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Iroquois Contributions to Modern Democracy and Communism

CAROL L. BAGLEY and JO ANN RUCKMAN

It would seem that there is another piece of the jigsaw puzzle of early colonial American History that has been omitted from the puzzle because it is American Indian. This paper deals with a combination of the influence of the Iroquois Great Law of Peace on American government and consideration of its possible influence on Russian government.

From the standpoint of historiography we are uncertain whether what follows is revisionist, revision of the revision, or a subsequent one. But it is usually acknowledged that the first major modern democracy was accomplished in North America with the American Revolution and the events leading to the Constitution of 1787. This historical assumption is rarely disputed, but the *date* of an accomplished democracy might be. There is, for example, persuasive evidence that North American democracy began between 300 to 500 years earlier with the Iroquois Law of the Great Peace and that this form of *representative* democracy influenced the formation of the colonial struggle to inaugurate the first modern constitutional democracy in the world—that of the United States Constitution of 1787.

There have been other well-known democracies, such as the

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Greek city-state, but these ancient forms were *direct* democracies needing the whole body of eligible citizens to participate. With their brief success and long decline they were supplanted by the Roman oligarchic republic and later the Roman Empire. For 2000 years there was no evident democracy, the known world being run mostly by absolute monarchs or oligarchies under the name of independent republics. This was the state of the world when our continent began to be colonized by Europeans. These colonizers came from non-democratic nations. But the colonies—perhaps because of the great distance from their main governing body—began to formulate their own charters and these were written charters granted by various crowns or companies. The combination of written colonial charters and the running of the colonies' own legislative assemblies, although both under modest pretensions and allegiances to the crown, allowed the colonists to be shaped by their contacts with Native Americans. The Iroquois influence was all the greater because these Native Americans had a well-operating form of confederation which functioned to maintain peace among their member nations and for defense against "others." These twin needs—peace among their colonies and defense against "others"—were also the most urgent needs of the colonists.

As most people no doubt know, the Iroquois League included five nations: the Mohawks or people of the flint, Oneidas or people of the stone, Onondagas or people of the mountain, Cayugas or people at the landing, and Senecas or great hill people. They were joined in 1712 by the Iroquoian-speaking Tuscaroras as these people were threatened from the South by White inroads into their territory in North Carolina. As a group they were thereafter dubbed the Six Nations by non-Indians as well as the People of the Longhouse.

Interestingly, the geographic location of the five Iroquois nations roughly follows the pattern of the rectangular Longhouse. See Chart I.

Some idea of the kind of society established by the Iroquois people is needed here, especially as it contrasts with that of the incoming European people and as that society is buttressed by a body of laws, in this case by the Iroquois Great Law of Peace. As Gary B. Nash points out,

CHART I
THE LONGHOUSE

CAYUGA
"People at the Landing"
(Oswego, NY)
Younger brother

SENECA
"Great Hill People"
(Rochester, NY area)
Keepers of the Western Door

ONONDAGA—"Firekeepers"
"People on the Mountain"
(Syracuse, NY)
Keepers of the Wampum Belts

MOHAWK
"People of the Flint"
(near Albany, NY)
Keepers of the Eastern Door

(Seneca, Onondaga and Mohawk are the three Older brothers)

ONEIDA
"People of the Standing Rock or Stone"
(Near Pennsylvania border)
younger brother

Iroquois society was not only matrilineal in social organization, but invested the women of the community with a share of the political power. Political authority in the villages derived from the *ohwachiras* at whose heads were the senior women of the community. It was these women who named the men representing the clans at village and tribal councils and who named the forty-nine sachems or chiefs who met periodically at Onondaga as the ruling council for the confederated Five Nations. . . . The political power of the women was not limited to the appointment of male representatives to the various ruling councils. When individual clans met, in a manner resembling the later New England town meeting, the senior women were fully in attendance, caucussing behind the circle of men who did the public speaking, lobbying with them, and giving them instructions. To an outsider it might appear that the men ruled, because it was they who did the public speaking and formally reached decisions. But their power was shared with the women. If the men of the village or tribal council moved too far from the will of the women who had appointed them, they could be removed, or "dehorned." . . . Thus power was shared between the sexes and the European idea of male dominancy and female subordination in all things was conspicuously absent in the Iroquois society.

In attempting to understand the nature of the Iroquois-European interaction it is useful to inquire into the development of the Iroquois "personality" and patterns of individual behavior. Psychologists tell us that most of our personality traits, our way of responding to people and events that surround us, are firmly rooted in our early upbringing. . . . The Iroquois and other woodlands people, no less than Europeans, designed child-rearing practices to transmit to their children knowledge and skills necessary for the survival of the society. . . . Thus Iroquois parents taught their children how to hunt, to make tools, to grow crops, and to identify plants and

animals, just as Englishmen taught their children the rudiments of everyday survival. . . .

One aspect of child-rearing on which European and Iroquoian cultures differed was in the attitude toward authority. In Iroquois society the autonomous individual, loyal to the group but independent and aloof rather than submissive, was the ideal. . . . They were not respected if they were dependent, submissive, or unduly cowed by authority. They were trained early in life, as Wallace has put it, "to think for themselves but to act for others." They were being prepared to enter an adult society which was not hierarchical, as in the European case, but where individuals lived on a more equalitarian basis, with power more evenly distributed among men and women or old and young than in European society. Because material possessions were not prized and private ownership of property was of no importance the competitive principle operated only insofar as his prestige as a hunter or warrior was concerned. . . . In European society, where material possessions were greatly coveted and where the social structure made elaborate distinctions between rich and poor, godly and ungodly, literate and nonliterate, male and female, and politically enfranchised and unenfranchised, far more attention was given to maintaining proper respect for authority. Submission to authority and the maintenance of hierarchical lines became principles around which child-rearing was organized.¹

In other words, "children were to be seen but not heard" and were disciplined quite rigidly. One might say that one of the two cultures could be called a "shame culture" wherein the mores involved honor and duty, with emphasis on being honorable and honest. Such was the Iroquoian culture. The other culture might be called a "guilt culture" wherein the emphasis was on an authoritarian hierarchy and materialistic gain since one could "advance" in status in the hierarchy somewhat through evidence of increased ownership of properties. The result of such a difference is interesting, to cite Nash further:

The approach to authority also differed for adult members of the society. Iroquois culture, like most Indian cultures of North America, had none of the complicated machinery of European society which operated to direct and control the lives of its members. No laws and ordinances, sheriffs and constables, judges and juries, or courts or jails—the apparatus of authority in European societies—were to be found in the northeast woodlands prior to European arrival. Yet the boundaries of acceptable behavior were firmly set. Though priding themselves on the autonomous individual, the Iroquois maintained a strict sense of right and wrong. Rather than relying on formal instruments of authority, however, they governed behavior by inculcating a strong sense of tradition and attachment to the group through communally performed rituals. . . . [But] He who stole another's food or acted invalorously in war was "shamed" by his people and ostracized from their company until he had atoned for his actions and demonstrated to their satisfaction that he had morally purified himself.²

To reinforce and ritualize this kind of society, the one hundred and seventeen sections of the Iroquois Law of the Great Peace delineate in considerable detail the exact ways in which the councils among the original five, and later six, nations function, although the Tuscaroras—as an adopted people and in accordance with the Great Law—did not participate actively in the operations of the entire League assembled. They had no voting power in that body. The Great Law's sections are grouped under such titles as Rights, Duties, Qualifications of the Statesmen; The Clans; The Symbols; Foreign Nations; Rights of the People; and Protection of the House, among others.

Usually the union of several self-governing units lies in their need for defense against a common enemy or enemies—as occurred among the New England colonies in their grouping together in 1643 into a voluntary twelve-article confederacy against the Dutch, French and Indians who opposed New England's ideas about expanding its borders. Unlike the Iroquois union, this effort failed due to lack of cooperation and the

ambitious dominance of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Greed for power and the resultant internal wrangling was too great for effective cooperation. There were also many other efforts and plans for some kind of colonial union from many origins, including, among others, William Penn's in 1696. But as Catherine Drinker Bowen points out, "few of the plans were adopted; none of them lasted."³ Yet, ideas of colonial union persisted. At the 1744 conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania the Onondaga Sachem, Canasatego, told the English,

Union and amity between the five nations have made us formidable. We are a powerful confederacy, and by your observing the same methods our wise forefathers have taken you will acquire fresh strength and power. Therefore, whatever befalls you, never fall out with one another.⁴

Ironically, such advice ultimately backfired against the contributor of it along with all other Indian peoples—since it was finally adopted. And the identifiable thread connecting the influence of this advice is Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin knew of Canasatego's words since it was his Philadelphia press which printed the Lancaster Treaty.⁵ Later, in 1751, after reading Archibald Kennedy's manuscript, "The Importance of Gaining and Preserving the Friendship of the Indians to the British Interest, Considered,"⁶ Franklin wrote to the printer, James Parker,

A voluntary Union entered into by the colonies themselves, I think, would be preferable to one impos'd by Parliament; for it would be perhaps not much more difficult to procure, and more easy to alter and improve, as Circumstances should require, and Experience direct. It would be a very strange thing, if six Nations of ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a Scheme for such a Union, and be able to execute it in such a Manner, as that it has subsisted Ages, and appears indissoluble; and yet that a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a Dozen English Colonies, to whom it is more necessary, and must be more advantageous; and who cannot be supposed to want an equal Understanding of Their Interests.⁷

This is an interesting tribute to "ignorant Savages." Perhaps, though, we can forgive Franklin somewhat since his admiration for Indian oratory, civility, courtesy and respect for Indian political ideas existed concurrently with that more conventional view and since he really did not have a *close* acquaintance with Native Americans except for treaty making. At least, late in his life, he said, "Almost every war between Indians and whites had been occasioned by some injustice of the latter toward the former."⁸ Long before this, however, Franklin's knowledge of the Iroquois form of government appears in letters to Cadwallader Colden, with whom he had extensive correspondence. Even before his Plan of Union, Franklin had requested and received copies of Colden's *History of the Five Indian Nations* in the fall of 1747, and on January 27, 1748 Franklin wrote to Colden that he had *read* them.⁹

Against this background of colonial movement toward union, Henry Steele Commager's remarks prefacing the Articles of Confederation in the 7th edition of *Documents of American History* are meaningful. He stated that these Articles "should be studied in comparison with the Albany Plan of Union and the Constitution."¹⁰ The Albany Plan of Union is that prepared by Franklin for the Albany Conference of 1754. Certainly the interrelationships of these three documents are important to understand the final one: the U.S. Constitution. How one led to the next, i.e., Albany Plan to Articles of Confederation to the U.S. Constitution, is generally accepted. According to Clinton Rossiter, "The Albany Plan [i.e., Franklin's] is a landmark on the rough road that was to lead through the first Continental Congresses and the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution of 1787."¹¹ The only other very important one—which Commager omitted—as a contributory document to the U.S. Constitution, is the Iroquois Law of the Great Peace! But of course that Commager omission was back in time, all the way back, in fact, to 1963 edition!

We can consider a kind of overview of these four documents and their interrelationships and results together. One important similarity is the Federal idea in all these documents, i.e., one general government within and under which each smaller governing unit such as colony or state or nation retained its own rules of governance. For example, the words "union" and its derivatives or "league" appear in all four documents. One part of section 55 of The Great Law of Peace reads:

A large bunch of shell strings, in the making of which the Five Nations League chiefs have equally contributed, shall symbolize the completeness of the union, and certify the pledge of the Nations represented by the chiefs of the League of the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca, that all are united and formed into one body, or union, called the Union of the Great Law which they have established.¹²

The Albany Plan of Franklin also sought to establish a union or confederation of colonies. In addition, Articles I, II and III of the Articles of Confederation, along with the preamble, include such words as "union" and "league." And in the Preamble to the Constitution the wording is similar: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union . . . and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

For rough comparisons of these four documents, both pyramidal and governmental, see Charts II and III, following.

CHART II
PYRAMIDAL STRUCTURES OF THE FEDERAL IDEA

Iroquois League	Albany Plan	Articles of Confederation	United States Constitution
Families	Families	Families	Families
Communities	Communities	Communities	Communities Cities
Seventeen Clans	Villages	Cities	Counties
Five (later, Six) Nations	Colonies	States	States
League or Confederation	Grand Council	United States	United States
	England		

Note: The above ignores population numbers.

CHART III

	IROQUOIS LEAGUE	ALBANY PLAN	ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION	UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION
EXECUTIVE	Chief Atotarho (Onondaga)	President-General: 1) appointed by Crown 2) veto power	None designated: done by committee	President: 1) elected by electoral college 2) veto power
	Honowirethon (Onondaga): 1) no vote 2) can confirm only	Speaker to succeed		Secretary of War
	Skanawate			
	Speaker elected each day from Mohawk, Seneca or Onondaga (three parties or branches)	Speaker chosen by Grand Council for six-week term	None designated	Speaker presides over House: elected by majority of representatives
	Form is bicameral: 1) three Older brothers—Mohawk Seneca and Onondaga Chiefs;	Grand Council: 1) 48 members—not more than seven or less than two from each colony;	Congress: Delegates appointed annually— a) states represented by no less than two	Form is bicameral: 1) Senate;

LEGISLATIVE	<p>2) two Younger brothers—Oneida and Cayuga Chiefs</p> <p>Free speech & debate; no taxing power</p>	<p>2) regulated by proportion of money to federal treasury</p> <p>Taxing power</p>	<p>or more than seven members; b) no one to serve more than three years in any six years</p> <p>Each state one vote; free speech & debate; taxing power</p>	<p>2) House of Representatives</p> <p>Free speech & debate; taxing power</p>
JUDICIAL	<p>All decisions unanimous: thus, oratory important</p> <p>Punishments: social</p>	<p>Each Colony</p>	<p>Each State: Congress— last appeal on territorial disputes</p>	<p>Supreme Court: trial by jury</p>
EACH UNIT UNDER FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	<p>Chief of Nation (five)</p> <p>War Chief of Nation (five)</p> <p>Men's Council Women's Council</p>	<p>Colonial Governor (appointed)</p> <p>Colonial civil establishments already existing</p>	<p>Governor of State</p> <p>State Assemblies existing; judicial existing</p>	<p>Governor of State</p> <p>Senate & House</p> <p>Judges</p>

The procedure that is used in the Council of the League to determine what the policy for the Five Nations will be is fascinating. In all cases this procedure is to be followed by the Council and involves seven separate steps:

1. All decisions start with the Mohawks. These Mohawk statesmen are divided into three groups and they must all consider the measure separately of one another and must arrive at a joint decision.

2. When the Mohawks have agreed on the outcome of the decision it is ready to go to the Senecas for consideration, in the same manner.

3. When the Senecas have had the question and agree with the Mohawks, they then give their opinion to the Oneida and Cayuga statesmen for their decision, again arrived at in the same manner.

4. After the Oneidas and Cayugas have agreed they turn their decision back to the Mohawks and the Senecas for their confirmation again.

5. At this time the Mohawks and the Senecas give the question to the two separate bodies comprised of the Onondaga statesmen for their decision. And this step operates like the veto power.

6. When the two bodies agree, then Atotarho gives the decision to Honowirethon to confirm their decision if it is unanimous.

7. Honowirethon then gives the decision of the Onondagas to the Mohawks and the Senecas so that the decision may be announced to the Council as the will of the Council and the policy of the League of Five Nations.¹³

Of course there are variations but it looks much like the *checks and balances* that one finds in studying the legislative process that appears in several of the three other documents before a decision may be rendered from the legislature.

Some consideration of the rights of the people of the League are here pertinent because these people are protected rather well by the Great Law through the provisions that are available to them. One example is section 93, which reads:

Whenever an especially important matter or a great emergency is presented before the League Council and the nature of the matter affects the entire body of

Five Nations, threatening their utter ruin, then the chiefs of the League must submit the matter to the decision of their people and the decision of the people shall affect the decision of the League Council. This decision shall be a confirmation of the voice of the people.¹⁴

Also the people of the League have the initial power to render outcomes such as treason, impeachments and bring to the attention of the Council the will of the people.

Under the power of the people in the matter of treason by a member or members of the League's Council, they can go through their war chiefs and remove all of the chiefs in the Council, if those chiefs don't heed their bidding. Section 59 of the Great Law states that, if the Council members are not heeding the Laws of the League, the General Council of Women of the Five Nations shall warn the chiefs and if this fails, the men of the Five Nations shall command the war chiefs, and, if this fails, the men of the Five Nations shall command the War Chiefs to enter the Council and warn the erring chiefs. If the chiefs do not heed the third warning of the War Chiefs, often the men in their council shall decide whether to depose the chiefs or to club them to death. Should the men decide on the first course, then the War Chiefs will depose them as chiefs of their Nations and as Council members. If the men decide that living is too good for them, then the War Chiefs sit by the erring chiefs and hold in their hands beads (wampum) of black. If the erring chiefs still do not heed the warning, the War Chiefs drop the black wampum and the men club the chiefs to death. All this is done in a prescribed, ritualized fashion according to the Great Law.

The League of Five Nations has a very quick way of doing justice and it seems that there is little backlog of cases in their judicial system. This is a strong power that the people have in that they can depose or literally destroy their leaders in the Council.

If any leaders are put out of office or die, there of course would have to be a new leader. The Great Law of Peace had given the power to the people to install the Chiefs. Only the Noble Women of the Clan could nominate a son or family member to be a chief, however. There are between forty-eight

and fifty Noble Women families in the clans, and these women have the sole power to suggest who the chief is going to be for their Nations or for their Clans because they alone hold the title to the Chieftainship; and when a Chief dies, or is deposed, or sets his title away during war, the title reverts back to the women of his Clan since they hold the title to his Chieftainship. This title is always protected by the women and they have the authority on who will wear the title and who won't. Also, as we have seen, they have the first priority in the process of removing it. The process of installing a new chief is not too long but, as section 54 stipulates, the women of the Clan who are of the noble status counsel together to nominate a son to be chief. Then the men of the clan offer their approval. It is now forwarded to the Council of the League where the one designated is installed as the new chief.

One of the most powerful rights that a citizen can have is that of having a hand in the policy making of a government, even if the Council or government leaders will not heed the wishes or the wisdom of the people. With this in mind the Great Law of Peace has left the Iroquois people with a very powerful weapon, that of proposing their own will in the laws even though the leaders fail to do so. This right is like the initiative process found in some of today's state governments or the making of an amendment to the law so that the will of the people will be listened to. As it reads in section 16:

If the conditions which shall arise at any future time call for an addition to or change of this law, the case shall be carefully considered and if a new beam seems necessary or beneficial, the proposed change shall be decided upon, and if adopted, shall be called, "Added to the Rafters."¹⁵

This procedure is very simple in that the clans can propose to the War Chiefs what they want and the War Chiefs must tell the Council their wishes in the matter. The Great Law failed to say, however, that the Council must take the will of the people. But, no doubt, the Chiefs would not go against the will of the people for fear of the treason power that the people enjoy or for that matter the impeachment power that the women have. So this right does give the people of the League a voice in the government and how it functions. This fundamental right in

the Great Law giving the people these powers is of paramount importance if one is to classify this regime as a limited representative kind of government, which it seems to resemble more and more.

The preceding governing structures of the League, as Peter Farb viewed them, is that

The League favorably impressed the White settlers, and some historians believe it to have been one of the models on which the Constitution of the new United States of America was based. In organization the League did somewhat resemble the union of the original thirteen colonies [or vice versa], but in other ways it was closer to the United Nations. The League had a constitution, which was orally transmitted, but it could not levy taxes, and it lacked a police force to carry out its decisions. [But, were they needed in the League form of government?] The hereditary leaders, the Council of Sachems, were concerned solely with external matters, such as war and peace and the making of treaties. The Council could not interfere in the affairs of the individual tribes—a situation that is analogous to the small influence the federal government originally had over the internal affairs of the thirteen states. Each tribe had its own sachems, but they also were limited in their powers; they dealt with the tribe's relations with other tribes and not with clan matters.¹⁶

The Law of the Great Peace may also have had significant influence in another part of the world in addition to that indicated on the United States Constitution.

Frederick Engels published *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in 1884.¹⁷ He regarded the writing of this work as "the execution of a bequest," for, as he noted in the preface to the first edition,

no less a man than Karl Marx had made it one of his future tasks to present the results of [Lewis H.] Morgan's researches in the light of the conclusions of his own . . . materialistic examination of history, and thus to make clear their full significance.¹⁸

When he died, Marx left behind his critical notes on Morgan's *Ancient Society*, and Engels used these notes as his guide in writing *The Origin of the Family*. The extent to which his work was dependent upon Morgan is clear from its subtitle: the full title of Engels's work is *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. In his attempt to illuminate the earliest stages in the evolution of human society Engels adopted Morgan's scheme of evolution and placed it within the framework of Marxist theory, using dialectical materialism to explain social change in primitive societies. He selected from Morgan's studies the material he needed to support his own theories of social change and supplemented it to some degree with borrowings from Johann J. Bachofen.

Morgan's work was most important to Engels in his discussion of the evolution of the family and other kinship groupings, and it was Morgan's work on the Iroquois which Engels regarded as his greatest contribution to an understanding of prehistoric kin groups. Engels wrote of Morgan that

in the kinship groups of the North American Indians he has found the key to the most important and hitherto insoluble riddles of earliest Greek, Roman and German history.¹⁹

In other words, Engels believed that in his study of the Iroquois Morgan had discovered a previously missing link between more primitive social structures and the social organization found among the Homeric Greeks. The Greeks of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he argued, could only be properly understood in the light of Morgan's researches on the Iroquois, since the Greeks of that period were only beginning to emerge from "barbarism" to "civilization" and many traces of social arrangements resembling those of the Iroquois still remained. It perhaps goes without saying that Marx and Engels felt no qualms about using the Iroquois to illustrate the social institutions typical of that stage of development labelled "barbarism" and then skipping on to the ancient Greeks as an example of the succeeding stage of social evolution.

The second chapter to Engels's work, entitled simply "The Family," is in large part devoted to a discussion of the development of the "pairing family" among the Iroquois—the "pairing family" being, as Morgan had argued, the intermediate stage

between "group marriage" and the monogamous family. Engels's third chapter is entitled "The Iroquois Gens" and is given over to a discussion not only of the gens ("clan" in modern anthropological terminology) but also of the phratry, an alliance of several gentes, and of the tribe, an alliance of several phratries. He also discussed in this chapter the Iroquois confederacy, which he regarded as a forerunner of the institution of the state.

Objective though he tried to be, Engels's admiration for these various Iroquois institutions comes through plainly. The "pairing family" of the Iroquois he considered a superior institution to the later monogamous family, which, he insisted, involved "the subjugation of the one sex by the other" and signaled the beginning of "a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole previous prehistoric period."²⁰ By contrast to the monogamous family the Iroquois "pairing family" was still a relatively loose arrangement which could be dissolved on the initiative of either partner. Moreover, it existed within the context of a "communistic household," and "communistic housekeeping," according to Engels, "means the supremacy of women in the house." The status of women under such arrangements was, said Engels, "not only free, but honorable,"²¹ and, indeed, final authority within the communistic household rested with the women. As an indication of this authority, Engels cited the missionary, Ashur Wright, who had written of the Iroquois that

Usually, the female portion ruled the house. . . . The stores were in common; but woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too shiftless to do his share of the providing. No matter how many children, or whatever goods he might have in the house, he might at any time be ordered to pick up his blanket and budge; and after such orders it would not be healthful for him to attempt to disobey. The house would be too hot for him.²²

According to Engels, the status of women in Iroquois society—a topic of great interest to him—rested in part on the Iroquois's custom of tracing descent through the female line. Engels believed that matrilineality was bound to occur at a certain stage in social development—at a point when certainty in regard to paternity was still not possible, and before the

development of private property which in his view was responsible for the appearance of both patriarchy and patrilineality. Again Engels used the Iroquois as an illustration of the necessity of matrilineality at a particular stage of social evolution.

Part of the reason for the power of the women within the communistic household, Engels argued, was that each household would be related, while the men would be outsiders, brought in from other gentes. Matrilineality also helped to explain the equality of women with men within the organization of each gens. Engels pointed out that each gens had its own council and men and women participated in this council on an equal basis.

While Engels went to great length to stress the favorable position of women among the Iroquois, he lavished even greater admiration upon the Iroquois confederacy. He set forth the major principles of the "public constitution" of the Iroquois, as he called it (e.g., "The Great Law of Peace"), then went on to emphasize the point that the Iroquois confederation still did not constitute a state because "the state presupposes a special public power separated from the body of the people"²³ and Engels did not find such a separation in the Iroquois confederacy. In a paragraph which can only be characterized by the word "rapturous," Engels wrote in glowing terms of the virtues of the confederacy. "What a wonderful constitution it is," he exclaimed, "no soldiers, no gendarmes or police, no nobles, kings, regents, prefects, or judges, no prisons, or law-suits."²⁴ He went on to conclude his discussion of the Iroquois with this final tribute to their social organization:

The land belongs to the tribe . . . yet there is no need for even a trace of our complicated administrative apparatus. . . . The decisions are taken by those concerned. . . . There cannot be any poor or needy—the communal household and the gens know their responsibilities toward the old, the sick, and those disabled in war. All are equal and free—the women included. There is no place yet for slaves. . . . And what men and women such a society breeds is proved by the admiration inspired in all white people who have come into contact with unspoiled Indians, by the personal dignity, uprightness, strength of character, and courage of these barbarians.²⁵

Engels's admiration for the tribes of the confederacy clearly stemmed from the fact that their social organization in many ways resembled the type of social organization which Marx and Engels hoped eventually to see realized with the future establishment of a communist society, when once again there would be no state and the people would manage their own affairs without the intervention of authorities of any sort. Engels added, however, that the Iroquois social organization was, whatever its numerous virtues, doomed to disappear because the existence of the society "presupposed an extremely undeveloped state of production" and an "almost complete subjection to [the] strange incomprehensible power" of nature.²⁶ Moreover, "outside the tribe was outside the law" and "tribe was at war with tribe."²⁷ In other works, while the communist society of the future would in many respects resemble Iroquois society, it would differ from it in that it would rest upon a highly productive economy, man's control over the forces of nature, and the brotherhood of all men, bringing with it universal peace. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the Iroquois Confederacy came closer than any other historical society to approximating Marx and Engels's vision of the future communist utopia.

While Marxists today still consider Engels's *Origin of the Family* as one of the basic works of the Marxist canon, Marxist anthropologists and sociologists have been forced to accommodate Engels's theories to the vast accumulation of anthropological and sociological data which has accrued since his day. While holding his work to be "fundamentally sound," they have moved far beyond his fascination with the Iroquois in their search for the origins of social institutions and their continuing refinement of his theories. But Engels's work is still the starting point for Marxist investigations into the nature of the family and of primitive societies, and through his work both Morgan and the Iroquois live on in Marxist circles.

In conclusion, the influence of the Iroquois Law of the Great Peace has not yet been fully incorporated into American and world historiography as it should be. Much remains to be done.

NOTES

1. Gary B. Nash, *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), pp. 20-22.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

3. Catherine Drinker Bowen, *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Scenes from the Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974), p. 97.

4. *Ibid.* p. 98.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Benjamin Franklin, *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 20 Vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961), Vol. 4, pp. 114-121.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

8. Bowen, p. 98.

9. Franklin, Vol. 3, p. 272.

10. Henry Steele Commager, *Documents of American History*, 7th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 111.

11. Clinton Rossiter, "The Political Theory of Benjamin Franklin," in *Benjamin Franklin: A Profile*, ed. Esmond Wright (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), pp. 179-180.

12. *White Roots of Peace, The Great Law of Peace of the Longhouse People* (New York: Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne via Roosevelt, 1971), Sec. 55.

13. Charles G. Clark, a former student and political science major, now assistant to the President of Idaho State University, consolidated this list from the longer forms in *The Great Law of Peace* and made several other suggestions that have been incorporated into this paper.

14. *The Great Law of Peace*, Sec. 93.

15. *Ibid.*, Sec. 16.

16. Peter Farb, *Man's Rise to Civilization: The Cultural Ascent of the Indians of North America*, 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), p. 101.

17. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). All subsequent references are to this edition.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

27. *Ibid.*

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