

## A Terrible Omission

by John Bellamy Foster

*Marx's Capital: A Student Edition*, edited and introduced by C. J. Arthur. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992, 384 pp. \$22.50.

Teaching Marx's *Capital*, even volume I, can be a daunting task. Reading the whole volume in any college class is usually impractical, since there would be little time to deal with any other material. In addition, today's students often expect slim volumes, and anything as imposing as *Capital* is bound to intimidate many. One answer is to incorporate the text into a course, while assigning certain selected pages. Even this, however, can be cumbersome and difficult.

C.J. Arthur's production of a student edition of volume I of *Capital* is therefore an event to be noted. Arthur previously edited a widely used abridgment of *The German Ideology*. His editing of *Capital*, volume I, conforms—with the exception of one terrible omission to be discussed below—to the same high standards. As E.J. Hobsbawm observes (on the back of the book),

Whatever the state of current politics, Karl Marx remains one of the great thinkers of the modern world. Chris Arthur has solved the problem of slimming down *Capital*, without tearing the fabric of

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Marx's argument or losing the flavour of his style, with exceptional success. All students will have reason to thank him.

The principles that Arthur utilized to reduce *Capital* to a readable length include: war on footnotes, eliminating polemical attacks on other thinkers, deleting some arithmetical examples, dropping some historical, statistical, and anecdotal material, and eliminating entire chapters. The translation is based on the original one of 1887, updated in a few places where emendations seemed particularly necessary.

Arthur claims that "this edition provides the reader with everything of theoretical value in Marx's *Capital*, together with a wealth of historical detail." Regretfully, I am forced to disagree. One of the sections of the book that is cut most severely is Part 8 on "So-Called Primitive Accumulation." Of the original 8 chapters in this section Arthur completely eliminates 4. One of these deleted chapters is Chapter 31, "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist," where Marx argues that,

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and the entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.

It seems to me rather sad that on the 500th anniversary of the invasion of the Americas, an abridged edition of Marx's *Capital* was produced that excluded the chapter containing his most important passages on this aspect of primitive accumulation. This was clearly no oversight but rather reflects a long-standing theoretical dispute about the relative importance of the two main elements of primitive accumulation that Marx discusses in *Capital*: (1) the expropriation of the agricultural laborers in Britain through the enclosures, (2) and the pillage of what is now called the Third World. Arthur's decision to delete Chapter 31, as well as much else in Part 8, no

doubt reflects his own position with respect to this theoretical and historical dispute. Yet, in my view, the exclusion of Marx's most famous discussion of the pillage of what was to become the periphery of the capitalist world leads to a fundamental distortion of the argument in *Capital* (since it suggests that the development of capitalism—and the industrial revolution in particular—was exclusively an internal affair). This not only misrepresents Marx but also history itself.

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*(Continued from inside back cover)*

Monthly Review Foundation is among the sponsors of a memorial service for E. P. Thompson to be held on December 12, 4 p.m., at the Ethical Culture Society, 64th Street and Central Park West. Dorothy Thompson, his widow and co-worker, will be there.

Planning is underway for the Sixth Conference of North American and Cuba Philosophers and Social Scientists, to be held in Havana, June 10-24. Anyone interested in attending or who would like further information should contact as soon as possible Cliff Durand, 1443 Gorsuch Ave., Baltimore MD 21218—phone: 410-243-3118.