, Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, Marx-Engels sel. wks., 1951 edn, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Firth, Economics of the New Zealand Maori, 2nd edn, p. 119.

<sup>12</sup> Firth, *op. cit.* p. 377.

<sup>13</sup> Engels, F, Origin, Marx-Engels sel. wks., 1951 edn, p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> Engels, F, Origins, p. 195.

\*\*\*\*\* According to Sir Peter Buck in *The Coming of the Maori*, the Maoris reached the highest peak in Polynesia in the manufacture of clothing (p. 176). As well, 'New Zealand provided a rich variety of stone for the adze-makers ... The prize material was nephrite or greenstone', the hardest known stone which would take the keenest edge. (The adze was the principal tool throughout Polynesia. Maori chisels and drills were also very advanced). The prevalence of inter-tribal warfare led to the emergence of fortified pa (or village stronghold), unique to New Zealand, in which various building techniques were united to produce a qualitatively new construction.

In his book *The Stone Implements of the Maori* Elsdon Best compared Maori stone tools with others in both Polynesia and Melanesia and remarks 'the stone adzes of the Hawaiian islands appear to be much cruder than the Maori forms'.

<sup>15</sup> Engels, F, Origins, p. 171.

<sup>16</sup>Engels, F, Origins, p. 173.

<sup>17</sup>Engels, F, Anti-Duhring, part 2, ch. IV, 'The Force Theory'

<sup>18</sup>Engels, F, Origin, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> Engels, F, Origin, p. 236.

<sup>20</sup>Engels, F, Origin, pp. 238-239

\*\*\*\*\* Solon, a political leader in the Athenian State in ancient Greece

<sup>21</sup> Engels, F, Origins, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> Engels, F, Origins, pp. 247-248.

<sup>23</sup> King, M, Maori: A Photographic and Social History, pp. 73-74.

<sup>24</sup> King, M, op.cit. p. 74.

<sup>25</sup> Anthropology in the South Seas, eds Freedman & Geddes, p. 237.

<sup>26</sup> King, M, Maori, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>27</sup> ibid., p.161

<sup>28</sup> King, M, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> Sorrenson, MPK, Maori Origins and Migrations, 1989, p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> Sorrenson, MPK, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Lenin, VI, A Great Beginning, coll. wks., vol. 29, p. 421.

<sup>32</sup> Lenin, VI, The State and Revolution, coll. wks., vol. 25, pp. 388-389.

<sup>33</sup> See, eg Sorrenson, quoting Dr Pat Hohepa, p. 86. Also King on inventing the 'Great Fleet' myth, p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, Foreign Languages Publishing House, pamphlet edn, 1945, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> ibid., p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> ibid., p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p15.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Not in the original reply to our correspondent, a subsequent statement by National Government Minister in Charge of Treaty Negotiations Mr Graham is a revealing confirmation of the correctness of our view. He declared in May 1995 that: 'Government authority in New Zealand was based not on the Treaty itself but on subsequently successful British colonisation,' reported in the New Zealand Herald of 6 May 1995.

According to this report, 'Rejecting treaty-based calls for Maori sovereignty, he said the Government's authority was based on established fact rather than arguments over what was legal or even moral and just'.

Here there is no beating about the bush or the usual Government claim that the Treaty was one of partnership between the two peoples. It is an unvarnished admission that the Treaty was simply a cover for the reality of British colonialism. Arguments over legality, morality or justice? Tchah! They don't mean a thing. In the real world all that counts are imperialist legality, morality or justice.

Thus Graham justifies 150 years of exploitation and oppression which are standard practice for colonialism.