

# NST

## Nature, Society, and Thought

a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism

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Nature, Society, and Thought

**NST**

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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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## **Appeal for *NST* Sustainers<sup>^</sup>**

*Nature, Society, and Thought* is now in its third year of publication. The comments we have received from our readers indicate that we have been fulfilling their expectations. To maximize the accessibility of the journal, we have kept our subscription rates relatively low. A journal such as ours, however, is heavily dependent on multiuser (library) subscriptions to defray a part of the cost of publication. As many of you are aware, library budgets have been sharply curtailed in recent years. Libraries have also found that new journals often cease publication after a few issues and are therefore hesitant to take on new subscriptions until they are convinced of the lasting character of the journal. In this situation, our income from subscriptions does not yet cover the cost of publication. We have been meeting the publishing deficit by applying revenues from other activities of the Marxist Educational Press. But since these too do not adequately cover the cost of operations we cannot continue this practice without weakening our book publishing and conference programs. We are therefore appealing to our readers to become *NST* sustainers. While we appreciate contributions in any amount, we ask you to consider becoming a regular contributor by pledging a tax-deductible annual contribution of \$100 or more. We shall express our appreciation with a complimentary subscription to *NST*.

## Editorial

### On Reading Literature

For many, reading *Nature, Society, and Thought* is a dialectical process, not a series of mechanical or random responses. As a typical (?) reader of the journal, perhaps you start by identifying and categorizing the content. In parallel or sequentially, you may relate the new and/or the familiar you already know of the subject. You may become involved or disengaged. You may confirm or challenge statements, propositions, or assertions. Perhaps you puzzle over apparent ambiguities. With some attention to style and organization, which may or may not make the material accessible, quotable, or discussible, you judge and evaluate the articles. How significant? How original? How useful? How current? Unconcerned about the theory of literary composition, you have acquired and consciously or implicitly make use of categories, perspectives, and standards of the written word as part of your intellectual equipment. This multi-dimensional, interactive process of reading the journal, then, may provide information, generate ideas, and stimulate questions, curiosity, and interior monologue.

But how dialectical is our reading of imaginative literature? Our expectations and entire reading posture are different when we deal with fiction, poetry, drama, essays, and biography. The forms have different purposes, make different demands, entail different sensitivity, and yield different insights from those of expository, descriptive, or argumentative texts. Certainly, satisfying the unique human need for aesthetic pleasure is worthwhile. We know that in its richness literature extends over the entire range of human experience. We recognize the way literature transmits major features of every society's culture. It is not accidental that people learn about and remember more historical events and personalities from historical fiction than from history books. Similarly, after formal education is over, readers of literature think more about more philosophical issues (especially moral codes and standards) and acquire more vivid understanding of individual behavior and patterns of social behavior from

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literature than from textbooks and courses. Not only does literature draw on all areas of knowledge, but it serves them all in its own way. Yet its directly didactic function is perhaps its least significant and effective one. Nor is the analysis of literary form the best approach to cultivating appreciation or understanding of its effects. The fact that these two features have been prominent in education (sometimes to the exclusion of all others) is unfortunate. Aside from what we may have learned from a few exceptional teachers, we develop most of our tastes and preferences independently, from our *direct* responses to literature. But there are additional avenues to broadening and deepening our involvement with literature.

*Nature, Society, and Thought* has published articles on experiences in reading materials which are offered or required in higher education and plans to publish more in future issues. This issue contains three articles relevant to the functions of literature: one offers a new look at a significant twentieth-century poet whose political views and commitment have been ignored or downplayed; another demonstrates the contribution of discourse analysis and the methods of literary criticism originating in the examination of literature but fruitfully extended to history and politics, in this case relating to the Middle East; and a third reveals the biases, prejudices, and stereotypes permeating journalistic accounts of Central America written by two novelists.

Beyond the specific insights on these subjects, we believe that a variety of techniques, categories, and analyses can make the active, many-sided engagement with literature a richer, more enjoyable experience. Part of the effective power of literature is the unconscious absorption by readers of the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values of writers. We are not satisfied when the assumptions and limitations of the writers are left unexamined or hastily separated into "acceptable" or "unacceptable." At the same time, more rounded responses must increase the gratification contributed by literature. [

We look forward to discussion of issues raised by the papers. In addition, we are interested in receiving manuscripts on questions such as socialism and literature, censorship, representation of reality, utopianism, pornography, the propaganda of literature, and any others of concern to our readers. Your comments and suggestions are most welcome. We wish you productive reading.

Leo Auerbach

## Media/Mediation: Central America According to the New Journalists

Claudia Schaefer

If culture can be defined as the constant production of meaning and identity in and of social experience, then how should one react to Joan Didion's evaluation of El Salvador in the 13 March 1983 issue of the *New York Times* as being as close as one can get to "the cultural zero," a dark "frontier" land where both human beings and their constructs (such as the National University) are overgrown by vegetation and the "lights of culture" are as easily extinguished as the bulbs on the cross Didion sees in the cathedral of San Salvador (1983, 78–79)? Can culture literally stop being produced, as the apocalyptic tone of these statements seems to reflect? Or does the observation of a cultural "void" reveal more about the individual sending out this message than it actually transmits about Central America?

In this brief article I propose to examine some of the problematics attached to what Timothy Brennan terms the "cosmopolitans" (1989, viii), that is to say the intellectual voices which mediate between First and Third-World cultures (especially under the guise of the mass media), those which function as movable bridges spanning multiple borders with such ease, those "allowed a flirtation with change that ensure[s] continuity, a familiar strangeness, a trauma by inches" (Brennan 1989, viii–ix), those who "read the texts" of other cultures for us (or, democratically, with us). The "cosmopolitan" negotiates culture in two ways: by authoritatively maneuvering around in it, and then by reporting "back home" images gleaned from this access to convince or "sell" the public on the validity of these interpretations. Given the popularity of Didion's book *Salvador* (more recently produced in a film version) and the international media obsession of late with Salman Rushdie, I

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propose to focus my discussion on Didion's *Salvador* and Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile*.

At a time when more and more analysis has been dedicated to scrutinizing the ideological value of the nonfiction novel—what John Beverley calls the “postfictional” (1989, 26)—I would like to consider what may be viewed as the flip side of these issues: the “new” journalism or what has variously been referred to as “topical” (Brennan 1989, 62), “para” (Macdonald 1965), or “literary” (Sims 1984) journalism. A number of novelists-turned-journalists or journalists-turned-novelists have stated as their mission the blurring of boundaries between “news” and “storytelling,” pitting “literary” journalism against the so-called formulaic, conventional or “straight” variety (the last term belongs to Hollowell 1977, 22). This project is essentially a liberal one, as I hope to make evident shortly. As what Robert Scholes calls the new “hystorians” (1968, 37) since “they record the *hysteria* of contemporary life” (Hollowell 1977, 23), intellectuals such as Didion and Rushdie (and Tom Wolfe, Carlos Fuentes, or Mario Vargas Llosa, I might add)<sup>1</sup> have embraced what they see as the liberating fictional elements latent in reportage to freely represent themselves as cultural spokespersons in the act of—to paraphrase Scholes—“imagining their way to the truth” (1968, 37). One of the obvious flaws underlying this process, however, is that while they purportedly trash “objectivity” and the façade of truthfulness of journalistic writing, they simultaneously use the truth function of the news while reneging on any “pact” with an objective stance. The free admission or liberal confession of prejudice is consumed in the mass market as incontrovertible fact, implying serious ramifications of reinscribing the authorial function on a text in direct opposition to what Beverley addresses as the political and ideological agenda of “the erasure of the function, and thus also of the textual presence, of the ‘author’” (1989, 17) in, for instance, the *testimonio*. But can *both* types of texts be consumed as somehow representing fact or “truth” in a less-than-careful but perhaps “well-intentioned” First World quest for information or understanding? The question is quite disturbing. But if the uncritical acceptance of “eyewitness” accounts purporting to immerse the reader in the “real” history of a region juxtaposes these texts on bookstore shelves—can this signal a parallel archiving in popular thought?

Didion's *Salvador* and Rushdie's *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* are political diaries or memoirs—more akin than anything to

travel literature or picaresque journeys to exotic lands—complete with notations of dates and venues, an offshoot of the topical journalistic activity in which they frequently engage while at the same time a curiously distanced account of what Rushdie calls “film-set unreality” (1987, 17), connected by him from the outset with fantasy *Utopias of the European Conquest* and by Didion with the same “magic current of phrases” and “unbounded power of eloquence” echoed by Joseph Conrad in her epigraph taken from *Heart of Darkness*. The stage is set by each as they saturate themselves in the culture to be “reported,” attempting to become familiar with what is “different” and simultaneously establishing their credentials as experts to do so. To this end, the novelist-reporters emphasize the careful research done beforehand (for Didion, this consists of consulting the U.S. embassy and official government White Papers on the region; for Rushdie as well as Didion it signifies reading García Márquez’s *Hundred Years of Solitude* in order to project some peculiar type of assimilable “magical realism” on the environment<sup>2</sup> and the cultural immersion effected by actual travel to Central America (in Didion’s case, two weeks in El Salvador in 1982; in Rushdie’s, three weeks in Nicaragua in July of 1986 at the invitation of the Asociación Sandinista de Trabajadores Culturales—the ASTC—on the seventh anniversary of the Sandinista victory).

In their self-professed roles as mediators of national-liberation struggles for the First World, whose consumption of their reporting sustains these activities, these two intellectuals pass through the airports in Nicaragua and El Salvador as transitions into another dimension. Calling the airfield “splendidly isolated” (1983, 13), Didion reads this step as the first in a journey outside history; interestingly enough, Rushdie follows suit in his opening remarks, which predispose the reader to bracket Latin America outside familiar contexts: he first cites references from the Havana airport’s tobacco map to a “fantasy” world encountered by Columbus (1987, 15), then proceeds to establish Central America as a metaphorical “darker text” (1987, 15) as portrayed in the violent, bloody images of a Pablo Neruda poem. The key in both cases is the first-person account of the “cosmopolitan.” The tenor of the ensuing discussion of Central American scenes and figures is tinged by their respective decisions to compose their cultural “portraits” from a point “beyond” or “outside of” history. Like a photographic image which despite its powerful visual impact can be used to isolate an event from an adequate context, Didion and Rushdie propose just

such isolation for their reports. Here are two examples from Didion's text and one from *The Jaguar Smile* which demonstrate this process of disarticulation of images:

The visitor to Salvador learns immediately to concentrate [on certain details], to the exclusion of past or future concerns, as in a prolonged amnesiac fugue. (1983, 14)

[Here,] time itself tends to contract to the here and now. (1983, 71)

What follows... is a portrait of a moment, no more, in the life of that beautiful, volcanic country: ... a moment, but, I believe, a crucial and revealing one, because it was neither a beginning nor an end, but a middle, ... a time when all things, all the possible futures, were still (just) in the balance. (1987, 13)

Just as Didion comments on Central Americans' "distorted" concept of history and inability to perceive "straightforward" events (1983, 67), so she herself distorts what she views and reconstructs for us. What follows are, in reality, authoritatively described images of life and death that are *recognizable* (dead bodies, poverty-stricken peasants, teeming bazaars, soldiers), but whether the reader's *comprehension* of these images goes beyond static perception to agency or responsibility is another question entirely.<sup>3</sup> If this is indeed a "magical" land, "a state in which no ground is solid, no depth of field reliable, no perception so definite that it might not dissolve into its reverse" (Didion 1983, 13), then both history and geography must fragment into chaos, not continuity or coherence. Rather than organization, orchestration, or relations of cause and effect, Central America is reduced to a convenient shorthand of inherent instability full of scenarios allowing for passionate pleas for "freedom and democracy." One must understand Rushdie's "depression" after "hitting a wall" (1987, 47) on certain topics with Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal in these terms; given the reporter's cultural agenda, he must inevitably conclude that Peru was "a flawed democracy of the right" and Nicaragua "a flawed democracy of the left" (1987, 49). Both have in common aspirations to some vaguely construed notion of "the democratic" as yet unreached by either (and perhaps, for Rushdie, unreachable). Some of these revealing occasions (a series of cultural epiphanies) take the form of confrontations with Miguel D'Escoto over censorship of the

(Rushdie 1987, 63), anonymous body dumps as tourist sites (“difficult but worth the detour” [Didion 1983, 20]), Managua as a paradoxical “living corpse” (Rushdie 1987, 16), visits to Somoza’s bunker and Hope Somoza’s bathroom (now the office of the minister of culture [Rushdie 1987, 45]), and berating Ernesto Cardenal for his “uncritical” stance on Cuba, a situation about which Rushdie takes the opportunity to express his “serious reservations” (1987, 46). In these two versions, Central America appears less to be a cultural “void” than a sick social body, “a temporarily fevered republic in which the antibodies of democracy [need] only be encouraged,” in Didion’s view (1983, 96). Society need not be *changed* (that word that makes the First World quake) but merely “cured” and brought back to “normal.”

How to do this when individuals in what Didion seems to see as a play of sorts are no more than ghosts, leaving behind faint traces of their perfume in taxis (1983, 41); when there are no real “stories” to tell but only a “*noche obscura*” and a feeling of “sleepwalking” (1983, 36;40), in which the lights of intelligence flicker and die; when events recede into oblivion even as they occur in fleeting sequences like stereopticon images, since Didion does not seize them to articulate them into intelligible structures (doing so would imply ideological articulation and demystification), but she concludes instead that “actual information [is] hard to come by in El Salvador, perhaps because this is not a culture in which a high value is placed on the definite” (1983, 61). In order to articulate them at all, Rushdie must appeal to terms more familiar, appropriate, and “tasteful” to his readers. *Nicaragua libre*, for example, is only apprehended through reference to personalization, a reduction to the familiar and familial. He confesses: “I’ve always had a weakness for synchronicity . . . [the new Nicaragua] was born exactly one month after my own son” (1987, 11). Nicaragua and El Salvador cannot stand on their own terms; they are dependent on these transcultural interpreters for mediation and meaning. For both Rushdie and Didion there are self-fulfilling prophecies either because Nicaragua is a “volcanic” culture ready to erupt into prototypical violence at any moment or because El Salvador is reduced to a series of “incidents” (Didion 1983, 22) in cyclical time, a “mirage” or “political tropic alien to us” (Didion 1983, 96, emphasis added) and therefore incapable of producing any “culture” as Others would have it. We must conclude, then, that culture “stops” when one no longer finds the “recognizable” that

one *expects* to find, when the Other as object ceases to reflect the identity of the subject. Consequently, the cultural “void” must emanate from the First World’s visions and values, not from the Third World, upon which its image is imposed. The Third World is like a celluloid transparency which is either overexposed (dissolving into a field of ethereal light and incorporeality) or underexposed (a “dark text” like the matter in a black hole), never in focus.

As floating intermediaries charged with telling “strange stories in familiar ways” (Brennan 1989, 36) for the consumption of a geographically (and often culturally) distant public, both Rushdie and Didion must *select* what to present and *how* to represent it within the general parameters of First World notions of taste. To be popular, salable, and “appealing,” as Hollowell notes about literary journalism (1977, 39), these stories/reports must answer the needs of the First World’s aesthetic and political agendas. The manner in which this is done in *The Jaguar Smile* and *Salvador* is by means of the reduction of Central American conflict and societies in transition to two *topoi*. It is either a question of language—what Rushdie calls “the war of the words” (1987, 67)—or a case of family feud. Reminiscent of North American journalist Shirley Christian’s 1985 book entitled *Revolution in the Family*, which portrayed the Nicaraguan Revolution—complete with a cast of “major figures”—as nothing more than a “glitch” in the relationships between the Chamorro-Cardenal-Somoza families, *Salvador* sacrifices the larger coherent vision of social change for the solitary figure. For instance, there is the printer named Barriere, who is the grandson of a former Salvadoran dictator and who offers the “cosmopolitan” Didion what she calls a “special perspective” (1983, 52) on the country and whose “perfect unaccented English” signals a “higher [degree of] reasonableness” (1983, 55) than others’ apparently “accented” views. Then there is her emphasis on the personal vendettas among the various members of clans such as the Magañtas and D’Aubuissons. The obvious trouble with this reductionist vision is that it carries with it a defense of the individual capriciousness of the patriarch within such a structure—the bourgeois concept of family, whether the head be the United States or the state—to whom others are made accountable by force, not reason. This scheme inherently denies any role to the “ungovernable masses” or “children” as potential agents of history. For his part, Rushdie reduces the political figures of the post-Somoza Nicaraguan government and its allies to dehistoricized images: Miguel D’Escoto is a “formidable priest...

[who] reminded me of Friar Tuck" (1987, 63); Tomá Borge is "a tiny gnome with a large cigar" (1987, 57); Julio Cortázar is no more than "the giant" (1987, 103) in the marketplaces at the side of Borge. Such are the reports of a novelist-journalist who is privy to "inside" views of other cultures. We must ask ourselves just what has been made accessible to us as a result of these "portraits."

+But it is in the reduction of Central American culture to a struggle over language that both Didion and Rushdie reveal most their mediating voices as negotiators between "Worlds." For Rushdie the relationship between the United States and Nicaragua is merely a matter of a "secular struggle between two kinds of discourse, vying for supremacy" (1987, 67), a dispute that is unresolvable until and unless press censorship is lifted. Therein lies the entire liberal scenario of multiple voices. One need not listen to other voices, just let them speak. Didion's opinions coincide with Rushdie's on this issue. She sees meaning constricted to such a level that language no longer seems to communicate at all and facts cease to exist (this is the "truth" she reports back to us). "The only logic is that of acquiescence," the reader is told by this witness (Didion 1983, 13); "language has always been used a little differently in this part of the world," she reports with authority (Didion 1983, 64, emphasis added). Is this not just what First World culture wants to hear? Does it not make "us" feel more secure about getting a handle on "them"? After all, when we pinpoint the central focus of historical issues as "language differences" can we not resolve all of our cultural "differences" on paper? By the time her two weeks are up, Didion has proved to herself that neither side understands the rules of this "game," that "we had been drawn, both by a misapprehension of the local rhetoric and by the manipulation of our own rhetorical weaknesses, into a game we did not understand" (1983, 96). Didion's own choice of language, becoming the intermediary or "referee" of diplomatic or linguistic "games," boggles the mind. But even Rushdie's attempts at linking together on some general level the "discourse of the Third World" by juxtaposing the East and West Indies—through the "translation" of his own "sensitivity" and "consciousness" (1987, 12) in scenes reported by "eyes trained in India and Pakistan" (1987, 17)—only point out once again that it is his own persona assuming a rhetorical "view from underneath," as he states in the prologue (1987, 12), which is functioning in this text

As “consciences” of the First World or self-appointed “credible” reporters (not to mention constructors) of images of Central American culture, these intermediaries depart at the last moment for more “comfortable” cultural climes; they are ones where “culture” must still be produced, one surmises. This is their ultimate personalization of “liberty and democracy”: listening to the voices and then retiring to a distance to report not on what those voices said but rather on what those voices “really” mean. We read Rushdie’s account of his thoughts during the flight back to Europe after a conversation with a Nicaraguan woman self-exiled in Paris. He writes:

We parted in Madrid, and returned to our separate lives, two migrants making our way in this West stuffed with money, power, and things, this North that taught us how to see from its privileged point of view. But maybe we were the lucky ones; we knew that other perspectives existed. We had seen the view from *elsewhere* (1987, 170, emphasis added)

Has each of these “cosmopolitan” reporters told us more about Central American culture, then, or about how cultural images are produced and manipulated? And have we not also learned how the so-called “hybrid” genres such as “literary journalism” support and sustain dominant ideological schemes under the guise of “truth”?

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## NOTES

1. The case of Vargas Llosa’s political “conversion” and its reflection in his discourse is evident in his recent economically authoritative stance of “Entre la libertad y el miedo” [Between freedom and fear] from the newspaper *La Nación*, reprinted later under the auspices of the Bank of Boston. For a First World mass media interpretation of this novelist/politician, one need only consult the *New York Times Magazine*, which recently included an article on Vargas Llosa entitled “Can a Novelist Save Peru?” by Gerald Marzorati.

2. Rushdie concludes: "In Matagalpa, Macondo [the mythical city #of the Buendías in García Márquez's novel] did not seem so very far away" (1987, 75).
3. I am indebted to Robin Andersen's sensitive and perceptive essay for suggesting to me the idea of "recognizability." Andersen writes that the news photo "offers the illusion of understanding. We think we understand because we come to recognize the image" (1989, 99).

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

# Edward Said and the Critique of Orientalism

George Snedeker

## Introduction

To readers unfamiliar with discourse analysis and the methods of literary criticism, *The Question of Palestine* by Edward Said may seem to be an odd sort of book. It first appears to be a political defense of the rights of the Palestinian people against Zionism and the policies of the Israeli state. The book, of course, is such a defense, but at the same time, it is also more than this.

Said begins his account of the history of Zionism with a discussion of George Eliot's last novel *Daniel Deronda*, published in 1876. He remarks:

The unusual thing about the book is that its main subject is Zionism, although the novel's principal themes are recognizable to anyone who has read Eliot's earlier fiction. Seen in the context of Eliot's general interest in idealism and spiritual yearning, Zionism for her was one in a series of worldly projects for the nineteenth-century mind still committed to hopes for a secular religious community. (Said 1979, 60–61)

It might seem more logical to have begun with a discussion of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the writings of Theodore Herzl, or the actual European migration to Palestine from the 1880s to 1948. The plausible reason for beginning with George Eliot is the role European intellectuals have played in defining the way in which the Palestinians and the Zionists would be understood within Europe and the United States. The role each group would play was defined more by discourse and interpretation than by any immediately experienced reality.

Said's analysis of Zionism and of contemporary Western attitudes toward Islam and the entire Middle East is grounded in his analysis

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of the ideology of Orientalism. It is in this sense that his trilogy— *Orientalism*, *The Question of Palestine*, and *Covering Islam*—possesses a logical and historical coherence. These works attempt to disclose the ideological underpinnings of the very definition of the cultural distinction between Europe and the so-called Orient. This distinction is less a question of empirical fact than one of cultural definition and the power to define through textual representation. In *Orientalism* Said established the theoretical and historical premises for the analysis of the contemporary situation, and it is in this context that *The Question of Palestine* and *Covering Islam* are concrete applications of the general theory of Orientalism as a hegemonic ideology.

In this essay I will first discuss the main features of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. My primary focus will be upon the way in which he has applied discourse analysis and the methods of literary criticism to the study of history, society, and the internal dynamics of political struggle. I will then discuss his conception of criticism and the role of the critic, which is a central component of this theory. I will pay particular attention in my own critique to the epistemological and ethical presuppositions underlying this analysis. I will argue that Said's political analysis expresses a commitment to the leading principles of the secular humanist tradition exemplified by the philosophy of Vico, and that his conception of criticism defines both the progressive nature and limits of his analysis.

### ***The critique of Orientalism***

Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism is grounded in a theory of representation. Central to this analysis is the way in which meaning is constituted through discourse and interpretation. The actual facts play a minimal role in understanding the "real Orient" since the Orient is itself a feature of Western discourse which has established the cultural boundary between Orient and Occident.

In order to carry out this analysis, Said read and analyzed works by the leading academic Orientalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Silvestre de Sacy, Ernest Renan, Edward William Lane, and H. A. R. Gibb. These academic writings were analyzed in terms of the political context of colonial domination by the French and English from Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798 through World War II and the U.S. domination of the region which followed. It is in this context that academic Orientalism, imaginative writing, and the writings of imperial administrators are

treated as constituting a discourse on and about the Orient. Said views his own analysis of Orientalism as being similar in form to the method of discourse analysis utilized by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. The connection might also be drawn to the analysis of texts made by Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. The fundamental aim in each of these analyses is to establish the construction of a way of perceiving reality. In his own work, Said lays great stress upon the significance of individual authors since they serve as points of reference within the discourse of Orientalism:

The unity of the large ensemble of texts I analyze is due in part to the fact that they frequently refer to each other: Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors. (Said 1978, 23)

It seems that it is this feature of making reference to other writers which characterizes the specific nature of Orientalist discourse and which also imbues individual texts with a special importance.

For Said, Orientalism is a system of moral and epistemological order which became an institutionalized discourse representing knowledge of the Orient. The professional Orientalist mediates the relationship between the Orient and the Western consumer of his cultural productions. Orientalism is a style of thought which is based upon a fundamental ontological distinction between the Orient and the Occident. Imaginative writers like Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Sir Walter Scott, and George Eliot are noteworthy for their acceptance of this distinction as fact and for their depiction of the Orient in great works of Western fiction. Orientalism as a doctrine and as a way of understanding the world has become part of European and North American material and cultural reality. For Said, the ideology of Orientalism expresses a fundamental power relationship on the level of culture:

In the first place, culture is used to designate not merely something to which one belongs but something that one possesses and, along with that proprietary process, culture also designates a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play. (Said 1983, 8–9)

It is through this form of cultural operation that the distinction between “we” and “they” is established. This feature of culture

describes the history of Orientalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The difference between the Orientalist and the Oriental is that the former writes about the latter, while the latter assumes the role of passive Other.

Although Said traces the development of Orientalism from ancient Greece to the present, his primary concern is with the hegemonic role this ideology has played from the Napoleonic period to the present. Modern Orientalism involves a close interaction between political, economic, and cultural interests. It was during the nineteenth century that Orientalism was transformed from a scholarly discourse into an imperial institution. It is in the context of colonial expansion that the speeches and writings of colonial administrators like Evelyn Baring Cromer and Arthur Balfour become important elements of Orientalist discourse. Great works of literature, travel books, scholarly writings, and political speeches become the archival materials which share commonly held beliefs and values concerning the nature of the Orient.

As I remarked earlier, Orientalism had been dominated by French and British scholars and imaginative writers from the end of the eighteenth century through World War II. This period of French and British cultural hegemony closely followed European colonial conquest. Since World War II, the United States has replaced France and England in both its political domination of the Middle East and through the development of area studies concerning this region. U.S. Orientalism has been dominated by the application of social-scientific methodology and research with the exclusion of any emphasis upon literature. It would seem from Said's analysis that this stress upon "facts" has even further dehumanized our conception of the people of this region. Social science has reduced the population to attitudes, trends, and statistics. There is no longer the need for scholars to understand the language or cultural traditions of the region. A very powerful and well-funded support system exists for the promotion of Middle East area studies in the United States.

Edward Said attempts to develop a theory of cultural domination which is grounded in Gramsci's theory of hegemony. His own specific contribution to this theory relies upon the application of literary theory and discourse analysis to the sphere of cultural life. His study of Orientalism serves as a concrete example of how this analysis can be applied to a specific cultural domain and set of political problems. In principle, the analysis he develops in *Orientalism* could be equally applied to the field of Sovietology,

Latin American studies, or women's studies. He has provided a useful model for further research and analysis of cultural domination of all sorts.

The strengths of his analysis also embody many of its own limitations. For example, his treatment of modern Orientalism as a feature of colonialism lacks anything that might be called a theory of imperialism. It seems that he intentionally avoids the very possibility of situating his analysis within the framework of a theory of capitalism. Nevertheless, his historical account of modern Orientalism closely follows the process of European expansion and domination.

An additional problem is in the very conception of Orientalism as a totally hegemonic force. Said's analysis ends with a depiction of Orientalism as a kind of immutable all-encompassing ideology. In short, there seems to be little space for counterhegemonic struggle other than in the form of courageous individual scholars who resist out of moral revulsion. In his own view, Orientalism constitutes a set of inherited beliefs somewhat akin to a religious doctrine. This is what makes the struggle against Orientalism even more difficult than it might initially seem.

The solution offered by Said is based upon a humanist conception of the role of the intellectual in modern society. This role is conceived in universalist terms:

Perhaps if we remember that the study of human experience usually has an ethical, to say nothing of a political, consequence in either the best or worst sense, we will not be indifferent to what we do as scholars. And what better norm for the scholar than human freedom and knowledge? (Said 1978, 327)

This position provides the logical connection between the analysis of Orientalism and that of Zionism.

### ***Zionism and the Palestinians***

The second volume of Edward Said's trilogy, *The Question of Palestine*, was written immediately after the signing of the Camp David accords. This book might be understood as an attempt by a Palestinian American to write the history of Zionism from the point of view of its victims. This is no simple task given the long-standing denial of any public space in U.S. civil society for the presentation of the history of the Palestinian people and their political and human rights. As Said wrote in 1988: "It is as if even the narrative of Palestinian history is not tolerable, and,

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therefore must be told and re-told innumerable times” (Said and Hitchens 1988, 11). Given this tradition of denial, the presentation of the narrative of the history of Palestine becomes an important political act.

As Said argues in *The Question of Palestine*, all appeals on behalf of Zionism were international. The site of Zionist struggle was only partially in Palestine. Most of the time this struggle took place in Europe and in the United States, where propaganda and liberal discourse have played an important role in defining this political conflict. It is in this context that he stresses the role Western intellectuals have played in their representation of Israeli society and the Zionist project. He strongly criticizes the accounts by intellectuals like Reinhold Niebuhr, Edmund Wilson, Saul Bellow, and Gary Wills on the progressive features of Israeli society which maintain an attitude of silence about the treatment of the Palestinians—arguing that these writings are symptomatic of a bias which does not even acknowledge the humanity of the Palestinians.

Said suggests that during the nineteenth century the expert Orientalists were looked to for knowledge about the Orient. However, today we turn to Zionism for this knowledge. The attitudes and practices of British scholars, colonial administrators, and experts did much to prepare the way for the development of the contemporary attitude toward the Palestinians within Israel and the United States:

Most of all, I think, there is the entrenched *cultural* attitude toward Palestinians deriving from age-old Western prejudices about Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient. This attitude, from which in its turn Zionism drew for its view of the Palestinians, dehumanized us, reduced us to the barely tolerated status of a nuisance. (Said 1979, xiv)

He argues that between Zionism and the West there is a community of language and ideology. The Arabs are not part of this community; they are generally depicted as its enemy.

It has often been forgotten in the United States that while important European intellectuals were considering the fate of Palestine, the Palestinians believed that it was their homeland. For Said, the significance of the Balfour Declaration is that it took for granted the higher right of a colonial power to dispose of a territory as it saw fit: “There is not much use today in lamenting such a statement as the Balfour Declaration. It seems more valuable to see it as part of a history” (Said 1979, 16). The Balfour Declaration is an important

part of the legacy of Orientalism and all of its stated and unstated cultural assumptions concerning the character of the native population of Palestine.

For most of its modern history the population of Palestine has been subject to denial. In order to deny the presence of natives on a desired land, the Zionists had to convince themselves and much of the rest of the world that the Palestinians did not exist as a people. It is in this context that the publication of Joan Peters's *From Time Immemorial* in 1984 was an attempt to provide ideological justification for denying all rights to the Palestinians. Her central claim is that significant numbers of Palestinians did not live in Palestine until the period 1946–48, when they migrated to take advantage of the economic development which resulted from Zionist enterprise. For Said, the lack of any critical response to her book in the United States clearly shows the low level of rational discourse within the liberal intellectual community (Said and Hitchens 1988, 23–31).

The fact is that Arabs have generally been represented in the Western media and seldom allowed to speak for themselves and present their point of view. There are few articles in the mass media or books published by Arabs; it seems that someone always has the role of speaking for them. This has led to the refusal to grant them any place in actuality. Said argues that Palestinians have not been given the opportunity to represent themselves and their history and that this process follows the general pattern established by Orientalism in the nineteenth century.

Said's discussion of Palestinian history and the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians is not simply a narrative of events and circumstances. In his view:

The question of Palestine is therefore the contest between an affirmation and a denial, and it is this prior contest, dating back over a hundred years, which animates and makes sense of the current impasse between the Arab states and Israel. . . . But we need to try to understand what the instruments of this contest were, and how they shaped subsequent history so that this history now *appears* to confirm the validity of the Zionist claims to Palestine, thereby denigrating the Palestinian claims. (Said 1979, 8)

He goes on to argue that the concealment of the real history of Zionism has become institutionalized in the Western media and intellectual discourse and that the open discussion of this history is a

necessary feature of any comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

This history is one which has been heavily influenced by the weight of argument, interpretation, and selective silence. Edward Said's analysis of the tormented history of the Palestinian people and their struggle for self-determination is grounded in his analysis of the ideology of Orientalism and the practice of Western colonialism. His criticisms of Zionism and the practices of the Israeli state since 1948 are grounded in a theory of universal human rights:

The long-run goal is, I think, the same for every human being, that politically he or she may be allowed to live free from fear, insecurity, terror, and oppression, free also from the possibility of exercising unequal or unjust domination over others. (Said 1979, 53)

I do not believe that Said's articulation of the existence of fundamental human rights such as self-determination is simply a tactical or rhetorical gesture. The assumption of human rights for all people regardless of race, religion, class, or gender is a feature of the secular humanist tradition, which is the philosophical foundation for his literary studies and approach to politics. This position rejects any double standard in relationship to the issues of democracy, human rights, or terrorism. In this sense, his ethical position is very similar to that of Noam Chomsky.

#### ***The United States and Iran***

As in the case of *The Question of Palestine, Covering Islam* was written as a political intervention. Said's central focus was on the way Islam was being presented in the United States during the Iranian hostage crisis. He viewed the coverage of this crisis as reflecting the well-established traditions of Orientalism and the political pressures of the immediate situation. The term "covering" had a double meaning, referring to both the "reporting of" and "covering over" the realities and complexities of Islamic society.

In this study, Said focuses more upon the role of the mass media than academic Orientalism or the texts of high culture. For example, he mentions the fact that during the first days of the hostage crisis there were three hundred reporters in Teheran, none of whom read Persian. Most of the reports that came out of Iran stressed the character of the Islamic mind and anti-U.S. feelings, while more complex human realities were either ignored or denied.

He argues that the mass media give consumers of news the sense that they have an understanding of Islam:[

In many instances “Islam” has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility. (Said 1981, xi)

It must be kept in mind that the current images of Islamic society are reinforced by the entire tradition of Orientalist scholarship and literary representations of the Orient. Authorities are readily cited to substantiate the idea that Islam is medieval and a danger to Western civilization.

Said states that the aim of his book is not to provide a defense of Islamic society, but instead to analyze the uses of “Islam” in the West. He is aware that his method of textual analysis does not allow him to affirm the viability of Iranian or other Islamic societies. It is more useful as a way of pointing out distortions or misrepresentations than it is in providing an authentic image of sociohistorical reality.

From his analysis we can see quite readily the absurdity of the statements and images of Islam which are routinely presented in the mass media. We can recognize their absurdity since we know that similar kinds of generalizations could not be made about Europe or Catholicism. For example, prejudicial statements about “Catholic society” or the “European mind” would not even make sense. It is only possible to say such things about a distant Other.

The paradox in the representation of Islam is that its alterity often takes on the appearance of a simple immediacy: “There is an unstated assumption, first of all, that the proper name ‘Islam’ denotes a simple thing to which one can refer immediately” (Said 1981, 38). Accompanying this immediacy is the tendency to treat Islam as something without a history of its own. In the present context it is reduced to being in a conflictual relationship with the West over oil or hostages. In reality, Islam has had a rich history and a diverse societal existence. The mass media have reduced this complexity to a flattened reality. While the West is presented as modern secular society, Islam is presented as being stuck in religious primitivism and backwardness.

One of the significant theoretical formulations in *Covering Islam* is Said’s conception of “communities of interest” and the problem of interpretation:

what we are dealing with here are in the very widest sense communities of interpretation, many of them at odds with one another, prepared in many instances literally to go to war with one another, all of them creating and revealing themselves and their interpretations as very central features of their existence. (Said 1981, 41)

In this context he attempts to deal with the relationship between the political power and economic interests that underlie representations of individuals, groups, and societies. He argues that all knowledge concerning human society is historical. This knowledge rests upon both moral judgments and the interpretation of what are taken to be the key facts. These interpretations depend upon who the interpreters are, whom they are addressing, what purposes are at stake, and at what moment in human history the interpretations are taking place: "It is related to what other interpreters have said, either by confirming them, or by disputing them, or by continuing them" (Said 1981, 154).

Said's main point here is that no interpretation can be complete without an examination of the situation of the interpreter:

Every interpreter is a reader, and there is no such thing as a neutral or value-free reader. Every reader, in other words, is both a private ego and a member of a society with affiliations of every sort linking him or her to that society. (Said 1981, 156)

In this view, every reader is situated and constrained by his or her education, the prevailing ideological currents, material interests, and institutional power.

After having established the problem of power and interest underlying every interpretation, Said then turns to a subjective way out of this dilemma by asserting the freedom of choice that every intellectual makes:

whether to put intellect at the service of power or at the service of criticism, community, and moral sense. This choice must be the first act of interpretation today, and it must result in a decision, not simply a postponement. (Said 1981, 164)

Earlier on he had remarked: "By using the skills of a good critical reader to disentangle sense from nonsense, by asking the right questions and expecting pertinent answers, anyone can learn about either 'Islam' or the world of Islam." (Said 1981, xix) This assertion of individual

choice would seem to negate the entire problem of interpretation if it could be exercised in such a willful manner. This position seems to suggest that all readers need do is make the correct moral commitment and then proceed free from the interests that otherwise have the capacity to distort all interpretation. This apparent paradox leads directly to the examination of Said's conception of criticism and the role of the critic in society.

The problem is not that there may not be a real basis for a counterhegemonic movement within civil society. The problem with Said's formulation of this possibility is that it is too abstract and individualistic. The choice that the critic makes is itself outside of any real historical context. After having established a theory of hegemony well grounded in history, he then seems to set this aside in the name of an abstract freedom.

### ***Criticism and the world***

In 1983 Edward Said published a collection of essays under the title *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Although these essays cover a wide range of topics (from Orientalism to recent developments in literary theory), the main focus of his concern is identifying the role of the critic in contemporary society. Most of the essays go beyond the field of literary criticism as it is narrowly defined. Much of the book expresses a strong polemic against "deconstructionism" and the influence of Jacques Derrida upon the development of criticism in the United States.

Said argues that the dominant currents in literary theory have led to a fetishism of the text and the denial of historical reality in the name of methodological rigor:

Even if we accept (as in the main I do) the arguments put forward by Hayden White—that there is no way to get past texts in order to apprehend "real" history directly—it is still possible to say that such a claim need not also eliminate interest in the events and the circumstances entailed by and expressed in the texts themselves. (Said 1983, 4)

In his view, texts are themselves events grounded in sociohistorical reality. He takes the ontological position that texts are part of the social world and the historical moment in which they are written and read. This position assumes the objective existence of a social world which is knowable through representation. His own views concerning the ontological status of reality are similar to those of Georg

Lukacs and Raymond Williams and are in direct opposition to the main currents of contemporary literary criticism.

He also argues that the texts of high culture should occupy no privileged position for critics. Criticism should not assume that its domain is merely the literary text. It should see its project of criticism and interpretation in terms of a more general, and in principle, more democratic conception of discourse. What matters is the continuity and transformation of knowledge and experience through cultural signification. This point of view rejects the elitist traditions of literary criticism without abandoning the critical project of reading and interpretation. In fact, it assumes that the trained critic has an important role to play within civil society.

Said argues that no reading of the text is neutral; every text and every reading is, in his view, the product of a "theoretical stance." Although critics may often deny this simple fact, in doing so they risk becoming irrelevant to the ethical and political life of society:

In having given up the world entirely for the aporias and unthinkable paradoxes of a text, contemporary criticism has retreated from its constituency, the citizens of modern society, who have been left to the hands of "free" market forces, multinational corporations, the manipulations of consumer appetites. (Said 1983, 4)

This position assumes that the critic can make an important contribution to the liberation of society from a diverse range of tyrannical and oppressive forces. However, in order for contemporary critics to begin playing this role, they must first give up much of their elitism and their definition of criticism "as the endless misreading of a misinterpretation." (Said 1983, 25)

Said assumes that there exists potential for active resistance within civil society and that much of contemporary criticism has lost contact with this reality. In his view, the roads taken by much of contemporary criticism (including left criticism) result from a theoretical and epistemological stance and an active will. Although the power of material interests and hegemonic ideology are great, it is presumed that individual critics have chosen deconstructionism as their central paradigm and that they can reject this for a theory of criticism grounded in radical humanism. The unexamined problem is the relationship between the critic and social movements for liberation.

At stake here is the relationship between intellectuals and political

parties and other mass organizations. But what is also crucial is the theoretical conception of society as a “collectivity” or as a “collection of individuals” mediated by institutions, practices, and discourse. Said often seems to prefer the latter to the former, and as a consequence, ends up with a highly individualistic conception of choice, responsibility, and action. His theory of criticism lacks an adequate conception of agency which would transcend the notion of a purely individual ethical choice. After having established “the critic” as the unique individual, he is then faced with the problem of reintegrating the role of critic into a civil society defined by conflict, resistance, and accommodation to the existing order.

Even when Said formulates society as a collectivity possessing a history, he still conceives of the critic as an individual consciousness located on the margins of society. This relationship is one of permanent alienation. It is from this vantage point that the critic produces critical consciousness for civil society:

For in the main—and here I shall be explicit—criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom. (Said 1983, 29)

Needless to say this is hardly a historical conception of criticism. The world and the critic are viewed as being in a state of permanent opposition. As an alternative to recent trends in literary theory, Said formulates an untheorized conception of criticism as “critical consciousness.” In his view, critical consciousness represents the awareness of different social situations; it is also the awareness that no system or theory exhausts human reality. He goes as far as setting up a fundamental opposition between theory and criticism:

Indeed I would go as far as saying that it is the critic’s job to provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests, to point up those concrete instances drawn from everyday reality that lie outside or just beyond the interpretive area necessarily designated in advance and thereafter circumscribed by every theory. (Said 1983, 242)

The problem with this formulation is that it is not clear what could possibly be meant by “historical reality,” “society,” “human

needs and interests,” and “everyday reality” since each of these are concepts and could only be understood as features of a theory of history and society.

The opposition between criticism and theory is dependent upon ontological claims concerning a reality beyond the purview and interpretive area of theory. How Said has come to the assertion of the primacy of the real as opposed to the limits of theoretical understanding is never made clear. This primacy is simply given as constituting the necessary conditions for the critical enterprise of demystification and as the grounds for resisting all forms of domination and tyranny. Having rejected deconstructionism as a nihilistic philosophy, he then opposes the idea of a master discourse or totalizing theory by means of ontological assertions of an extratheoretical reality which is knowable through the act of criticism.

### ***Religion and secular criticism***

In the conclusion of *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said returns to the problem of Orientalism in the context of a discussion of religious and secular criticism. In reference to the idea of the Orient, he remarks:

To say of such grand ideas and their discourse that they have something in common with religious discourse is to say that each serves as an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly. (Said 1983, 290)

The key term in this passage is the idea of “closure.” Religious ideas act as an inhibition upon the development of secular criticism. They offer the authority of the sacred and silence the possibility of reason and a critical attitude.

Said draws the analogy between religious discourse and the traditions of Orientalism. These sets of ideas are linked by their generality and presumption of authority. In turn, he goes on to suggest that a series of terms in contemporary political discourse suffer from a similar fate:

As I have said, impossibly huge generalizations like the Orient, Islam, Communism, or Terrorism play a significantly increased role in the contemporary Manichean theologizing of “the Other,” and this increase is a sign of how strongly religious

discourse has affected discourse pertaining to the secular, historical world. (Said 1983, 291)

In the present context, terms like “communism” and “terrorism” do not make reference to a distinctive human reality or practice, but rather establish a demonology of good and evil. Since these terms are grandiose, rather than finite, rational analysis and argument are excluded as human possibilities.

Said’s alternative to religious discourse is the development of a truly secular criticism. His model for the distinction between religious and secular criticism is the distinction made by Vico between secular and sacred history:

There is a great difference between what in *The New Science* Vico described as the complex, heterogeneous, and “gentile” world of nations and what in contrast he designated as the domain of sacred history. The essence of that difference is that the former comes into being, develops in various directions, moves toward a number of culminations, collapses, and then begins again—all in ways that can be investigated because historians, or new scientists, are human and can know history on the grounds that it was made by men and women. (Said 1983, 290–91)

Since sacred history is made by God, it is beyond human understanding. The philosophical grounds for Said’s conception of secular criticism are to be found in Vico and the tradition of secular humanism which has developed since the publication of *The New Science*.

Said’s affinity for Vico’s formulation of the problem of language and knowledge is clearly stated in the final chapter of *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Said 1976, chap. 6), where he opposes Vico’s conception of humanism to the perspectives of structuralism and poststructuralism. His own conception of criticism embodies recent developments in discourse analysis and a traditional humanist conception of the knowing subject. It is on the basis of this formulation that he criticizes recent developments in literary theory as expressive of a new irrationalism and mysticism.

In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, he was more generous in his evaluation of the innovations in literary criticism achieved by structuralism than he was later to become in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, where he polemicized against the variants of deconstructionism.

In Said's view, deconstructionism represents the revival of religious criticism in a new form. Unlike the discourse of Orientalism, which seeks closure, deconstructionism promotes mysticism, the fundamental unintelligibility of language, and a withdrawal from political engagement. As a consequence, the critic becomes either mute or simply irrelevant to the political life of his or her society. It is in this context that Said offers the alternative of a secular humanist conception of criticism.

### *Marxism and the critique of Orientalism*

Although most Marxists can easily support the political project of Said's critique of Orientalism, few have taken his work seriously enough to offer a critical commentary upon it. One clear exception to this rule is the Egyptian Marxist, Samir Amin. In his most recent book, *Eurocentrism*, Amin discusses the critique of Orientalism in the context of his theory of world capitalism.

Amin argues that Said's critique of Orientalism has the defect of not having gone far enough in some respects and having gone too far in others. He argues that Said has not gone far enough to the extent that he is satisfied with denouncing Eurocentric prejudice without proposing a theoretical explanation of Orientalism, and that he has gone too far in suggesting that the ideology of Orientalism was already in existence in the Middle Ages. For Amin, Orientalism did not begin until the Renaissance. As he puts it: "Once it became capitalist and developed the power to conquer, Europe granted itself the right to represent others—notably 'the Orient'—and even to judge them" (Amin 1989, 101). This is a power Europe did not always possess.

Amin attempts to situate the critique of Orientalism within his theory of capitalist development. He argues that prior to the sixteenth century, Europe occupied a peripheral status in relation to the dominance of the tributary mode of production in the Arab world. With the rise of capitalism in Europe, Eurocentrism and Orientalism assumed the role of dominant ideologies in the new world order. These systems of belief expressed the new power relations defined by the capitalist world economy. For Amin, prejudice against the Orient prior to the sixteenth century was more an expression of provincialism than Orientalism: "Dante relegated Mohammed to Hell, but this was not a sign of a Eurocentric conception of the world, contrary to what Edward Said has suggested. It is only a case of banal provincialism, which is something quite different,

because it is symmetrical in the minds of the two opposing parties” (Amin 1989, 74). Amin’s discussion of the relationship between Europe and the Arab world from antiquity to the Renaissance relies heavily upon the historical research of the French Marxist, Maxime Rodinson.

Amin does not make any substantive criticisms of Said’s theory of representation, his analysis of texts, or his conception of criticism. Instead, he focuses upon the periodization of Orientalism and situates this ideology within the history of capitalism. Although Said’s historical analysis of the relation between Europe and the Arab world deals primarily with the period from Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt to the present, he also suggests that the roots of Orientalism can be traced back to antiquity. The project of *Eurocentrism* is to argue for a universal theory of history within the framework of Marxism. Said’s own universalism is grounded in the humanist tradition as expressed in texts from Vico to Gramsci.

### **Conclusion**

In my own view, Edward Said’s analysis of the problem of Orientalism has made an important contribution to our general understanding of the role racism plays in political discourse. Given the context of the dominance of Eurocentrism in U.S. political life, Said’s position has been a courageous one. This is not to suggest that many anti-Arab intellectuals have been swayed by the cogency of his analysis or his commitment to universal standards of moral judgment. This would be to expect too much from a critical intervention. It might be argued that he has made an open hatred of the Arab or Islamic world more difficult to sustain without embarrassment or the minimum of self-criticism.

Said’s analysis of Orientalism is grounded in a theory of representation. The reality of the distinction between Orient and Occident is less a question of historical fact than one of cultural distinction and definition. His analysis of discourse refers the reader to the problem of representation and misrepresentation. This way of formulating the problem might suggest that a true representation exists as an alternative to the actuality of misrepresentation. The theoretical problem underlying the analysis of the hegemonic ideology of Orientalism is not resolved by suggesting that a people or a society could be referred to in some immediate and essential way.

In practical terms Said would claim that better representations of the Other are both possible and politically desirable. It is in this

context that he criticizes the misrepresentations of Islam, the Arabs, and the Palestinians. It is also in this context that his book *After the Last Sky* (1986) is an attempt to provide a narrative of the experience of the Palestinian people since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. His account of Palestinian life attempts to represent the experience of oppression, displacement, and resistance from the perspective of a Palestinian intellectual. This narrative must be understood in terms of its opposition to the more totalizing discourse which excludes the Palestinian voice entirely. Although his narrative makes use of Jean Mohr's photography of Palestinian life, in addition to a textual representation, the aim is not to present a flattened reality, but rather to describe the diversity of experience and to provide a sense of a people possessing a history.

This type of narrative is an important intervention within a highly contested political discourse concerning rights, obligations, struggle, and human suffering. However, it does not resolve the theoretical questions raised by Said's conception of discourse and representation. These questions require some further investigation and reflection on the uses of language and the power relations which define the very context of representation.

Rather than a better representation of the Other, the most desirable situation would be one where the very category of otherness had been transcended both in thought and in social being. However, this is merely to suggest a desired state which has no immediate possibility of being realized. In the meantime, it makes perfect sense to struggle for better representations, not only in texts, but in movements, organizations, and the fabric of daily life. There is a real political relevance to being sensitized to the power of language to define and limit.

My suggestion that there is no power relationship between self and other should not be misunderstood as a call for the end of all distinction. Said seems to be aware of this very problem. It is not distinctions as such, but only those which seek to deny the essential humanity of individuals, groups, and entire societies which present political and theoretical problems. It is in this context that Said's rejection of the postmodernist notion of the death of the subject must be understood. This position represents his commitment to humanism and the possibility of creating a democratic and secular discourse linked to an emancipatory human project.

Like Foucault, Said stresses the centrality of power relations in

his analysis of discourse. Texts are situated objects within a worldly discourse. They constitute meaning and define the limits of thought and action. His criticism of Foucault's conception of power is that it is too general and does not allow for resistance to total domination.

For Said the point of analyzing the political role of discourse is to identify a domain for struggle and resistance. His working through the massive quantity and density of representations of the "Orient" is part of an intellectual and political project. The philosophical presuppositions of this analysis are that since the hegemony achieved through the discourse of Orientalism is a human production, it is both knowable and in principle something which can be resisted and overcome. Many of the problems in his conception of criticism are tied to a search for a political alternative.

Since there exists no immediate translation of his theoretical critique into a political practice which could directly confront the hegemony of Orientalism, Said turns to an overly subjective and individualist conception of criticism. This turning inward toward critical consciousness as a political solution may be largely a response to a despair over the lack of a viable social movement in the United States which could link the plight of the Palestinians with anti-imperialist struggles in southern Africa and Central America. Solidarity and anti-interventionist movements have yet to come to full realization that the situation of the Palestinians is conjoined to other struggles for self-determination. This political reality has in no sense led Said into passive submission, but has instead forced him into a reliance upon what Gramsci once called "the optimism of the will."

There can be no such thing as a purely theoretical or individual solution to political problems. My point here is not to deny the importance of intellectual work, but rather to situate it in relation to the problems of concrete political struggle. Bringing about fundamental change in power relations, in the organization of society, and in the way in which meaning is constituted discursively can never simply result from willful action. Edward Said's conception of humanism and secular criticism has directed us toward the problem of hegemony and domination, but it does not provide a theoretical solution to this problem since he has been unable to imagine theoretically what role criticism can actually play within a highly dominated civil society. The perspective of criticism and critical consciousness cannot take us beyond the image of the enlightened

but isolated intellectual.

In an article entitled "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" (1982), Said seems to turn from a focus upon the critic and the role of criticism in society to that of the secular intellectual. A similar concern is expressed in a recent interview (1988). In his 1982 essay, Said criticizes the rigid disciplinary boundaries of literary criticism and the isolation of the critic from the larger political discourse of civil society. He suggests that the professional skills of the trained critic might be more fruitfully applied to the discourse of politics rather than the texts of high culture which define the guild profession of literary criticism. In addition, he suggests that what is really at stake in contemporary political debate is the reproduction of the hegemonic discourse or the intentional interference by intellectuals with the project of cultural domination. It is at this point that literary critics and other scholars can make an important intervention within the present reactionary political situation.

Although the turn from the conception of critic to that of secular intellectual does not avoid the problem of specifying choice and the context for political commitment, it does allow Said to move away from the conception of critical consciousness. Secular intellectuals are not isolated individuals possessing critical consciousness, but rather actors within a historical context and organically linked to audiences, constituencies, and opponents. It is at this point in the argument that Said returns to Gramsci and the problem of counter-hegemonic struggle. The contribution that trained critics can make involves the analysis of representation through a focus upon the uses of language and the constitution of discourse.

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## Dylan Thomas as Social Writer Toward a Caudwellian Reading

Victor N. Paananen

October 1989 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the birth of Dylan Thomas. In the more than thirty-five years since his death, more has been written about Thomas than about any other twentieth-century poet (Gaston 1987, vii). Yet, despite such close scrutiny of several aspects of his work, virtually nothing has been said about any element of social concern in it, and only Jack Lindsay, the British Communist writer and Thomas's friend for several years while Thomas worked in London, has made an effort to explain Thomas's politics (Lindsay 1968).<sup>1</sup> Lindsay objects to writing about Thomas that "fails to grasp the depth of Dylan's convictions and the central part they played in his work" (Lindsay 1968, 34). Lindsay's sense that Thomas held passionate political and social views is supported by evidence from sources not used by Lindsay, who, in any case, published the final version of his essay in 1968, long before the appearance of much valuable work on Thomas such as Paul Ferris's 1985 edition of Thomas's *Collected Letters*.

This paper will look at the evidence for social and political commitment on Thomas's part, and it will look at the way that this concern is reflected in some of Thomas's published work. Finally, with the aid of Christopher Caudwell, a British Communist critic writing some years before Lindsay, I will attempt to discuss Thomas's poetic practice in a way that does not deny Thomas's social vision but instead offers a corrective to the textbook view that Thomas's poetry is a "reaction away from the topical, the 'social,' and the ratiocinative to a realm of introspective personalism" (Rosenthal 1960, 219). Jack Lindsay is the only critic who has tried to ground Thomas's poetic practice in his politics, suggesting that "Dylan gained a secure knowledge of the essentials of dialectical materialism, which played a crucial part in determining his poetic

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technique” (Lindsay 1968, 31). While not disagreeing with Lindsay, I wish to suggest, using Caudwell’s insights into the history of poetry, another way in which Thomas’s work represents a development beyond bourgeois practice in poetry.

In Thomas’s visits to the United States, which would indeed result in his early death, “Americans who had celebrated him as the romantic liberator—as the poet who had broken the domination of the once politically minded generation of Auden, Spender, MacNeice, Lewis,” explains John Malcolm Brinnin, Thomas’s U.S. host and chronicler, “would have been perplexed to find that he was actually more censorious of the status quo than any of the other British poets.” The less than sympathetic Brinnin says that Thomas “expressed himself strongly on political matters and tended indiscriminately to support the far Left” (Brinnin 1955, 33). Thomas signed the Stockholm Peace Petition and the Rosenberg Petition, and he “actively supported the Authors World Peace Appeal” (Lindsay 1968, 35). But such support of left-wing causes might seem only to support Brinnin’s suggestion that Thomas was too easily persuaded by an appeal from a left-wing source, were there not clear evidence of a conscious and specific political commitment on Thomas’s part.

A reliable witness, Professor William York Tindall of Columbia University, offers an important anecdote that has been ignored by Thomas’s biographers. Tindall’s skepticism about Thomas’s assertions makes a grotesque incident seem clear confirmation of what Thomas had told him about his political allegiance:

Thomas told me (in 1952) that he was a Communist. My disbelief was shaken, however, at a party a few days later. Here Thomas suddenly arose, kicked the cat which turned and bit me, and, to the embarrassment of our hostess, called a distinguished and once radical American novelist, who was also a guest, both “renegade” and “prick.” The shade of the Party, becoming the death of the party, broke it up. (Tindall 1962, 60)

One must regret the unfortunate outcome that Thomas’s explosion had for the cat, but the incident does point to convictions passionately held by Thomas. No doubt Thomas had, as so often, been drinking, but *in vino veritas*. Rob Gittins, in his account of Thomas’s final visit to the United States in 1953, describes a similar dinner party at which Thomas enjoyed a rare opportunity to talk politics with people with whom what Gittins calls Thomas’s “vague and woolly socialism would go down well” (Gittins 1986, 113).

The reports from Brinnin, Tindall, and Gittins all express surprise that, at what proved to be the end of his life, Thomas had political interests and convictions. His description of himself as a Communist is greeted with “disbelief.” Nevertheless, Thomas’s support for a revolutionary party had been publicly announced nearly twenty years before. In *New Verse* in 1934, Thomas said, “I take my stand with any revolutionary body that asserts it to be the right of all men to share, equally and impartially, every production of man . . . from the sources of production at man’s disposal” (Fitzgibbon 1965, 143).<sup>2</sup> This statement was written during Thomas’s close association with A. E. (“Bert”) Trick, a man twenty-five years older than Thomas, and Thomas’s political mentor. Indeed Thomas wrote to Trick some years later to say that Trick “gave my rebelliousness a direction” (Thomas 1985, 364). In letters from the time of Thomas’s association with this socialist grocer—identified as “a Communist” by Thomas’s wife, Caitlin (Thomas 1987, 44)—Thomas’s politics can be seen taking shape.

Twenty-five percent of the population of Thomas’s native Swansea were chronically out of work (Trick 1966, 38), and the letters reflect Thomas’s awareness of the resulting conditions. In November 1933, writing to Pamela Hansford Johnson, Thomas, just nineteen, speaks of “an outgrown and decaying system” in which “light is being turned into darkness by the capitalists and industrialists. . . . There is only one thing you and I, who are of this generation,” writes Thomas,

must look forward to, must work for and pray for, and, because, as we fondly hope, we are poets and voicers not only of our personal selves but of our social selves, we must pray for it all the more vehemently. It is the Revolution. Later, in another letter, I will give you a more reasoned outline of Revolution, the hard facts of communism . . . and hope that you, too, may don your scarlet tie. . . . The precious seeds of revolution must not be wasted. (Thomas 1985, 55–56)

The letter with the “more reasoned outline of Revolution” was apparently not written, but Thomas does write to Trevor Hughes in January 1934 that “society to adjust itself has to break itself; society . . . has grown up rotten with its capitalist child, and only revolutionary socialism can clean it up. . . . Capitalism is a system made for a time of scarcity,” observes Thomas, who has reached the socialist insight that a market economy restricts the productivity

for use that is possible with modern technology, “and the truth of today is the truth of fertility” (Thomas 1985, 92).

In a letter to Glyn Jones, Thomas labels himself a “Socialist” (Thomas 1985, 97), but on 2 May 1934, he tells Hansford Johnson, “I could go to Russia with a Welsh Communist organisation” (Thomas 1985, 127). On 3 July 1934, when Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and Tom Mann, another well-known British Communist, were on trial for “seditious speeches in the South Wales coalfield” (Thomas 1985, 146n), Swansea seemed “the centre of all revolutionary activities” (Thomas 1985, 146). “I have just left the Socialist Party,” Thomas tells Hansford Johnson, “and offered my services to the Communists” (Thomas 1985, 146). With this allegiance, continuing a fierce opposition to the British Union of Fascists that he had expressed in a letter to the Swansea and West Wales *Guardian* (Thomas 1985, 142), Thomas rushed off to a Fascist rally in Swansea that was addressed by Oswald Mosley. He arrived on time only to be “thrown down the stairs” (Thomas 1985, 142).<sup>3</sup> (Thomas’s opposition to fascism was such that, “although he was a natural pacifist,” he later—according to Caitlin—considered “going off to fight” in the Spanish Civil War [Thomas 1987, 44].) It was in the same month as the Fascist rally that Thomas sent off the statement of political belief, mentioned earlier, to the editor of *New Verse*.

Later in July, Thomas wrote to Hansford Johnson, “If it can be forced home on the consciousness of the people that the present economic system is ethically bad, the seed has been planted that may in time grow into a fine revolutionary flower.” He saw a “society . . . composed at top and bottom, of financial careerists and a proletarian army of dispossessed. . . . Out of the negation of the negation,” he said, “must rise the new synthesis.” He expressed impatience with parliamentary processes for the achievement of social ownership: “Alternatively, there is the confiscation of property by force. . . . If constitutional government cannot, in the space of a year after the next General Election, fulfill their policies. . . the army and the police force must be subdued, and property taken by force” (Thomas 1985, 159). At a meeting of a Swansea literary society in October of that year, Thomas, who was, as he put it, “becomingly clad in red,” was “introduced. . . as a Young Revolutionary” and answered questions about “the Communist Erewhon.” Bert Trick was with Thomas and delivered “a nice

little speech about the inevitability of Revolution” (Thomas 1985, 171–72).

Whether Thomas was actually a member of the CP is, in fact, impossible to resolve with any sources now available (Lindsay 1968).<sup>4</sup> When Thomas was in Prague in 1949 as a guest of the Czechoslovak government, he said, “I am a Communist, but am I also a bloody fool?” (Lindsay 1968, 29). Did that mean that he would keep his membership a secret? Surely, if Thomas had been a member of the CP, it had to be kept secret when he sought visas for his visits to the United States over the years 1950 through 1953, during the cold war. The young Iris Murdoch was, because of Party membership, denied entry to the United States as early as 1946 (Baldanza 1974, 13), and many other literary people have had the same reception since. When he applied for his first U.S. visa, Thomas did have an interview in London that “made him angry, but also apprehensive”:

He had been asked, for instance, whether he would attend a song-recital of Paul Robeson’s. He had answered in the affirmative. Then his interrogator had rather portentiously queried him about a literary conference in Prague which Dylan had recently attended and he had to admit his expenses were paid by his hosts behind the Iron Curtain. (Brinnin 1955, 32)

If Thomas had had any illusions on the subject previously, he would have known after this first interview that an applicant for a visa was entitled to hold only a narrow range of political opinions. Nonetheless, all evidence points to Thomas’s holding revolutionary convictions before he moved from Wales to London in 1934 and throughout his life. He had some knowledge of Marx, gained, probably, under Trick’s tutelage. And, as his prose writings show, he understood poverty and class consciousness.

### ***Thomas’s social vision in the prose works***

A touchstone for Thomas’s social vision is usefully found in his essay based on his radio talk on the Festival Exhibition of 1951. With fascism defeated, and a new Britain being created—for so it seemed with the postwar socialist Labour government in power—the Festival seemed to many in Britain to herald a new age. In 1948, Thomas had spoken of “the birth of the new People’s Republic [in Czechoslovakia]” as showing “the beauty of simple people, proud and joyful, with the rhythm of history visible in every gesture”

(Lindsay 1968, 37); in 1951, Thomas felt this same exhilaration in London:

This is the first time I have ever truly seen that London whose sweet Thames runs softly; that minstrel mermaid of a town, the water-streeted eight-million headed village in a blaze. *This* is London, not the huge petty misshaped nightmare I used to know as I humdrummed along its graceless streets through fog and smoke and past the anonymous unhappy bodies lively as wet brollies. This festival is London. The arches of the bridges leap into light; the moon clocks glow; the river sings; the harmonious pavilions are happy. And this is what London should always be like, till St. Paul's falls down and the sea slides over the Strand. (Thomas 1954, 56–57)

Even though it remains “eight-million headed,” London becomes, in Thomas’s vision, a riverside “village” defined by the flow of the Thames. He sees it as a community like his beloved Laugharne in Wales, a seaside village that is to him “timeless, beautiful” (Thomas 1954, 70). Without alienation, “the anonymous unhappy bodies” of London will become like the “human, often all too human, beings” (Thomas 1954, 70) who inhabit Laugharne. Thomas’s language here transfers to this vision of a city much of the force and harmony that he finds and celebrates in natural process—in which humans play their part—in his poetry.

To find one’s place in natural process, as even “eight-million headed London” does in Thomas’s vision of the Festival Exhibition, is to achieve what Engels called the freedom that is the recognition of necessity. In Thomas’s short story “A Visit to Grandpa’s,” we encounter an old man who has come to understand and accept even his own death and submits willingly to natural process, turning to the river as does the liberated London of Thomas’s vision. Grandpa waits for death, bag packed, at the riverside:

Grandpa . . . inclined his face to the river wind, so that his beard was set dancing and wagging as though he talked, and watched the coracle men move, like turtles on the shore. . . . grandpa stood firmly on the bridge, and clutched his bag to his side, and stared at the flowing river and the sky, like a prophet who has no doubt. (Thomas 1984, 142–43)

Like Thomas himself in the poetry, in which he exults even as he “sail[s] out to die” (Thomas 1956a, 193), the unalienated individual,

one with nature, accepts an awareness of approaching death as part of the freedom that comes with understanding of, and integration into, natural process.

Although no thought of death crosses their minds, the Welshmen who splash happily in a river at the conclusion of Thomas's "A Story" have the same unmediated sense of place and process as does Thomas by the side of the Thames or Grandpa by his Welsh river. They have as well a warm sense of community:

And dark came down warm and gentle on thirty wild, wet, pickled, splashing men without a care in the world at the end of the world in the west of Wales. (Thomas 1984, 344)

Thomas's prose becomes rapturous, and, in fact, even metrically regular in its concluding anapests. There is the same rapture at the conclusion of the essay on the Festival Exhibition and in the concluding scene of "A Visit to Grandpa's." *Under Milk Wood*, the major work of Thomas's final years, is a similar celebration of humans free to be their "all too human" selves while they live their sea-dominated lives in Laugharne. If Thomas celebrates nature, it is a nature in which, as the essay on the Festival Exhibition, "A Visit to Grandpa's," "A Story," and *Under Milk Wood* demonstrate, a humanity free of alienation will consciously find its place to both celebrate and be celebrated.

For now, humanity remains "anonymous and unhappy" and not their gloriously eccentric selves like Grandpa, the Welshmen in "A Story," or the residents of Laugharne. The reasons are, of course, largely economic, and Thomas understands this fact well. The most jarring encounter with the hard facts of poverty occurs in one of Thomas's most popular pieces, "A Child's Christmas in Wales." The celebration of childhood joy is abruptly interrupted as the happy Thomas children enter the slums of Swansea:

We returned home through the poor streets where only a few children fumbled with bare red fingers in the wheel-rutted snow and cat-called after us, their voices fading away, as we trudged uphill, into the cries of the dock birds and the hooting of ships out in the whirling bay. (Thomas 1984, 302)

The cat-calls of the poor children point to economic inequality and a class system, and the unnaturalness of the slums is identified by their distance from the "cries of the . . . birds" and from "the whirling bay" of the timeless sea.

Thomas's short story "Old Garbo" (Thomas 1984) also recognizes the effects of poverty. The late-adolescent narrator of the story, who is eager for sexual initiation, is taken out on a night of slumming by a world-weary and alcoholic reporter, Mr. Farr. Despite Farr's bravado in promising to show the narrator the "shilling women in the 'Lord Jersey' [a pub]," it is clear that Farr must, in fact, harden himself against a recognition of the real needs of the poor that might drive a woman to sell herself for a shilling. Besides extreme drunkenness for the narrator ("A wall slumped over and knocked off my trilby"), the evening's excursion leads only to an exposure of the human misery that poverty generates. A report heard in the pub—concerning a stillborn child and a death in childbirth—proves untrue, but the consequence of its being told is the suicide of "Old Garbo." While the stillbirth and death are believed to have happened, the poor women show sympathy for their own class in taking up a collection. None of the vice that the men had sought is to be found. Mr. Farr's final invitation—"Come and have one to-night in the 'Nelson.' There's a girl down there who'll show you where the sailor bit her"—simply highlights, at the end of the story, the point that slumming is an attempt to profit sexually from the hard lives of the poor. In much the same way, an eager adolescent picks up a young prostitute in "One Warm Saturday" (Thomas 1984), and she leads him to a rotting slum house. Rather than finding sexual gratification, he must face the life circumstances of poor people, and the young man who had been acting as a self-absorbed sensualist finds himself sympathizing with the victims of a failed system.

"The Peaches" (Thomas 1984), one of Thomas's finest and most often reprinted stories, is a story about class consciousness. Annie, based on Thomas's beloved aunt, Ann Jones, "brown-skinned, toothless, hunchbacked," forgetfully wearing her usual tennis shoes, despite having changed into her best dress, tries to please her wealthy relative, Mrs. Williams, by serving a can of peaches she has saved for a long time. Mrs. Williams, whose physical uneasiness in a poor household has been evident throughout, will not eat in Mrs. Jones's smelly parlor—"I can't bear peaches." This refusal leads to a final break between these class-divided relatives, with Mr. Jones in his rage demanding, "Who does she think she is? Aren't peaches good enough for her? To hell with her bloody motor car and her bloody son! Making us small" (Thomas 1984, 135). Because of the refusal of the peaches, Mrs. Williams's son, Jack, and

the young Dylan are, at the end of the story, on opposite sides of the barrier of class:

The chauffeur came back. The car drove off, scattering the hens. I ran out of the stable to wave to Jack. He sat still and stiff by his mother's side. (Thomas 1984, 137)

There can be few demonstrations in literature of how class consciousness is created more sensitive or more accurate than "The Peaches."

***Dylan Thomas as communist poet***

As we have seen, Dylan Thomas offers important insights into poverty and class consciousness in his prose. In what sense, then, is this writer, who called himself a Communist, a communist poet? Thomas's social vision is one that longs for an outcome like that suggested by the Festival Exhibition, in which alienated existence ends and humanity assumes its place in natural process. But Thomas would not write "propaganda" poetry. In this decision he has, implicitly, the support of the Communist critic, Christopher Caudwell, who objected to sloganizing poetry in much the same way that Thomas did.

It is also Christopher Caudwell who points to the way in which Thomas, who leaves behind the politics of a class-ridden society when he writes poetry, contributes to the new poetry that will be written, after the revolutionary period, by the communist poet. Such a poet will speak in a society free of the distortions of class:

This concrete world of life which gathers up within itself as a rounded, developing whole the divorced and simpler abstract worlds of man and nature, is the peculiar concern of the communist poet. . . . All art is conditioned by the conception of freedom which rules in the society that produces it; art is a mode of freedom, and a class society conceives freedom to be absolutely whatever relative mode of freedom that class has attained to. In bourgeois art man is conscious of the necessity of outer reality but not of his own, because he is unconscious of the society that makes him what he is. He is only a half-man. Communist poetry will be complete, because it will be man conscious of his own necessity as well as that of outer reality. (Caudwell 1973, 327–29)

Unlike most bourgeois poets, Thomas *is* conscious of the society that makes him what he is. Indeed the short stories collected as *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* are an exploration of Thomas's emergence

from childhood and adolescence. The stories show, as we have seen, an awareness of poverty and an understanding of the origins of class consciousness. Thomas in his poetry is “conscious of the necessity of outer reality” and of his own reality.

A true reconciliation of outer and inner requires, as Caudwell argues at length in *Illusion and Reality*, freedom—not the illusory freedom of the bourgeois but what Engels called the freedom that is “the recognition of necessity.” (This definition from Engels is the epigraph to Caudwell’s book.) As Caudwell reminds us, “Language expresses both external reality and internal reality” (Caudwell 1973, 272), but one is not free to perceive either reality—and one’s language is therefore corrupt—if one lacks the freedom that comes from the recognition of necessity. Thomas, with his revolutionary outlook, saw through bourgeois social arrangements—of which he offered a critique in his letters and his published prose—to the more fundamental and enduring processes of nature.

Thomas chose, in his poetry, not to write propaganda within bourgeois society, but to write for the timeless realm that comes with the removal of classes. Caudwell tells us that the communist poet will have the freedom to express an unclouded recognition of the fundamental necessities of the external world and of humanity:

That everything which comes into being must pass away; that all is fleeting, all is moving; that to exist is to be like the fountain and have a shape because one is never still—is the theme of all art because it is the texture of reality. Man is drawn to life because it moves from him; he has desires as ancient and punctual as the stars; love has a poignant sweetness and the young life pushes aside the old; these are qualities of being as enduring as man. Man too must pass away. (Caudwell 1973, 329)

It would take pages of explication to show fully the remarkable way in which Caudwell’s definition of what poetry will become is a forecast of the content and tone of Thomas’s poetry. Readers of Thomas’s poetry cannot but be struck by how accurate this sounds. But let me conclude by quoting from one of Thomas’s earliest and best known poems that has many of these elements in it:

And death shall have no dominion.  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,

They shall have stars at elbow and foot;  
Though they go mad they shall be sane,  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;  
Though lovers be lost love shall not;  
And death shall have no dominion. (Thomas 1956a, 77)

Here Thomas speaks out of the freedom that is the consciousness of necessity. He is not tied to a self-absorbed ego, to “introspective personalism,” but he loses self in common humanity and in process. When Thomas writes, “Though lovers be lost love shall not;/ And death shall have no dominion,” he recognizes that the individual passes but that what Caudwell calls “desires as ancient and punctual as the stars” endure.

Thomas wrote many poems like “And death shall have no dominion.” Perhaps he should have written propaganda poetry as did his less radical contemporaries; but what he did write gives him a stronger claim to readers in the world that is now, in a process as irresistible as the processes of nature, coming into being.

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## NOTES

1. With support from the script for a film to which Thomas contributed, *These are the Men*, and from his knowledge of Thomas’s work—and his knowledge of Thomas the man—Lindsay identifies a politics “based on this simple and fundamental idea: that work under the common sun united men and gave them their essential humanity, while everything that cut across this union—exploitation, racial or other divisions, war as the final monstrous expression of the alienation of men from one another and from the earth—was manifestly evil and needed no further exposure for its total condemnation” (Lindsay 1968, 34).
2. Henry Treece reported that Thomas felt by 1938 that the statement should be withdrawn, but Jack Lindsay speculates that this meant only that Thomas had come to think that “the wording was too naive and absolute, too little related to actual

- politics" (Lindsay 1968, 28).
3. Paul Ferris, editor of Thomas's letters, says that Thomas was *not* thrown down the stairs (Thomas 1985, 146n).
  4. The same impasse has been reached in determining whether the great British sculptor Henry Moore was a Party member (Barnett 1988).

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# The Contemporary Attack on Science

András Gedő

*With the exception of socialism, the cure is quite generally sought regressively: in turning away from the present. For unbound human beings, the old bonds are recommended: faith, pre-scientific thinking.*

Robert Musil (1923)

## *Is there a crisis of scientific rationality?*

A striking characteristic of late-bourgeois thought in recent years has been a rising wave of attacks on science. These attacks are directed primarily at science as knowledge, at its rationality and objectivity, and similarly at its interrelationship with technology, as well as at science as social activity and at its institutionalization. Responsibility for the present-day crisis—and for crisis as such—is laid at the door of science; to it is ascribed virtual omnipotence in conjuring up the process of degeneration of modern times, the “forgetfulness of Being,” yet also impotence in unlocking what is original and essential in recognizing its own nature and destiny, its irrational motives and consequences, and the shipwreck of the modern age. “The still undeciphered history of belief in the modern world has been written by science in the name of truth and precisely thereby has also been veiled: it is unrecognizable as the history of belief,” declared Tenbruck in the middle of the 1970s. “Compelled by the triumph of its own advances, science has quietly gone back on its promise; belief in its power of legitimation has waned. The great ideas, with which it has written the history of belief in the modern age, are worn out” (1976, 6, 11). The shrill, incessantly repeated catchphrase regarding the failure of science or rather, of science as destiny, together with that regarding the priority of faith, is a fashionable phenomenon, through which and in which, however, the orientation of life-philosophy’s critique of science and technology, of its mythologizing of crisis (and of history in general), is revealed.

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The new cult of the mythical and the longed-for return to belief in the “Sacred” (Bell 1980b, 326ff.) appear as an alternative and counterforce to the indicted rationality of science and as a stage of that critique of objective knowledge which has to establish the failure of “scientific-technological civilization.”<sup>1</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the anti-intellectualism of life-philosophy’s myth of crisis overflowed the lower and higher levels of bourgeois consciousness, from the little-differentiated and reflected stratum of the awareness of life up to the dazzling and etherealized region of philosophical abstractions. Reproduced were the traditional and blatant, yet all the more persisting, versions of obscurantism, as well as the refined and sophisticated philosophical forms of antisecularism. At one pole, the celebration of religious “revival,” astrology, theosophy, and anthroposophy; at the other pole, antirationalism of a Nietzschean and Heideggerian stamp. The homogeneity and proximity of these poles is nowadays more visible and obvious than in periods in which positivistic scientism predominated, where there was the appearance that life-philosophy’s critique of science was enveloped by an aura of untimely timeliness, of the fascinating paradoxicality of conservative revolt, of the aristocratic and subtle intellectuality that renounced the intellect, of an intellectually attractive anti-intellectualism.<sup>2</sup> The critique proclaimed a more highly valued—and more profound—depth of ultimate mystery, which was foreign to the common obscurantism intended for the everyday crowd. That which seemed disparate in those periods arises in our time, borne simultaneously or successively on the same tide, as in the fresh, yet still amorphous atmosphere of crisis of the turn of the century or as in the bourgeois experience of decline after 1917.

The haunting reoccurs. The cups rattle. Occultism, spiritism, transcendental meditation, eurhythmy, Zen Buddhism—all of them anodynes and narcotics from the jar of the irrational, which are offered as means of invigoration for the stress-debilitated inner life of the achiever-type in industrial society... Also experiencing a boom are faith-healers, quacksalvers and herbalists... Behind all this, as varied as it is, stands, to a greater or lesser extent, a trust in irrational forces, which are supposed to bring results in those areas where reason and rationality seem to have failed (and to which they no longer extend)... This skepticism toward reason and this

readiness for the irrational have grown, in the recent past, virtually by leaps and bounds, and they are found in all camps: on the right as well as on the left, among conservatives and among environmentalists. (Reinhardt 1979, 158ff.)

And the more the torrent of life-philosophy's critique of science soars upward and the more it expands, the less tenable becomes the illusion that the assumption of a fatal collision between "scientific-technological civilization" and "life" together with the disillusionment over, and revolt against, science and reason are merely transitory and isolated expressions of the current state of late-bourgeois thinking, the illusion that they belong to the particular character of the intellectual world of the New Left or, as the case may be, to the ideological reformulation of the uneasiness of frustrated scientists.

In the early 1970s, however, this illusion was still accepted in the scientific currents of bourgeois thought (or in those inclining toward scientism), even in their reflections in the awkward experiences of the antiscience movement. Edward Shils stated even then that "science, scientists and the institutional setting of science are being criticized and indeed more voluminously and more harshly than they have been for a very long time." According to Shils, the antiscience tendency arose, first of all, from the social context and circumstances of science. However, from his observations (and positivistic premises) he still concluded that no serious danger threatened science: "In general the purely intellectual reputation of science has never been better." In the view of Shils, there existed simply "a crisis in the external technological, economic and political relations of science —not in its external intellectual relations." He also cherished the hope that the fundamental differences between the two main groups of the antiscience movement, "the anti-science scientists and the romantic-anarchist wing of the new left," would diminish the strength of that movement and take away the seriousness of the crisis (Shils 1972, 38ff.). Even though, to be sure, this diagnosis by Shils noted or implied certain special features and paradoxes of the present intellectual crisis around science —the contemporary critique of science can hardly appeal to such general critical situations in the development of science as was the case with the "crisis of physics" around the turn of the century, the expectations of research have further increased, and the "science business" has not suffered a loss of status and import in either an economic or a military respect —it did not at all, however, do justice to the seriousness of that intellectual crisis. In

spite of Shils's confidence, precisely the "external intellectual relations of science" were profoundly disturbed; the antisience movement (although splintered) unfolded as a component of a broader anti-intellectualist wave, making for a powerful ideological current.<sup>3</sup>

Although, in the early 1980s, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker reflected that intellectual state of crisis, he emphasized—in distinction to Shils's earlier, rather reassuring judgment—the drama of the situation. Removed equally from overall accusations against science and from illusory attempts to withdraw from scientific-technological civilization, Weizsäcker grappled with the tension of a philosophical attitude which, on the one hand, is committed to scientific investigation, to its claim of objectivity, and to its dialectical problematic, and, at the same time, becomes conscious of the danger of a thermonuclear war and of the conflicting social and ecological consequences of science applied to technology; on the other hand, it feels attracted to Heidegger's thinking. From this tension resulted a crisis-picture of the spiritual condition of science, which, it is true, was not quite Heideggerian; yet, in the final analysis, it caused pregnant observations concerning that condition to merge into the conclusions of Heidegger's critique of science. "The crisis taking place at present has one of its causes in the modern shape of science" (with Heidegger, it is looked upon as *the* cause of the crisis). Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker saw the emerging identity crisis of science in the fact that it was not able to understand its own role and its own implications. In his train of thought, then, there obtruded the relevant—and *non*-Heideggerian—realization: "Science is obligated to recognize, as well, how social relations must be changed, if society is to survive the transformation of the world, which is made possible by science." This cognition—or, rather, demand upon cognition—seems to come into a strained relationship with the conclusion of that train of thought, which yearned for the solution of the identity crisis of science in a renewed religiosity.

According to Weizsäcker, neither as theoretical nor as moral insight does the conception of knowledge of modern European culture afford "a home for the affective awareness of that on which it depends. Religion as bearer of culture was, at one time, such a home. It would still be, I believe, the only home if it could be reconciled to modern consciousness" (1980). In its contradictory character, Weizsäcker's diagnosis indicated both the philosophical dimensions and the wrong tracks of the crisis-consciousness of science, as well as the possible entanglement involved in becoming

aware of its objectively social motives and its spiritual, religious transfiguration. However, it also contained the idea that the philosophical consideration of science has to reflect the social sciences, because, to begin with, it has to include consideration of the social status and the social presuppositions and consequences of science.

### *The indictment of science*

Positivistic scientism and life-philosophy's indictment of science had already taken shape by the middle of the nineteenth century in the form of philosophical conceptions and attitudes which could be supported by their own traditions and which also follow traditions enduring into late-bourgeois neutrality. Almost simultaneously, but independently of each other, Renan and Kierkegaard formulated the standpoints, respectively, of scientism and of hostility to science, with a radicality difficult to surpass. "It is no exaggeration to say," Renan declared in 1849, "that the future of humanity lies in science, that science alone can make known to a human being his or her destiny, that it teaches one the way and means to attain one's goal" (1947, 230). The proclamation of scientism belonged to the process of turning away from classical bourgeois philosophy, while the concept of science was also modified. The objective generality and necessity contained in science was first pushed into the background and veiled, then was lost. Being made empty this concept of science was subordinated to the primacy of faith. The fetishizing of science, which was entangled with its epistemological devaluation (if not obviously, then in the depths of philosophical consciousness), not only gave ideological expression to bourgeois interests in the development of science—and in the boundaries of this development—it also awakened the illusion that science in capitalist society has as its spontaneous and inevitable result the reconciliation or the resolution of social contradictions and tensions. Since Renan's time, positivistic scientism has gone through a manifold and essential change: its present-day variants are linked with the scientific principle of Renanian provenance only in their core content and through historical mediations. The later versions of scientism were accommodated to alterations in the social position of science, to modifications of positivism, to the emergence of the program of "social technology," then to its changing ideology and practice. Kierkegaard's indictment of the natural sciences sounds so "modern," indeed "postmodern" (although it is virtually coeval

with Renan's scientism-prophecy), that it could be situated at the outer pole of the current antiscentism of life-philosophy: "In our time, it is, in particular, the natural sciences which are dangerous. . . . *All ruin will come, in the last analysis, from the natural sciences. . . .* Natural science in its entirety, as also all of the science of modern times, is sophistry. . . . In dealing with the natural sciences, nothing at all can help. Here one stands defenseless and is utterly unable to control anything" (Kierkegaard 1954, 126ff.). This basic idea was common to the Kierkegaardian and the Nietzschean-Heideggerian versions of the negation of the spirit of science; in the present intellectual crisis, however, Nietzsche's and Heidegger's form of this attitude predominates. In distinction to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche pronounced science blameworthy, not so much for the reason that it is incompatible with the personal inwardness of individuals, with his or her moral and religious existence, but rather for the reason that it is alien and antagonistic to the irrationality of life: "Even our desire and will for knowledge is a symptom of a monstrous *décadence*" (Nietzsche 1969, 3:697). To Nietzsche, as also to Kierkegaard, science seemed "an inhuman abstraction" (Nietzsche 1969, 1:293). The objectivity of science did not count so much for Nietzsche as an immoral and irreligious danger threatening the "ego"; he explained objectivity more as a mere fiction and understood science as general falsehood and mendaciousness (Nietzsche 1969, 2:113), which leads to the fate of desolation. To be sure, this interpretation did not remain free from hesitations and inconsistencies; even in the last periods of his course of thinking, when he radicalized his critique of science, Nietzsche looked for scientific arguments for the principle of eternal recurrence of the same. Nevertheless, in his philosophy he openly proclaimed "battle against science" and the idea of exorcism of the "spirit of science" developed into a multilayered, leading theme.

With Nietzsche, the indictment of science had already overlapped the lament about the "machine." In this respect, despite his critique of romanticism, he continued its anticipations of life-philosophy:<sup>4</sup> "Science—transformation of nature in concepts for the purpose of domination over nature—this belongs in the category of '*means*' . . . science is set on bringing about this *enslavement* of nature" (Nietzsche 1969, 3:440 and 859). The combining of the ideas of the nugatoriness of science, due to its *epistemic vanity*, and its fateful all-powerfulness into one, even if discordant, concept persisted, after Nietzsche, in the current of life-philosophy. It became the core

element of the crisis-myth which at first presaged, then reflected, the general crisis-condition of capitalism as the fate of scientific rationality. The apologetic character of this crisis-myth was so strong that it also could assimilate the awareness of the capitalist embodiment of science, while it subordinated this awareness to the critique of scientific rationality, to a conception, therefore, which defined scientific rationality as the ground and source of decay and destruction.<sup>5</sup>

The present-day indictment of science by life-philosophy is formulated most distinctly in Heidegger's interpretation. His critique of science is radical in two respects—both in the assertion of its emptiness as knowledge and also in that of its fatal omnipotence—yet, at the same time, it is philosophically sublimated, invulnerable to *prima facie* objections. Heidegger's critique of science and technology intends to strike at their essence; it neither detracts from their actual use nor has a need to evoke a customary demonology of technology. It sees in the essence of technology the danger threatening humanity. According to Heidegger, this essence is inherent in "modern science," since "modern science is based on the development of the essence of modern technology" (Wissel 1970, 72). Science, as theory of reality, as attached to "being," and authentic thinking mutually exclude one another. Science destroys things; it is, from the beginning, technological, occasioning the "withdrawal of Being." In science lies the world-destiny of humanity: "We do not need an atom bomb at all; the uprooting of humanity is already here. We only have purely technological relations. It is no longer an earth on which human beings live today" ("*Nur noch . . .*" 1976, 206).

As a result of the present wave of life-philosophy's animosity to science, there emerges once more the spurious appearance of an absolute disjunction between positivistic scientism and life-philosophy's critique of science. The noisiness and impact of the indictment of science make scientism seem almost absent, while the same indictment attributes to scientism, which is equated with science, an incontestable supremacy. The contrast between positivistic scientism and life-philosophy's antiscientific stance, seemingly absolute, is bridged by means of their interdependence. Even Heidegger's radical antiscientism accepts (tacitly, it is true) two assumptions of positivistic scientism: on the one hand, he operates with a positivistic concept of science; on the other hand, he accepts a scientific interpretation of history, in that he allows science and technology to be invested with omnipotence in the determination of

modern history. The scientific absolutization of the position of science is immanent within the present-day kinds of late-bourgeois “sociotechnological” ideology, and not only in disguised forms as a latent presupposition. According to Bell, scientific-theoretical knowledge is the decisive factor in postindustrial society. For that reason, the sites of the production of this knowledge—the universities—are its key institutions (Bell 1973). If, later on, crisis consciousness got the upper hand in Bell’s depiction of postindustrial society (Bell 1976), the scientific nucleus of his conception remained intact, which not only tolerates but also involves the demand for a return to the Sacred. Positivistic scientism survives also in its traditional forms, formulated in this connection not always and under any circumstances in philosophical theses but also as attitude and outlook, which have the appearance of a self-evident attribute and necessary presupposition of scientific activity. Scientism and reductionism bound up with it even have buoyancy alongside the advance of antisocialism. Complementary to this, sociobiology develops as a “new synthesis,” which sets about a universal explanation of society and the individual, history and spirit, and becomes an influential trend,<sup>6</sup> in which the orientation prompted by E. O. Wilson encounters the sociophilosophical views of K. Lorenz and the tradition of older bionaturalistic conceptions of society. Sociological system-theories of the kind of Niklas Luhmann, which radicalize the scientific positivism of a Talcott Parsons into a conception of society without the individual as subject and without history<sup>7</sup> and which make the human being appear only in terms of the environment of the system of society, show, at the same time, affinity for the religious and manifest themselves as expressions for the fetish of anxiety. And for a positivistic-scientific representation of science, the philosophy of “critical rationalism” stands prepared. In the disputes with the branches of postpositivism critical of science (above all, with the relativistic theories of knowledge of T. S. Kuhn and Feyerabend), it turns out, however, that they are connected with Popper’s “critical rationalism” not only through divergence and controversy but also through continuity in substance; and the irrationalistic approach is even indwelling in Popper’s philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

Nowadays, however, the overt indictment of science is preferred, above all and on all sides.

Where nothing else is to be devoured, reason must also devour itself. Progress has long since been dismissed. In addition, the *magnum opus* of Adorno and Horkheimer has now been corrupted

into the “Dialectic of Pseudo-Enlightenment [*Aufklärichts*].” The fantastic and anarchistic self-extravagance of reason celebrates the festival of dissolution: “Reason exults in its dithyrambic cry.” Transgression. Even the transcending of self-critical thinking becomes empty movement. The mawkishly [*philobatisch*] sickly critique, reflection only as reflex, appears as the mania of someone deranged. (Nordhofen 1986)

The picture is perhaps too crass, the lines are perhaps too sharp. Yet, is not the phenomenon—the blissfully celebrated breakdown of science, the exultation about the irrational—itsself crass? Are not the lines, which are thought to be observed on the death mask of rationality, themselves sharp? The new indictment of science builds upon the traditional critique of rationality by life-philosophy. It interprets new developments—the danger of a world war threatening human existence, the consequences of the new stage of the general crisis of capitalism, ecological collisions—from the point of view of this transmitted fund of ideas and subordinates them to it. Collapses of previously operative forms of late-bourgeois ideology—the crisis of sociological theory of the Talcott Parsons kind and that of Keynesian economic theory—are also explicated as demonstrations of the failure of scientific knowledge, as indications of the abyss of reason. Thus, it is said that the endeavor to comprehend scientifically the social character of human beings leads to abrogation of the human being (Tenbruck 1979 and 1984), that the theoretical concept of society is useless and harmful (Schelsky 1981 and Touraine 1980), and that the critical situation of bourgeois political economy shows the limited nature of the possibilities of scientific rationality (Bell 1980a and Kristol 1980). Idealist interpretations of scientific theories and the attempts to demonstrate the irrational in science, to defend the primacy of the irrational on the basis of it<sup>9</sup>—all these factors are incorporated into the shape of crisis; they are manifestations of a “crisis of perception,” which points to the indispensability and higher value of intuitive knowledge. As against rational knowledge, which only makes distinctions, measures, and corrects, which disintegrates into fragments, the physicist Fritjof Capra pleads for a “non-intellectual experience of reality,” which synthetically comprehends all that is (1982, 21). The fact that life-philosophy’s indictment of science can find endorsement and representation even among natural scientists stands in contrast not only to the scientistic thesis that scientific activity is tied together with a positivistic affirmation of science but also to the phantom of scientism of many critics of the enterprise

of science, a phantom which, as a seeming ideological sovereign, obscures the danger of life-philosophy's destruction of science.

***Marxism's response to the indictment***

In intellectual disputes, Marxism stands on the side of science under indictment. Thereby it also represents and defends itself: the antiscentism of life-philosophy indicts Marxism as science, whereas positivistic scientism denies to Marxism a scientific character. As a *nonscientistic advocate for indicted science*, Marxism becomes aware of the drama of the present-day social and historical situation of science. However, it opposes the attempt to reinterpret this drama as an existential tragedy in the "history of being"; it is unwilling to relinquish to anti-intellectual resignation the potentiality and the claim of science—including its own. This opposition and this refusal are founded on the fact that Marxism is transsituated beyond life-philosophy's hostility to science and beyond positivistic scientism, such that this farther positioning lies in the middle of theoretical and practical battles and is the locus of learning and inquiry. The materialist dialectics of Marx comprehended the contradictoriness of progress in general, which, in distinction to Comte's or Renan's scientism, Marx did not reduce to science. Instead, Marx understood science in the context of the material and intellectual life-activity of social human beings.

Marx disclosed the consequences, fraught with conflict, of a science subsumed under the capitalist process of production, in which, moreover, the objective grounds for the negative fetishizing of this science are concealed.<sup>10</sup> Peculiar to the contemporary drama of the situation of science and technology are trends which could hardly be foreseen at the time Marx worked on *Capital*.<sup>1</sup> The connections and consequences of these trends are to be grasped afresh by present-day Marxists: the potential for destruction, threatening the conditions of life, by means of a physics transformed into thermonuclear weapons; the environmentally disruptive effects of contemporary scientific technology; the new dimensions of the science enterprise, integrated into the system of state-monopoly capitalism. If there are, no doubt, partial, first-hand experiences of these facts, possibilities and necessities, nevertheless science alone is capable of adequately recognizing these threats and seeking protection from them. And if Marxism and Marxists have to learn from such cognition to reflect on them, it follows from a scientific consideration of the problem of

“how humanity can survive the new power which science has given to it” (Commoner 1966, 131), that this problem is of a *social* nature. Barry Commoner, who, as a biologist, examined the theme of science and survival long before ecology was in vogue, obviously did not proceed from Marxist assumptions. Yet, the conclusions which he drew from this examination approximated, in their essential content, the discovery by Marx. “Each major advance in the technological competence of men has enforced revolutionary changes in the economic and political structure of society. The present age of technology is no exception to this rule of history. We already know the enormous benefits it can bestow; we have begun to perceive its frightful threats. The political crisis generated by this knowledge is upon us. Science can reveal the depth of this crisis, but only social action can resolve the crisis” (Commoner 1966, 132).

Marx conceived of this activity as the practice of radical social change. Not the activity itself but an understanding of its necessity, its possibilities and tendencies, is the concern of science, an understanding which contributes to the activity and becomes changed by it. That necessity results, according to Marx, from a texture of social antagonisms, within which science is enmeshed in a conflictive manner. Incorporated into the process of the reproduction of capital, it appears “as an alien, hostile power over against labor and dominating it” (Marx and Engels 1982, 2061); nevertheless, in the context of, and in spite of, this subordination, it is, at the same time, a historically predominating revolutionary power. “Exploitation of science, of the theoretical progress of humanity. Capital does not create science but exploits it, appropriates it for the process of production” (Marx and Engels 1982, 2060). For Marxist theory and practice, revolutionary change is also considered as the *liberation of science*.<sup>11</sup> The previously unfamiliar developments in the cognitive and social situation of science do not invalidate this thought and this act; rather, they bestow upon them new emphasis and new import and, in addition, open up new possibilities of alliances between the labor movement and the intelligentsia.<sup>12</sup>

Marx’s view reveals that the dilemma between the positivistic, scientific concept of rationality and the antirationality of life-philosophy is a false consciousness of the bourgeois world. “Whoever conceives one’s social action, on the one hand, as utmost technical and strategic rationality and, on the other hand, as irrational ‘faith’ in ultimate values is up-to-date in the West. It has, however, also been said—with good reason, in my opinion—that these contemporaries,

then, are pathologically affected by the schizophrenia of the Western world," so states Paul Lorenzen (1986, 112), well known as head of the "Erlangen School," which is quite distant from Marxism. If the "spiritual poverty of the Western world" is discerned in this predicament, a dialogical relationship with Marxism can hardly be rejected in the long run. Marxism battles against this "spiritual poverty," traces out its social motives and develops a philosophical, scientific conception that prepares the way out of that dilemma. The "spiritual poverty" manifests itself also in the continually resumed proceedings against science and rationality, which are conducted against the background of a positivistic, scientific interpretation of science. In these proceedings, there took place, with Spengler, the annulment of the "Faustian man," and with Heidegger, the disavowal of modern science. The form of indicted science is inherent in a "spirit of the age" that Goethe's "Faust" repudiates, just as Adrian Leverkühn in "Doctor Faustus" disavowed Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The repudiation of modern science also brings with it the disavowal of Galileo's intellectual revolution. Since Duhem, accounts have been circulating in the history of science, which concur with Galileo's theological adversaries and persecutors. Lately, the "non-Galilean revolution" has been highly praised, which, contrary to Galileo's scientific revolution, is supposed to restore subjectivity and inwardness to their rightful place and proclaim a knowledge that "is a *gnosis* in quest of occult signs. These are revealed to those who are worthy to be initiated into the mysteries of Being" (Gusdorf 1982, 394).

At the opposite pole to this disavowal ranks Brecht's Galileo episode, which resulted from the fusion of two kinds of experiences: the experience of Galileo's historical contours and biography as well as the experience of the social and personal drama of physics and physicists in the twentieth century. In *The Life of Galileo* Brecht had the old Galileo, who has undergone his process of inquisition, say: "The struggle for the measurability of the heavens is won through doubt; the struggle of the Roman housewife for milk must always be lost anew through piety. Science, Sarti, is involved with both struggles" (Brecht 1981, 1:677). Undoubtedly Brecht had in mind the experiences and dangers of our century, which he understood in the Marxist sense, when his Galileo reflected that the progress of science can "be a progression away from humanity." "The cleft between you and it can one day become so great that your shout of exultation over any new achievement could be answered by a universal

cry of horror” (Brecht 1981, 1:677). Likewise, in order to avoid or to overcome this, science has “to be involved with both struggles”; it can do this only as natural science *and* social science and, *at the same time, as philosophy*. The two struggles, along with science which is involved with them, need a philosophical theory which itself belongs in this science, affirms it in its contradictory character, comprehends its objectivity in its social and historical nature, and explores the connections of both struggles with science—a philosophical theory, namely, that plays a part in both struggles.

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## NOTES

1. Cf., also, Urban (1983, 14ff.). Daniel Bell’s neoconservative return of the sacred corresponded to Theodore Roszak’s call for restoration of the religious dimension, which was formulated in the neoromantic, mythologizing rendition of the New Left in the United States. *See also* Roszak (1973).
2. In the bestsellers of the Däniken variety, which mix science fiction with mysticism, and in Hans Küng’s theological writings on the search for God, even cursory observation ascertained a common tendency and traced the success of both to a common source, to “the shaking of confidence . . . in reason and science.” “A new irrationalism—or, rather a new and novel religiosity—is apparently emerging” (*Der Spiegel*, no. 12/13, 1978, 228). And at the beginning of the 1980s, the article “*Auf einer Welle des Okkulten*” maintained: “Astrology, decked out now even with computers, is experiencing a boom. . . . ‘We live’, stated the American philosophy professor Paul Kurtz, ‘in the early stages of the era of pseudo-scientific irrationalism’—a modern Middle Ages” (232 and 238).
3. In the spiritual scene of the USA, “One faces a mass movement which is, of course, by no means homogeneous, yet displays common characteristics of intolerance, irrationalism and anti-intellectualism” (Zuelzer 1981, 21).

4. These life-philosophical approaches were not typical of romanticism as such but only of one of its trends, and even these are not to be reduced to the life-philosophical approaches developed therein.
5. "That the dazzling achievements of physics and chemistry have served capital alone is a fact about which there is no longer any doubt today for thinking persons, but it would not even be difficult to show the same alignment in the dominating tenets themselves," wrote Ludwig Klages in 1913 in his essay "*Mensch und Erde*." As a champion of conservative views, he declared that "'progress,' 'civilization,' 'capitalism' signify only different aspects of a single tendency of will" and ascribed original sin to history as such: "There is everywhere, however, one and the same meaning of that reorganization with which 'history' begins, namely, that above the soul rises the mind, above the dream a comprehending wakefulness, above life, which comes into being and passes away, an activity oriented upon permanence" (Klages 1974, 626ff.).
6. In their polemic with sociobiology, Rose, Kamin, and Lewontin noted that "following the publication of Wilson's book [*Sociobiology* (1975)] a stream of works echoing, modifying and extending the theme of sociobiology rapidly appeared.... Sociobiological explanations began to appear in the literature of economics and political science, and *Business Week* offered 'A Genetic Defense of the Free Market.... The general appeal of sociobiology is in its legitimation of the status quo. If present social arrangements are the ineluctable consequence of the human genotype, then nothing of any significance can be changed.'" (Rose, Kamin, and Lewontin 1984, 235ff.).
7. On the characterization of this outlook, see Polak (1984, 742ff.).
8. Compare, among others, Stove (1982).
9. See, for example, Duerr (1981).
10. Labor appears "in its material unity subordinated to the *objective unity of machinery, fixed capital*, which objectifies scientific thought into an *animated monster*" (Marx and Engels 1981, 377ff.).
11. On the problematic of the workers' movement and science, see, among others, *Dialektik 3* (1981); Buhr and Steigerwald (1981); Sandkühler (1982); *Wissenschaftlich-technische Revolution und Verantwortung* (1986).

12. Compare, among others, *Intelligenz, Intellektuelle und Arbeiterbewegung in Westeuropa* (1985).

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

# A Dialectical-Materialist Critique of Analytical Marxism

**Anthony Monteiro**

Because of its origins in England and the United States, Alex Callinicos refers to analytical Marxism as “Anglo-Marxism” (1989). Jon Elster, G. A. Cohen, John Roemer, and E. O. Wright are its principal exponents. A less prominent group of writers include Adam Przeworski, Philippe Van Parijs, Robert Brenner, and Andrew Levine. Its leading exponents claim to establish scientific and rigorous foundations for Marxism. They claim to divest Marxism of its teleological and normative shell, leaving intact its rational kernel, thereby constructing a positive science.<sup>1</sup> Analytical Marxists insist that Marxist categories, concepts, and theories of the social world be subjected to the same standards of validity and empirical falsifiability as other sciences. In seeking to achieve these objectives they impose upon Marxism a positivist canon of science which embraces a set of assumptions that are fundamentally alien to Marxism.

## *Analytical Marxism’s narrow view of science*

Analytical Marxism therefore narrows the range and explanatory scope of Marxism. Jon Elster makes this point clear when saying, “At the present time the social sciences cannot aspire to be more than chemistry; inductive generalizations that stick closely to the phenomena.” He continues, “The time for social physics is not yet here and may never come” (1989, 1).<sup>2</sup> The claim that Marx was unable to develop his scientific objectives consistently is in reality an expression of the fact that classical Marxism and analytical Marxism fundamentally differ in their views of the nature of science.<sup>3</sup> Although they claim a scientific approach, analytical Marxists never quite establish that theirs is but one of several alternatives among competing approaches to science. In the end, however, science is defined from the standpoint of analytical philosophy and neopositivism.

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In this respect history and dialectics are seen as metaphysical appendages upon the body scientific explanation. The scientist, from this standpoint, is viewed as a passive observer of facts. Explanation is the logical clarification and organization of facts. Formalization, abstraction, and quantification are considered basic to explanation. This conceptualization of science equates it with the achievements of Enlightenment thinkers and Newtonian mechanics. New developments in systems theory, nonlinear dynamics, far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics, fractal geometries, theories of catastrophe and chaos are, finally, outside the boundaries found in this definition of science. Ultimately, analytical Marxism's approach to science is unable to address the new sciences of complexity, nor to garner from them crucial insights in the explanation of growing social complexity.<sup>4</sup>

#### *A shift in the strategic center of Marxist discourse*

A foundational objective of analytical Marxism is to alter the strategic center of the discourse within Western Marxism and within the Left and liberal social sciences generally. This shift within academic Marxist discourse could in Kuhnian terms be looked at as a paradigm shift. From this perspective Western Marxism<sup>5</sup> itself is viewed as a multi-paradigmatic movement. Analytical Marxism is, therefore, a recent development within the struggle for paradigm dominance within Western Marxism. From a Lakatosian perspective analytical Marxism might be viewed as a renovation of most of Western Marxism's core methods, concepts, and theories. In this sense analytical Marxism could be seen as an epistemic break with the Hegelian and West European centered traditions of Western Marxism. In a Lakatosian sense such a break would be considered essential to restore progressiveness to what might be considered a regressive research program. Critics with commitments to varying traditions within classical<sup>6</sup> and Western Marxism consider analytical Marxism a self-defeating compromise with bourgeois social theory and subversive to Marxism. Nonetheless, the "analytic rigor" which its principal exponents claim to bring to this project is directed at dissecting the body of Marxist texts and in the end establishing commensurability between Marxism and analytic philosophy. Such an achievement would alter the strategic centers of discourse within academic social science and create conditions for heightened prestige for this new Marxism.

The fact that analytical Marxism situates itself within the analytic philosophical and neopositivist traditions of social science is especially significant. This philosophical and theoretical locus associates analytical Marxism with the anti-Hegelian intellectual field within Marxism. This field includes Austro-Marxism, the Della Volpean Circle, and Althusserian structural Marxism. Austro-Marxism's research approach centers upon developing Marxism as an empirically based social science. It was influenced by the neo-Kantianism of Ernst Mach and showed affinity with the outlook and positivist doctrines which later assumed distinctive form in the Vienna Circle. Bruno Bauer, Max Adler, Rudolph Hilferding, and Karl Renner claimed to be making Marxism into a positive science. Della Volpe and his followers in Italy sought to take Marxism from the plane of humanism, normative concerns, and a theory of action to a science. This objective ineluctably brought them into the field of positivism. Louis Althusser and the structural Marxists pursued an anti-Hegelian and antihumanist direction which shared a common terrain with earlier neo-Kantian formulations within Marxism. This field within Marxism is counterpoised to the humanist, Hegelian, and antiscientific traditions that are associated with Lukacs, Korsch, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, and existential Marxism (see Jay 1973 and 1984). More specifically, analytical Marxism's locus with respect to bourgeois philosophy generally is as significant as its place within Marxism. It is part of that scientific field with roots in Mill, Russell, the early Wittgenstein, and Carnap. This locus constitutes, therefore, an important challenge to continental European dominance within Marxism. It challenges that tradition of epistemologically centered philosophy which has its modern roots with Descartes. It seeks to shift the epistemic center of Marxism from epistemology to science, from metaphysics and metatheory to analysis and modeling, from the social totality to the social atom. Hence, while the most recent continental imports are from post-structuralists and deconstructionists like Foucault and Derrida, a robust Anglo-Marxism is thriving in the North American academy.

### ***Marxism within analytic philosophy***

Analytically trained philosophers and social scientists until recently might have agreed with Karl Popper, who argued that Marxism was an enemy of the "open society" and scientific discourse. Marxism was, therefore, seen as a dead issue in the academy. However, in

the last decade and a half it has been precisely such academicians who have been on the forward edge of looking at Marxist questions from an analytic perspective. Allen Buchanan contends, "Only fifteen years ago the works of Marx received scant attention and even less respect from the analytic mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy" (1987, 104). Since Allen Woods's 1972 article, "The Marxian Critique of Justice," a spate of books and articles on Marx by analytically trained philosophers have appeared.

At the same time the activism of the sixties and seventies—in particular the civil-rights movement, the struggle against the Vietnam war, and the women's movement—created an impulse for change and a new look at the positivist canons and protocols that dominate the academy and, in part, accounts for a new openness at that time. Marxist questions began to find their way into the university and into social science and philosophical discourse. However, interest in Marxism among the philosophers and social scientists trained in, and more or less committed to, the analytic tradition and positivist social science is more recent. Richard Miller demonstrates the wide scope and deep roots of this conjuncture (1985).

G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (1978) remains the most influential work in this direction. Jon Elster, John Roemer, Eric Olin Wright, and others consider this work to have been the catalyst for the analytical Marxist project. Wright holds that many students and assistant professors who initially led the Marxist movement in the universities in the seventies, after receiving tenure and publishing in respectable journals, sought an approach to Marxism "tempered by a more cautious and nuanced stance," a stance more compatible with prevailing academic norms and standards (1985, 2). Moreover, they needed a Marxism not out of step with the requirement of academic success and promotion. Analytical Marxism in many respects is fashioned to fulfill these needs. At the same time the rise to power of conservative, racist, antilabor, and militarist governments in the United States and Britain in the early 1980s created an atmosphere of retreat and resignation on the part of many liberal and left academics. This was a retreat from the very movements and commitments that made it possible for Marxism to be heard within the academy in the first place.

The analytic approach to Marxism has been present in ethics, philosophy, philosophy of science, and political economy for more than a decade. Analytical Marxism is part of this movement. Specifically, a decade ago, it grew out of the annual meetings of a group of left

scholars with varying sympathies to Marxism. Wright, speaking for the group, says that analytical Marxism is “the systematic interrogation and clarification of basic concepts and their reconstruction into a more theoretical structure” (1985, 2).<sup>7</sup> Roemer and other proponents of analytical Marxism say the project is motivated by the fact that capitalism has not fulfilled the trajectory predicted by the founders of Marxism; hence, they say, the claims made by classical Marxism of capitalism’s failures are “dubious.” Second, they argue that the real failures of socialism and the failure of “conventional” Marxism to raise many important questions concerning actual socialism and capitalism have also propelled this movement (Roemer 1986, 1).

### ***The postpositivist and postanalytical movements in philosophy***

Among academic philosophers and philosophers of science a significant movement in a postpositivist direction is underway (Rajchman and West 1985). Analytical Marxism, however, moves in the opposite direction. Neopositivist methods, epistemologies, and logics are its foundation. Analytical Marxism, in fact, is an effort to salvage what can be salvaged of neopositivism.<sup>8</sup>

The decline of positivism within the academy is discussed in a wide body of literature. Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) signaled a sharp turn in this direction. Putnam, Toulmin, and Feyerabend have waged sharp polemics with the “received view” on the unity-of-science program, the correspondence theory, methodological dominance, and other artifacts of modern positivism. Cornel West recently addressed the remoteness of professional philosophy from the world of real people and events as a consequence of the analytic approach in philosophy (1989). Buchanan argues that analytic political philosophy, in particular, was near dormant before the appearance of Marxist questions (1987).

On the other hand, Richard Rorty expresses the severity with which leading circles within academic philosophy reject analytic philosophy and neopositivism when stating, “The notion of ‘logical analysis’ turned upon itself and committed suicide” (quoted in Rajchman and West 1985, x). Hilary Putnam was equally blunt when declaring, “The accomplishments of analytic philosophy are only negative; it destroyed the very problems with which it started by successive failure even to determine what would count as a solution” (Rajchman and West 1985, x). Yet the entire weight of analytical philosophy and its epistemological, methodological, and logical commitments, as well as its view of science, are brought to bear in

the research agenda of analytical Marxism.

In the end, materialism and dialectics, the primary philosophical foundations of Marxism, are either rejected or recast to fit the requirements of this new Marxism. History as foundational to Marxian social theory is dismissed. Historicity is viewed as teleological and non-scientific. Even G. A. Cohen's "traditional" defense of historical materialism is methodologically closer to Hempel's covering-law schema than to Marx's historical approach (see Cohen 1978).<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Cohen's methodology is neither historical nor materialist.

### *Inverting Marxism in the name of Marx*

Elster insists that Marxism's historical method undermines social theory's capacity to discover the actual causal mechanisms of human behavior. Rather than history and social structure, Elster argues that individual motives and intentions are the causal foundation of individual and class action. The objective of Marxian analysis, he argues, should be to discover the microfoundations of collective behavior. In the place of social class, class motives, class consciousness, and class struggle, Elster insists upon individual (i.e., microlevel) motivations, intentions, strategies, and outcomes. Game theory, for Elster, becomes the methodological alternative to historical materialism. The Marxist method of "ascension to the concrete," and the method of enriching theories, categories, concepts, and models with increasing reference to, and verification based upon, the nonconceptual, noncategorical and nontheoretical is replaced with formalization, modeling, and increased abstraction.

Roemer views the dialectical method as obscurantist. Of dialectics he says, it "is based on several propositions which may have a certain inductive appeal, but are far from being rules of inference: that things turn into their opposites, and quantity turns into quality. In Marxian social science, dialectics is often used to justify a lazy kind of teleological reasoning" (1986, 191). Hence, in the interest of "analytical rigor" the very substance of Marxism is inverted.

### *A neo-utilitarian and neoclassical approach to economics*

In economic terms, Marxist political economy is fused with neoclassical methods and theories. Roemer claims that in so doing a new logical rigor is brought to the understanding of the concept of exploitation and class struggle (1981, 1). He claims that analytic and

technical sophistication is imparted to the theory of exploitation. In agreement with Elster, Roemer insists that Marxist political economy to be scientific must remove all references to structural and historical determinants of collective behavior. Individual preference and rational choice are the final determinants of economic behavior (1981, 8). Social class and the labor process, as structural determinants of exploitation and class struggle, are rejected.

This is a turn to the neo-utilitarianism and neoclassical marginal-utility theory which was developed in the work of Alfred Marshall. In both instances rational behavior is considered transhistorical and reflective of natural human characteristics. Unlike traditional utilitarianism, which sought to define that set of social arrangements that allow for the achievement of pleasure and happiness, analytical Marxism, in contrast, emphasizes pure economic and technical categories as the measure of the good society. Roemer's social ontology situates humans in a set of economic relations where they are presented with an array of choices. Rational behavior is defined as that behavior which achieves the highest economic efficiency. Social efficiency and rationality are measured in Paretian Optimality terms, as increasing at least one individual's utility without limiting that of others. This on Roemer's part is a return to what is considered "positive economics," which frees economic thinking from normative or value judgments.

Analytical Marxism's theory of social change and revolutionary transformation inverts the Marxist class-struggle approach and substitutes for it a microfoundational, rational-choice theory of social change. Social transformation, in Pareto Optimality, is the result of human reason operating to overcome problems of inefficiency and suboptimality in the achievement of social outcomes. The body of normative questions that emerge from Marxism's analysis of capitalism and exploitation, and the consequent moral choice for socialism, are rendered of minor significance. Capitalism is accepted or rejected on the basis of purely rational criteria that ultimately transcend normative determinations, ideology, class, and class consciousness. Positive measures like Pareto Optimality are the final determinants.

#### ***A logico-methodological and epistemological shift***

Analytical Marxism is part of a logico-methodological and epistemological shift in the leading traditions within Western Marxism. The sense is given by those who support this shift that a process of revitalization of Marxism and social science is underway. A wide

range of epistemological, ontological, methodological, and logical problems are an unalterable part of this process of “renovation.” Essentially, this shift is nothing less than an effort to radically reconstitute Marxism from the standpoint of analytic logic, neoclassical economics, and methodological individualism. The ultimate result of this project is to substantially alter the categorical grid and logical foundations of Marxism. As Roemer suggests, a “new species of social science” is central to the project (1986, 1). In social-theoretical terms the shift is away from a focus upon structures, hierarchies, levels, and instances, the principal concerns of Althusserian Marxism. It is, at the same time, a repudiation of dialectics, a major source of Western and classical Marxist thinking. Rational agency, freedom and choices, intentionality, motives, strategies, and the supra-individual outcomes of individual actions are thus its central dimension. Underdetermination, rather than overdetermination, freedom rather than social constraint, informs this enterprise. In a sense the entire body of continental social theory from Rousseau through Comte, Durkheim, and Marx is replaced with the tradition rooted in Locke and Mandeville.

Analytical Marxism is already refashioning the discourse within Marxism. Although the logico-theoretical sources of this project are manifold, a major part of them are, however, external to classical and continental Marxism. In this respect, Roemer questions the extent to which that which is emerging can legitimately be called Marxism in the traditional continental sense (1986, 2).

The challenge to what is considered functionalist explanation in Marxism (Elster 1982)—that is, explanation in which “consequences are used to explain causes” (Cohen 1982b, 483)—is part of a larger challenge to the nonliberal and nonindividual trend in social theory. Structural explanation in itself, for Elster and Roemer especially, is considered inherently functionalist and teleological. The rejection of structural causality and structural explanation as functionalist and teleological lays the foundation for a return to methodological individualism. All social phenomena, Elster argues, can be explained by reference to individuals, their properties, goals, beliefs, and action (1985b, 12). In the absence of individual foundations, Elster argues that it is impossible to establish causality. Elster correctly defines this strategy in social explanation as reductionist. It is this reductionist strategy which informs much of analytical Marxism.<sup>10</sup>

Analytical Marxism views its project in part as taking on Althusserian

Marxism's antiagency/anti-individualist excesses. The Althusserians put forward what was perhaps the most robust anti-individualist program within Marxism. The Althusserian project, which appeared a generation earlier in Western Marxism and claimed to reconstitute politics and history and to establish fresh foundations for the class struggle, is a principal target of this effort. Currently, much of the Althusserian project is out of favor. Upon its ruins and in combat with the remnants of its influence has emerged this "new species of social theory."

However, the body of Marxist texts is but a paradigm to be logically refashioned using the tools of modern mathematical logic, rational choice, and game-theoretic logic, as well as the modeling techniques of neoclassical economics (Elster 1978). Lash and Urry argue that this movement provides the basis of a "fundamental mutation in Marxism and in left social science" (1984). Elster contends that the best of bourgeois social theory and philosophy is combined with the best of Marxism (1982). The "best of Marxism" is its anticollectivist and individualist characteristics. Marxism's nonindividualist and structuralist features are deemed its metaphysical and speculative shell. Marx's development of choice and rational agency is the rational kernel of his system (1985a). The scope and final substance of this "mutation" is yet to be determined.

#### ***The effort to achieve commensurability with bourgeois theory***

Along with Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* the more than decade-long debate within Marxian economics which centered on the labor theory of value is a major influence. The discourse on justice and its forms prompted by the works of Rawls (1971) and Nozick (1974) has been important to this discussion. Lastly, the attempt begun by Elster to use game theory to explain collective behavior is another critical element. Jon Elster's *Logic and Society* (1978) and *Making Sense of Marx* (1985a) remain the most extensive effort to deconstruct dialectical logic and recast Marxism in a nondialectical and non-Hegelian form. Elster, furthermore, is inimitable in his robust claim that game theoretic/rational-choice modeling provides the way out of functionalism in social-science explanation.

The effort to combine the positivist, postpositivist, and Marxist discourses into a single discourse is quite extensive. In the fields of economics, philosophy, ethics, and social theory there is an elaborate search for commensurability. It is argued that the analytic project within Marxism has animated a new interest in Marxism and

with it fresh possibilities for social theory. At the same time a new level of commensurability between diverse and competing explanatory paradigms is being sought. With expected diversity and varying degrees of allegiance, common commitments have emerged. These are to abstraction and formalism in logic, a focus upon rational agency in social theory, and a social ontology that establishes the rational individual as its primary unit. The analytical project's methodological commitments are to reductionism and subjectivism—which is expressed as a commitment to methodological individualism.

The leading figures in analytical Marxism share the view that Marx intended his work to be received as scientific and that he sought to establish socialism as a science rather than a mere utopia. They claim, however, to have uncovered profound weaknesses that undermine Marx's scientific ambitions (Elster 1978, 1985a; Roemer, 1982a, 1986; Cohen 1978; Prezeworski 1985). Dialectical logic is the chief source of these weaknesses. A qualitatively different approach to the fundamental texts of Marx is required. The results of this new reading of Marx are emergent and cumulative. This new tendency has been variously named "game-theoretic Marxism" (Urry and Lash), "rational choice Marxism" (Hindess 1985), "analytical Marxism" (Roemer 1986) and "neo-classical Marxism" (Clawson 1983). The term "analytical Marxism" reflects its primary inspiration in analytic philosophy and the manifold and robust commitments inherent therein. As a designation it locates the project theoretically and geographically in the way that the designation "structural Marxism" achieved the same function for Althusserianism. Moreover, the term allows for the possibility of including a wide range of efforts that go beyond game theory or rational-choice theory, but which nonetheless can be considered a part of analytical Marxism. Furthermore, this new rendering seeks to reconstruct Marxism, utilizing the foundational philosophical methods and theoretical approaches of Anglo-American thought. Its immediate opponents are structuralism and functional explanation in Marxism; however, in essence, it seeks nothing less than a broad reconstruction of social theory and to the hegemony, in this regard, of the Anglo-American academy. In the broad sense, analytical Marxism is to social theory what analytic philosophy and logical positivism were to philosophy. Its paramount aim is to establish rational, analytic, and allegedly scientific foundations for Marxism and social theory defined in the analytic and positivist traditions.

**Cohen and Roemer: A vital nexus**

Elster (1978 and 1985a), Cohen (1978), and Roemer (1981 and 1982a) argue that the analytic method permits the testing and clarifying of the varied claims of Marx and Marxism. The initial concrete elaborations of this approach are to be found in Cohen (1978) and Roemer (1981, 1982a, and 1982d). Carling (1986) suggests that Cohen's and Roemer's work taken together establishes a formal theory of social change and exploitation. Cohen imposes a nomothetic structure upon the theory of historical materialism; Roemer treats Marxian economics as an object of neoclassical modeling. Cohen's approach is viewed as a general theory of history and historical change. Roemer's is a special theory with application to exploitation and class struggle under capitalism. Carling believes these two theories accord with Marx's intention to demonstrate the law-likeness of capitalist development and general social development in the analysis found in *Capital* (MDNM). In each case, nonetheless, agency and the rational individual are the primary center.

Cohen, while acknowledging patterns, structure, and regularity in human history, asserts that the principal impetus to dynamic social renovation is human deliberation and rational choice. Rationality and choice, Cohen holds, take place over the choice of forces of production in the face of scarcity. Scarcity creates dynamic pressure for technological innovation or choice of productive forces. Rationality works directly in the development and choice of productive technology and derivatively in the choice of the relations of productions that are most suited to promote the further development of the productive forces from their existing level. Cohen, in this manner, recasts the methodology of historical materialism. The subject of history is not the proletariat, in Lukacsian terms, as the bearers of rationality, or the revolutionary class whose purpose is determined by its place in the process of production as conceived in Engels's formulation of historical materialism. Agency turns out to be rational individuals acting to make history. Social class, therefore, ceases to hold its traditional central place in Marxian analysis. For example, in arguing that workers are not forced to sell their labor power, Cohen and Roemer suggest a whole set of nonclass, individualist options for workers under capitalism. There are, according to this line of reasoning, degrees of proletarian freedom and unfreedom. Proletarian freedom correlates with each individual's level of resource endowment. Therefore, the possibility always exists that some workers can escape the working

class and escape being forced to sell their labor power and thus escape exploitation. Hence exploitation is not necessary to the conceptualization of the working class under capitalism. Methodologically, the emphasis is placed upon individual choices and freedoms. Rational workers can become rational petty bourgeoisie. The working class is then a collection of individuals with differing levels of freedom, resource endowment, and information.

Elster emphasizes this point when he states, "Classes are characterized by the activities in which their members are compelled to engage by virtue of the endowment structure" (1985a, 326). The intentional behavior of agents becomes the theoretical object of analysis. Moreover, the rational individual is socially constituted, i.e., emerges as part of a social class, as a result of a choice to cooperate with other individuals with whom he or she shares similar social characteristics and resource endowments. Social class is neither inevitable nor a stable feature of capitalist society. It is derived from the social choices and behaviors of individuals. Class emerges, therefore, from the intentional behaviors of rational agents/actors. It ceases to be an objective phenomenon.

### *Elster's recasting of dialectics*

Elster (1978 and 1985a) redefines dialectics in a manner to account for the disaggregation of structure and at the same time achieve the centrality of agency and rational choice. Here resides the philosophical attempt to meet head on the Hegelian challenge to analytical and positivist social theory. Dialectics, Elster insists, is the suboptimal allocation resulting from individual optimizing behavior. He redefines dialectics in a manner which is compatible with game theory and Paretian Optimality theory. In game theory the standard example of this "dialectic" is the Prisoner's Dilemma (1985a, chap. 2; 1978, chap. 5 and appendixes 1 and 2). Elster defines the dialectic operationally and in such a way that suggests that it is the "conflict" between intentions, strategies, and outcomes. According to Elster, dialectics, rather than being the logic of natural, social, and historical processes, is the logic that emerges as a result of individuals acting to maximize social outcomes. The point is that the dialectic is not the result of social-historical processes, but of individual intentions and choices. Elster's conceptualization of dialectics as the relationship between intentions and suboptimal social outcomes reduces all logics and logical concerns to the microlevel of events. In the end, dialectics is rendered in an antihistorical fashion.

***Roemer's view of exploitation and class***

Roemer constructs what he calls a relationship of production, as opposed to a labor-theory-of-value explanation of exploitation. The market, rather than production, is the mechanism through which the wide possibilities of social relationships of production are determined. The system of exploitation is, in the end, the result of the variable resource endowment of individuals. Exploitation then is a market relationship, not a production relationship. In the case of the market, individual choice and rationality are paramount. Social classes, according to this definition, are similarly endowed collectivities. Those with greater resources are exploiters, those with less are exploited. Social classes are the consequence of these varying levels of resource endowment among groups of individuals. An exploiting class is that group of individuals who would be hurt by another group withholding their resources. The group which is hurt are exploiters, the one which benefits are exploited.<sup>11</sup> Roemer offers a second theory of exploitation. In this explanation, exploitation is seen as a form of unequal exchange of capital goods. In this way, as well, exploitation is divorced from production and is mediated through the market. Labor-market explanations, labor-theory-of-value formulations, as well as questions concerned with the extraction of surplus value, are unnecessary to understanding exploitation in the Roemerian system.

Roemer asserts that the most significant feature of capitalist production is not what happens at the point of production, or in the labor process, but "the differential ownership of production assets" (1982a, 95). Hence, rather than property relationships, especially ownership of means of production, being a consequence of production relationships, in Roemerian exploitation the situation is reversed. As Lebowitz argues, in Roemer's system "logical priority has shifted" (1988, 205). It does not matter, Roemer argues, whether labor hires capital or capital hires labor; the poorly endowed are exploited and the rich exploit in either case (1982a, 93). This is Roemer's "isomorphism theorem." It flows from a quantitative measure, rather a qualitative measure of social class. It shifts the logical center away from the process of production to the market. At the same time, this theorem assumes an atomic ontology (the notion that social complexity emerges from the actions of equal social atoms), methodological individualism and the assumption of a universal and single social reality for all social classes. The rich and poor, finally

are collection of individuals—the consequence of aggregating individuals based upon similar features. Rich and poor as social categories are quantitative measures of varying levels of resource endowments of individuals. The categories capitalist and worker, on the other hand, measure qualitatively distinctive and fundamentally different social properties emerging from fundamentally different relationships in the labor process and the social structure generally. However, the Roemerian argument denies this qualitative relationship and develops in its place a linear theory of capitalist relationships predicated upon unequal endowments rather than class relationships. Roemer's approach predisposes analysis to the individual and away from social class as socially determined.

Briefly, Roemer's theory of class and exploitation assumes that all actors begin as equally rational and share a single definition and evaluation of rationality. Rationality, moreover, is viewed as transhistorical. Rationality, efficiency, and optimality have the same meaning for all classes and individuals. This assumes a single social universe for all classes. They differ in their unequal endowments of social resources. This focus upon rationality and endowments, rather than labor power, which is unique to the working classes, turns the explanation of exploitation away from surplus labor and surplus value. In this sense, agents with fewer endowments can choose either to continue to be exploited or to withdraw from the game. In so doing, less endowed agents make a choice of productive techniques and mode of production by agreeing to continue to be exploited or by refusing to continue in the game. Given this approach, exploitation is deemed a condition of every mode of production, because in every economic system there are those who have more and those who have fewer resources. Thus exploitation is transhistorical.

### *Exploitation and rational choice*

For Roemer, in contrast to Marx, exploitation is not a form of slavery and force (Reiman 1987); it is a choice made by strategic players in a rational game. Roemer's theory, because it is a distributive and market explanation of exploitation, rather than a production or labor explanation, can be viewed as a special instance of the general theory of historical change as articulated by Cohen (Carling 1986; Reiman 1987). It will be recalled that Cohen argues that agents choose their productive techniques and, indirectly, their relations of

production. Roemer argues the special case that rational agents choose their mode of production. For Roemer and Cohen all questions of struggle are ultimately questions of the choice of modes of production. These questions rest, finally, upon the best technology and most efficient and rational arrangement of social relations. The day-to-day economic and trade-union issues, the struggles for democracy and other political issues find no place in this theorizing. Finally, Roemer and Cohen narrow the struggle of the working class solely to issues of modes of production, thus denying struggles short of maximum demands.

For Roemer exploitation characterizes feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Exploitation emerges as a natural outgrowth of rational choice (1981, chap. 10). It is a metafeature of human existence. Moreover, rationality is a quality of individuals and transcends class position and history and is prior to social structures. Exploitation is the consequence, therefore, of strategic choices. Hence, the two principal categories of Roemer's system, exploitation and rationality, are ahistorical.

Roemer claims to situate his effort between traditional Marxist definitions of exploitation and neoclassical or market definitions (Brewer 1987; Anderson and Thompson 1988). As a part of Marxist discourse, Roemer's thinking is an interpretation of Marx's political economy and his rendering of Marxist economic categories must be seen as part of a strategy that seeks to achieve commensurability between Marxist and neoclassical economics. The strengths and weaknesses of Marx's work are determined by using the standards of positivist social science and neoclassical economic theory. Along with Roemer (1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d, 1983), Elster (1982a, 1985a and 1985b) and E. O. Wright (1985) make significant contributions to this interpretation. It is claimed that this interpretation enhances the predictive and explanatory power of Marx's work. It emerges, Roemer argues, out of a "crisis of Marxism." This crisis is to be found as much in the changed nature of capitalism as compared to Marx's day as in the failures of socialism (1982a, 1986).

Game-theory and rational-choice techniques are used to demonstrate the socially necessary nature of exploitation and that exploitation continues after the democratization of the labor process and socialism. Following Lash and Urry, Brewer (1987) argues that through using game-theory proofs Roemer seeks to modernize the traditional conception of historical materialism and the types of collective action

necessary to eliminate exploitation as it is articulated in his system. Lash and Urry emphasize the fact that exploitation and its elimination is the central point in Roemer's work. The elimination of capitalist exploitation only leads to a system of socialist exploitation.

### ***Game theory and Marxism***

Elster is responsible for developing the main theses connecting game theory with Marxism. In the strongest terms Elster makes the case for a robust intentionality, as against structural causality, to explain human adaptation. In summing up Elster, Lash and Urry say:

Elster argues for the importance of two basic premises of rational choice theory (1) that structural constraints do not completely determine the actions individuals take and (2) that within the feasible set of actions compatible with constraints and possessed with a given preference structure an individual will choose those that he or she believes will bring best results. (1984)

The disaggregation of structures ultimately results in an investigation of the interdependence of decisions and the rational-choice foundations of decisions. Elster claims that game theory captures three sets of interdependencies. First, "the reward of each depends on the reward of all, by altruism, envy, a desire for equality and similar motivations." Second, "the reward of each depends on the choices of all, through general social causality." Third and last, "the choice of each depends on [the anticipation of] the choice of all" (1985a, 207). Elster argues that in order to short circuit the possibility of infinite regress, game theory introduces the notion of equilibrium—a suboptimal, yet "satisficing" (in the sense of Simon's theory of limited rationality [1976]) point. These conditions are based upon assumptions of symmetry—that the agents are equally rational and know (as well as expect) each to be equally rational.

Elster extends what is already implied in Cohen and Roemer, i.e., the inversion of Marxist materialism and the turn to individualism in explanation. At the same time, Elster extends the assumptions of methodological individualism further than either Cohen or Roemer. He argues for the convergence of Marxism and game-theoretic and rational-choice mechanisms of explanation of individual preference.

Methodological individualism, Elster argues, represents a strong

commitment to agency. Elster delineates four stages of agency, each reflecting a different stage of human rationality. In the current stage of human rationality the main contradiction is the suboptimal outcome of human rationality and intentions. Humans are not yet able to overcome the “Prisoner’s Dilemma” manifested in a lack of shared preferences and a preference for cooperation. Human outcomes in the current stage are characterized by the feature of unanticipated consequences. The next stage of human rationality occurs as humans overcome the contradiction of suboptimality in outcomes and choose assurance games, which are based upon universal cooperation and shared preferences (1978).

Class struggle, class consciousness, as with collective action generally, are operationally defined in game-theoretic terms and are problems of suboptimality. Class struggle is defined as a form of bargaining between individuals. Class consciousness is the capacity of the working class to overcome the “free rider” problem—that is, to achieve cooperation and break out of the Prisoner’s Dilemma. Class consciousness is, therefore, a form of rational behavior, which ultimately leads to assurance games and preferences for universal cooperation. This new stage, however, is arrived at as a consequence of individuals changing their behaviors, not of class conflict.

Methodological individualism combines in Elster, therefore, commitments to an atomistic ontology and a reductionist methodology. On the side of method the commitment is to the individual as the principal unit of analysis. On the side of ontology it views the social individual as the primary social reality. Moreover, rational-choice/game-theoretic analysis and methodological individualism encounter similar ontological constraints. Both are compelled to accept individuals and their properties as sufficient conditions of explanation of the social world. Ontological individualism, moreover, holds that social facts cannot be said to have status of their own, since no such facts could exist if there were no individuals who thought and behaved in specific ways. Hence the entire social structure is never given in structural terms à la Durkheim, but constructed from the familiar and the apparent—that is, the observable individual. In summary, Elster’s proposal contains two major components: first, all social explanation is reduced to the micro or individual level; second, the individual is viewed as the ultimate constituent of social complexity.

***Philosophical method, logic, and social theory***

Logical analysis, empiricism, and reductionism are inseparable in analytical Marxism. Logical analysis, furthermore, is foundational to the methodological-individualist and rational-choice/game-theoretic dimension of the project. It expresses robust commitments in logical terms and epistemologically represents the disaggregation of the social totality. It stands in opposition to the synthetic, dialectical, structural, and developmental in philosophical method and logic. It supports abstraction, formalism, and description in logic.

Philosophical method and logic meet social theory at the point that the results of dialectical reasoning are “rendered into straightforward logical arguments” (Elster 1978, 3). “I believe,” Elster insists, “that dialectical thinkers have had a unique gift for singling out interesting and sometimes crucial *problems* even if their attempts at a new *method* must be deemed a failure. As I see it, there is nothing of real importance in Hegel or Marx that cannot be formulated in ordinary language and formal language.” The results of these thinkers are viewed solely as “paradigmatic examples.” Unless these results are reconstituted and liberated of their functionalist and teleological shell, their scientific claims will go unrealized. Nothing is lost, according to Roemer, in the inversion save Marxism’s teleology. What is gained are mechanisms that explain human behavior on its own terms without reference to consequences and prior goals. In *Making Sense of Marx*, Elster submits that his objective is to demonstrate how the “Marxist paradigm” can be addressed without recourse either to methodological collectivism or dialectics (1985a, 4) and ultimately without regard to Marxist method.

***Repudiation of the communist objective***

The anticapitalist and communist objectives of Marxism are relaxed and received with extreme skepticism by analytical Marxism. Analytical Marxists suggest a number of possible nonworking-class solutions for workers under capitalism. Cohen argues that exploitation and proletarian unfreedom are not necessary conditions of capitalism. In other words, there are several means by which individual workers or groups of individual workers can realize their class objectives under capitalism. Elster ultimately argues that traditionally defined class struggle will not be the route to communism. It is, he insists, the achievement of a qualitatively different state of rationality that creates the conditions for assurance games and reciprocity—the basis

of communism (1985b, 454).

Thus the concerns of analytical Marxism with respect to social transformation and revolution shift away from the class struggle and socialism and to the possibilities of gradual evolution under capitalism. This evolution is oriented to issues of the elevation of human rationality. E. O. Wright supports Roemer's argument that communism and socialism as social formations are characterized by a lack of "skilled-based exploitation." Socialism, and eventually communism, is the withering away of resource-endowment inequality, particularly of skill-resource inequality (1985, 86). Education, then, becomes the motive force of history.

Analytical Marxists, in particular Roemer and Elster, argue that socialism and communism are exploitative systems. They contend that exploitation need not be considered an injustice. They argue that under socialism and communism there is "just exploitation." It is possible, they argue, that due to patterns of endowments and leisure preferences, the endowment-poor person exploits the endowment rich person (Roemer 1986, 274–77; Elster, 1986, 98). This situation can occur under any social system and is actually the outcome of a preference for leisure and the endowment situation. Elster argues that this demonstrates "conclusively that exploitation is not inherently wrong" (98). This idea of "just exploitation" or, to use Elster's formulation, exploitation with "a clean causal history," suggests that exploitation is and will remain a part of human social behavior. Its intentional content and relationship to strategic games are what changes.

#### ***Analytical Marxism and revisionism within Marxism***

Vaillancourt (1986, 44) argues that positivism influenced Austro-Marxism. The Second International and the dominant line within the German Social Democratic Party was characterized by an abandonment of class-struggle concepts and the belief in the gradual evolution of capitalism into postcapitalism, characterized by expanding democracy and proletarian freedom. It would appear that analytical Marxism has much in common with both of these trends. On the other hand, it is analogous to empirio-criticism (see Bradley 1971 and Edmund Wright 1987). The Marxist followers of empirio-criticism viewed it as a way of updating and modernizing the philosophical foundations of Marxism. Ultimately this represented a turn away from materialism and dialectics (see Lenin 1962).

What the success and final outcome of this new Marxism will be

cannot yet be determined. Whether it will create a new research program within Marxism is not yet clear. Its long-term impact upon Marxism and social science is still being weighed. Some, including McLennan (1986) and Lash and Urry (1984), believe its impact is already significant. McLennan believes that analytical Marxism "will dominate discussion of Marx and Marxism for the next decade." Lebowitz (1988) feels that analytical Marxism has a great deal to offer to Marxism. Roemer's examination of exploitation as a counterfactual proposition, Elster's fallacy of composition, and Cohen's discussion of proletarian unfreedom are considered by him as substantial new thinking. He, however, believes there is not much left of Marx in analytical Marxism (1988, 212). Anderson and Thompson view the project as a form of academic opportunism. They say "to people who feel they must publish books and articles in respectable places, Analytical Marxism offers only more elegant taxonomies and more promising agendas. This is why it threatens to enervate Marxist theory in the name of rigor" (1988, 228). Lenin, when referring to the empirio-critics, who claimed that philosophy stood above politics and the class struggle, used words that could politically contextualize analytical Marxism. He said, "One must not fail to see the struggle of parties in philosophy, a struggle which in the last analysis reflects the tendencies and ideology of the antagonistic classes in modern society" (14:358).

Although there are novel formulations and correlations in the thinking of several analytical Marxists, there is a great deal that lags considerably behind science in general and the social sciences in particular. For instance, Elster's riveting of social science to chemistry and his view of physics is some years behind current thinking in science. Elster recently argues for social scientists to recognize the limits of the predictive power of the social sciences. He suggests that macrotheory and structural analysis are illusionary. We, he contends, are bound to the most immediate level of empirical facts. On the other hand, the return to nondialectical and linear modes of thought constitutes a return to older logical methods. The most recent thinking in science poses a powerful alternative to the Newtonian rendering of the world. Moreover, new forms of realism and emergent materialism pose a scientific alternative to the mechanical materialism present in analytical Marxism.

Marxism, if it is to be scientific, requires commensurability first and foremost with what is emergent in science. The new sciences of complexity, which radically break with the Newtonian and Enlightenment

traditions, are decisive in this respect. In failing to come to terms with these new realities and their meaning for social theory, analytical Marxism fails to advance Marxism.

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## NOTES

1. Alvin Gouldner (1980) argues that Western Marxism can be divided into two basic trends—one “humanistic” the other “scientific.” Analytical Marxism would in this reading be considered part of the latter trend. It, unlike previous paradigms in the scientific trend, reconstructs Marxism from the standpoint of analytic philosophy and neopositivist social science.
2. In a footnote to this statement, Elster justifies this limitation upon social explanation by comparing social sciences to chemistry. Physics, he says, is parsimonious. That is, it operates from a base of fundamental ideas upon which an expanding array of phenomena can be explained. Chemistry, like social science, is primarily able to collect facts upon which it is able to comment and perhaps arrive at partial generalization.
3. This difference has been expressed as the distinction between Aristotelian and Galilean approaches to science. More precisely, what we are looking at is the distinction between Newtonian physics and modern science, the latter consisting of relativity, quantum physics, and, increasingly, the sciences of complexity—i.e., chaos and catastrophe theory, fractal geometry, etc. It is in many respects an epistemic break in science with linear modes of thinking and the conceptions of causality which arise from Humean philosophy.
4. Chuck Dyke summarizes these developments and has begun to draw conclusions from them for social and historical explanation. A particular example of this is his unpublished manuscript, “Strange Attraction, Curious Liaison: Clio meets Chaos.”
5. I use the term Western Marxism in the way it is used by writers such as Perry Anderson (1976; 1983), Martin Jay

(1984), Russell Jacoby (1981). It is therefore understood as a paradigm within Marxism which is Hegelian in its origins as well as generally anti-Leninist. Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* is considered to be the first work in this spirit. A generation ago an anti-Hegelian and structuralist trend emerged within Western Marxism—Della Volpe and his circle and the Althusserians made perhaps the strongest claims in this direction. In its rejection of Hegelian dialectics, analytical Marxism has much in common with these trends.

6. I use the term “classical tradition” to refer to that generation of Marxists who preceded Lukacs and Korsch and whose Marxism was committed equally to theory and practice. The classical tradition, however, was not unitary. The two main trends ultimately were the dominant trend of social democracy within the Second International and Leninism. The revolutionary trend within the classical tradition includes Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, both of whom, though differing with Lenin on matters of strategy and tactics, never wavered in their support of the Russian Revolution and its meaning for world revolution. Western Marxism originates with a severe critique of the positivist, antirevolutionary substance of the dominant philosophical trend within the Second International. Austro-Marxism, represented by Bauer, Adler, Hilferding, and Renner, developed a fascination with the neopositivism of the Vienna Circle yet tended to maintain an uneasy relationship with the Second International. Western Marxism's most important period is the period when its exemplars were firmly committed to revolutionary practice and the communist and workers' movements. Thus Lukacs's call for a return to Hegel represented a break with the positivist trend within Marxism. Gramsci's call for a “revolution against *Capital*” is also an antipositivistic, anti-Second International demand. In the end, however, the theory-practice nexus constructed by Western Marxism failed to establish a revolutionary practice. It has therefore increasingly become the Marxism of the European, and lately the North American, academies.
7. E. O. Wright had distinguished himself in the late seventies by his effort to empirically verify Marxist class categories through traditional empirical methods (1979). Pauline Vaillancourt (1986) seeks to indicate a Marxist research program that unites Marxist questions with traditional research methods. These

efforts are considered to be a break with the continental and classical traditions in Marxism.

8. In many respects analytical Marxism, rather than reinvigorating Marxism, salvages a good part of neopositivist social science, much of which had been considered sterile and removed from the actual world. This is done by attaching positivism to Marxism, by addressing Marxist questions from within the context of analytic philosophy, and by identifying with what is creative and innovative in Marxism. At the same time it claims to bring science and rigor to Marxism. This supposedly rescues the scientific claims of Marxism from its metaphysical residue.
9. Carl Hempel's notion of causality draws upon Hume's idea that causality is found in constant conjuncture. Marx's historical materialism, on the other hand, is based upon the notion of class struggle and the processes of social emergence out of this struggle. Moreover, Marx's materialism defines both the natural world and social relations as material. Cohen's materialism acknowledges only nature as material. In this sense Cohen returns to pre-Marxian modes of materialism associated with, for example, Bacon and Hobbes.
10. Cohen has consistently defended functional explanation as crucial to explaining events at a macrolevel. For instance, he argues that the relationship between forces and relations of production can only be adequately explained through reference to their consequences. Thus the adaptation of the relations of production to a certain level of the development of the productive forces, Cohen contends, is explained by the function that the productive forces play in the unfolding of relations of production and finally how these relations further develop the productive forces.
11. It is worth noting that Roemer's formulation of class and endowment structure and the dependency of these categories upon the market is rooted in utilitarianism and the marginalist school of bourgeois economics. Individuals enter the market as social equals but with varying magnitudes of resources. Their positions are variously determined by the prices they can demand for the commodities they wish to sell. Exploitation is finally a market relationship. Those with greater endowments are able to influence the market and determine prices. On the other hand, the exploiters would be most hurt if the exploited

withheld their resources. Such a decision would thus change the rules of the game and introduce a new arrangement and a new system of exploitation. It is clear that such a reductionist strategy in economic analysis obscures actual class divisions as qualitatively distinct categories and in so doing boils down to bourgeois apologetics.

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

### Has Socialism Failed?

Joe Slovo

*This discussion article by the general secretary of the South African Communist Party is available for \$3 as a pamphlet from Inkululeko Publications, P.O. Box 902, London, England N19 3YY. We present the full text with the permission of the author.*

#### 1. Introduction

Socialism is undoubtedly in the throes of a crisis greater than at any time since 1917. The last half of 1989 saw the dramatic collapse of most of the communist party governments of Eastern Europe. Their downfall was brought about through massive upsurges which had the support not only of the majority of the working class but also a large slice of the membership of the ruling parties themselves. *These were popular revolts against unpopular regimes; if socialists are unable to come to terms with this reality, the future of socialism is indeed bleak.*

The mounting chronicle of crimes and distortions in the history of existing socialism, its economic failures and the divide which developed between socialism and democracy, have raised doubts in the minds of many former supporters of the socialist cause as to whether socialism can work at all. Indeed, we must expect that, for a time, many in the affected countries will be easy targets for those aiming to achieve a reversion to capitalism, including an embrace of its external policies.<sup>1</sup>

Shock-waves of very necessary self-examination have also been

triggered off among communists both inside and outside the socialist world. *For our part, we firmly believe in the future of socialism; and we do not dismiss its whole past as an unmitigated failure.*<sup>2</sup> Socialism certainly produced a Stalin and a Ceaucescu, but it also produced a Lenin and a Gorbachev. Despite the distortions at the top, the nobility of socialism's basic objectives inspired millions upon millions to devote themselves selflessly to building it on the ground. And, no one can doubt that if humanity is today poised to enter an unprecedented era of peace and civilised international relations, it is in the first place due to the efforts of the socialist world.

*But it is more vital than ever to subject the past of existing socialism to an unsparing critique in order to draw the necessary lessons. To do so openly is an assertion of justified confidence in the future of socialism and its inherent moral superiority. And we should not allow ourselves to be inhibited merely because an exposure of failures will inevitably provide ammunition to the traditional enemies of socialism: our silence will, in any case, present them with even more powerful ammunition.*

## II. Ideological Responses

The ideological responses to the crisis of existing socialism by constituents of what was previously known as the International Communist and Workers' movement (and among our own members) is still so varied and tentative that it is early days to attempt a neat categorisation. But at the risk of over-simplification, we identify a number of broad tendencies against which we must guard:

- A. Finding excuses for Stalinism;
- B. Attributing the crisis to the pace of perestroika;
- C. Acting as if we have declared a moratorium on socialist criticism of capitalism and imperialism and, worst of all,
- D. Concluding that socialist theory made the distortions inevitable.

### A. *Sticking to Stalinism*

The term 'Stalinism' is used to denote the bureaucratic-authoritarian style of leadership (of parties both in and out of power) which denuded the party and the practice of socialism of most of its democratic content and concentrated power in the hands of a tiny, self-perpetuating elite.

While the mould for Stalinism was cast under Stalin's leadership it

is not suggested that he bears sole responsibility for its negative practices. The essential content of Stalinism — socialism without democracy — was retained even after Stalin in the Soviet Union (until Gorbachev's intervention), albeit without some of the terror, brutality and judicial distortions associated with Stalin himself.

Among a diminishing minority there is still a reluctance to look squarely in the mirror of history and to concede that the socialism it reflects has, on balance, been so distorted that an appeal to its positive achievements (and of course there have been many) sounds hollow and very much like special pleading. It is surely now obvious that if the socialist world stands in tatters at this historic moment it is due to the Stalinist distortions.

We should have little patience with the plea in mitigation that, in the circumstances, the Stalinist excesses (such as forced collectivisation) brought about some positive economic achievements. Statistics showing high growth rates during Stalin's time prove only that methods of primitive accumulation can stimulate purely quantitative growth in the early stages of capitalism or socialism — but at what human cost? In any case, more and more evidence is emerging daily that, in the long run, the excesses inhibited the economic potential of socialism.

Another familiar plea in mitigation is that the mobilising effect of the Stalin cult helped save socialism from military defeat. It is, however, now becoming clear that the virtual destruction of the command personnel of the Red Army, the lack of effective preparation against Hitler's onslaught and Stalin's dictatorial and damaging interventions in the conduct of the war could have cost the Soviet Union its victory.

Vigilance is clearly needed against the pre-perestroika styles of work and thinking which infected virtually every party (including ours) and moulded its members for so many decades. It is not enough merely to engage in the self-pitying cry: 'we were misled'; we should rather ask why so many communists allowed themselves to become so blinded for so long. And, more importantly, why they behaved like Stalinists towards those of their comrades who raised even the slightest doubt about the 'purity' of Stalin's brand of socialism.

In the socialist world there are still outposts which unashamedly mourn the retreat from Stalinism and use its dogmas to 'justify' undemocratic and tyrannical practices. It is clearly a matter of time before popular revulsion leads to a transformation. In general those

who still defend the Stalinist model — even in a qualified way — are a dying breed; at the ideological level they will undoubtedly be left behind and they need not detain us here.

### ***B. Blaming Gorbachev***

Most communists, of course, concede that a great deal ‘went wrong’ and needs to be corrected. Some, however, fear that the corrective methods are so hasty and extreme that, in the end, they may do more harm than good. The enemies of socialism, so it is argued, are being given new powerful weapons with which to destroy socialism and to return to capitalism. The pace of Gorbachev’s perestroika and glasnost are, either directly or indirectly, blamed for the “collapse” of communist political hegemony in countries like Poland, Hungary, GDR and Czechoslovakia.

In the countries mentioned, despite the advantage of over 40 years of a monopoly of education, the media, etc., the parties in power could not find a significant section of the class they claimed to represent (or, for that matter, even a majority of their own membership) to defend them or their version of socialism. *To blame perestroika and glasnost for the ailments of socialism is like blaming the diagnosis and the prescription for the illness.* Indeed, the only way to ensure the future of socialism is to grasp the nettle with the political courage of a Gorbachev. When things go badly wrong (whether it be in a movement or a country) it is inevitable that some who have ulterior motives jump on to the bandwagon. When a gap develops between the leadership and the led, it always provides openings for real enemies. But to deal with the gap in terms only of enemy conspiracies is an ancient and discredited device. Equally, to fail to tackle mistakes or crimes merely because their exposure will give comfort to our adversaries is both short-sighted and counter-productive.

In any case, a number of additional questions still go begging:

*Firstly*, have we the right to conclude that the enemies of a discredited party leadership are the same as the enemies of socialism? If the type of socialism which the people have experienced has been rubbished in their eyes and they begin to question it, are they necessarily questioning socialism or are they rejecting its perversion?

*Secondly*, what doctrine of pre-Stalinism and pre-Mao Marxism gives a communist party (or any other party for that matter) the

moral or political right to impose its hegemony or to maintain it in the face of popular rejection?

*Thirdly*, who has appointed us to impose and defend at all costs our version of socialism even if the overwhelming majority have become disillusioned with it?

In general, it is our view that the fact that the processes of perestroika and glasnost came too slowly, too little and too late in Eastern Europe did more than anything else to endanger the socialist perspective there. *It is through these processes — and they must be implemented with all possible speed — that socialism has any hope of showing its essentially human face.* When socialism as a world system comes into its own again — as it undoubtedly will — the ‘Gorbachev revolution’ will have played a seminal role.

### ***C. Abandoning the ideological contest***

We are impressed with the contribution which crusading pro-perestroika journals (such as *Moscow News* and *New Times*) are making to the renovation of socialism. At the same time, we must not overlook the alarming tendency among many media partisans of perestroika to focus so exclusively on the blemishes of the socialist experience that the *socialist critique of capitalism and imperialism finds little, if any, place.*

In keeping with this excessive defensiveness, there is a tendency to underplay some of the most graphic pointers to the superior moral potential of socialist civilisation. For instance, it is a sad commentary on earlier socialist history that the Soviet people are now moved to erect monuments to the victims of the Stalin period. But the capitalist world is planning no monuments to those of its citizens ravaged by its cruelties nor to millions of victims of its colonial terror.

The transformations which have occurred in Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria are revolutionary in scope. With the exception of Romania, is there another example in human history in which those in power have responded to the inevitable with such a civilised and pacific resignation?

We should remember De Gaulle’s military response in 1968 when ten million workers and students filled the streets of Paris. It is not difficult to forecast how Bush or Thatcher would deal with millions in their streets supported by general strikes demanding the overthrow of their system of rule.

Some Soviet journals have become so exclusively focused on self-criticism that the social inequalities within capitalism and the continuing plunder by international capital of the resources of the developing world through neo-colonial manipulation, unequal trade and the debt burden, receive little emphasis. Middle class elements, including many journalists within socialist societies, seem *mesmerised by pure technocracy; the glitter of Western consumerism, and the quality of up-market goods, appear to overshadow the quality of life for society as a whole.*<sup>4</sup>

There is less visible than at any time a critique of imperialism's continuing human rights violations and its gross interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states through surrogates and direct aggression, and its continuing support for banditry and racist and military dictatorships.

The gloss which is put in some of these journals on social and political conditions inside the capitalist West itself has been described by Jonathan Steele in the British *Guardian* as little less than "grotesque." In some contributions capitalism is prettified in the same generalised and unscholarly way as it used to be condemned, i.e. without researched statistics and with dogma taking the place of information. The borderline between socialism and what is called welfare capitalism is increasingly blurred.

In contrast to all this, whatever else may be happening in international relations, *the ideological offensive by the representatives of capitalism against socialism is certainly at full blast.* The Western media gloat repeatedly with headlines such as "Communism — R.I.P." Professor Robert Heilbroner, a luminary of the New York New School, has already raised his champagne glass with a victory toast for capitalism. Asserting that the Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe have proved that capitalism organises the material affairs of humankind more satisfactorily than socialism, he goes on to proclaim:

Less than 75 years after it officially began, the contest between capitalism and socialism is over; capitalism has won... the great question now seems how rapid will be the transformation of socialism into capitalism, and not the other way around. (*The New Yorker*, 23 January 1989)

Just in case more is needed to fulfil this prediction, some of capitalism's most powerful representatives are there to give history a helping hand. Reagan's final boast for his eight years in office was that he saw to it that not one more inch of territory in the world "went communist." Bush takes up the baton with: "We can now

move from containment to bring the socialist countries into the community of free nations'. The [British] *Guardian* (6 June 1989), United Kingdom) reports a multi-million pound initiative, endorsed by British ministers, to encourage change in Eastern Europe. And so on.

In the face of all this, it is no exaggeration to claim that, for the moment, the socialist critique of capitalism and the drive to win the hearts and minds of humanity for socialism have been virtually abandoned. *The unprecedented offensive by capitalist ideologues against socialism has indeed been met by a unilateral ideological disarmament.*

To the extent that this has come about through the need to concentrate on putting our own house in order it is, at least, understandable. But, in many cases, there is an inability to distinguish between socialism in general and the incorrect methods which were used to translate it on the ground. This has led to an unjustified flirtation with certain economic and political values of capitalism.

The perversion of democracy in the socialist experience is falsely contrasted to its practice in the capitalist West as if the latter gives adequate scope for the fulfilment of democratic ideals. The economic ravages caused by excessive centralisation and commandism under socialism seem also to have pushed into the background the basic socialist critique of capitalism that a *society cannot be democratic which is ruled by profit and social inequality and in which power over the most vital areas of life is outside public control.*

#### ***D. Losing faith in the socialist objective***

Some communists have been completely overwhelmed by the soiled image of socialism which they see in the mirror of history. They conclude that it reflects not only *what was* (and in the case of some countries, *what still is*), but, in addition, *what inevitably had to be* in the attempts to build a socialist society as understood by the founding fathers of socialist doctrine.

If, indeed, what happened in the socialist world had to happen because of some or all of our theoretical starting points, if the Stalin-type perversion is unavoidable, then there is no more to be said; we must clearly either seek an alternative to socialism or throw overboard, or at least qualify, some of its postulates.(6)

We believe, however, that the theory of Marxism, in all its essential respects, remains valid and provides an indispensable theoretical guide to achieve a society free of all forms of exploitation of person

by person. The major weaknesses which have emerged in the practice of socialism are the results of distortions and misapplications. They do not flow naturally from the basic concepts of Marxism whose core is essentially humane and democratic and which project a social order with an economic potential vastly superior to that of capitalism.

### III. Marxist Theory Under Fire

Let us touch on some of the concepts which have come under fire in the post-perestroika polemics:

- Marxism maintains that the class struggle is the motor of human history.<sup>6</sup> Some commentators in the socialist media are showing a temptation to jettison this theory merely because Stalin and the bureaucracy around him distorted it to rationalise tyrannical practices. *But it remains valid both as an explanation of past social transformations and as a guide to the strategy and tactics of the struggle to win a socialist order; a struggle in which the working class plays the dominant role.*
- The economic stagnation of socialism and its poor technological performance as compared to the capitalist world sector cannot be attributed to the ineffectiveness of socialist relations of production but rather to their distortion. *Socialist relations of production provide the most effective framework for maximising humanity's productive capacity and using its products in the interests of the whole society.*
- Marxist ethical doctrine sees no conflict between the contention that all morality is class-related and the assertion that working class values are concerned, above all, with the supremacy of human values.<sup>7</sup> The separation of these inter-dependent concepts (in later theory and practice) provided the context in which crimes against the people were rationalised in the name of the class. *We continue to assert that it is only in a non-exploitative, communist, classless society that human values will find their ultimate expression and be freed of all class-related morality. In the meanwhile the socialist transition has the potential of progressively asserting the values of the whole people over those of classes.*
- The great divide which developed between socialism and political democracy should not be treated as flowing naturally from key

aspects of socialist doctrine. This approach is fuelled by the sullied human rights record and the barrack-room collectivism of some of the experiences of existing socialism. *We believe that Marxism clearly projects a system anchored in deep-seated political democracy and the rights of the individual which can only be truly attained when society as a whole assumes control and direction of all its riches and resources.*

- The crucial connection between socialism and internationalism and the importance of world working-class solidarity should not be underplayed as a result of the distortions which were experienced. These included excessive centralisation in the era of the Comintern, subordination of legitimate national aspirations to a distorted concept of “internationalism,” national rivalries between and within socialist states (including examples of armed confrontation). *Working class internationalism remains one of the most liberating concepts in Marxism and needs to find effective expression in the new world conditions.*

In summary, we believe that Marxism is a social science whose fundamental postulates and basic insights into the historical processes remain a powerful (because accurate) theoretical weapon. But this is not to say that every word of Marx, Engels and Lenin must be taken as gospel; they were not infallible and they were not always correct in their projections.

Lenin, for example, believed that capitalism was about to collapse worldwide in the post-October period.

It was a belief based on the incorrect premise that, as a system, capitalism was in an irreversible crisis and that capitalist relations of production constituted an obstacle to the further all-round development of the forces of production.

This was combined with a belief in the imminence of global socialist transformation, which undoubtedly infected much of the earlier thinking about the perspectives of socialist construction in the Soviet Union.

Also, it could well be argued that the classical description of bourgeois democracy (see Lenin 1975a, 303–4) was an over-simplification and tended to underestimate the historic achievements of working class struggle in imposing and defending aspects of a real democratic culture on the capitalist state; a culture which should not disappear but rather needs to be expanded under true socialism.

*But we emphasise again that the fundamental distortions which emerged in the practice of existing socialism cannot be traced to the essential tenets of Marxist revolutionary science.*

*If we are looking for culprits, we must look at ourselves and not at the founders of Marxism.*

***The fault lies with us, not with socialism***

In some cases, the deformations experienced by existing socialist states were the results of bureaucratic distortions which were rationalised at the ideological level by a mechanical and out-of-context invocation of Marxist dogma. In other cases they were the results of a genuinely-motivated but tragic misapplication of socialist theory in new realities which were not foreseen by the founders of Marxism.

The fact that socialist power was first won in the most backward outpost of European capitalism, without a democratic political tradition, played no small part in the way it was shaped. To this must be added the years of isolation, economic siege and armed intervention which, in the immediate post-October period, led to the virtual decimation of the Soviet Union's relatively small working class. In the course of time the party leadership was transformed into a command post with an overbearing centralism and very little democracy, even in relation to its own membership.

Most of the other socialist countries emerged 30 years later in the shadow of the cold war. Some of them owed a great deal to Soviet power for their very creation and survival, and the majority, for a great part of their history, followed the Stalinist economic and political model. Communists outside the socialist world and revolutionaries engaged in anti-colonial movements were the beneficiaries of generous aid and consistent acts of internationalist solidarity. They correctly saw in Soviet power a bulwark against their enemies and either did not believe, or did not want to believe, the way in which aspects of socialism were being debased.

All this helps to explain, but in no way to justify, the awful grip which Stalinism came to exercise in every sector of the socialist world and over the whole international communist movement. It was a grip which, if loosened by either parties (e.g. Yugoslavia) or individuals within parties, usually led to isolation and excommunication.

We make no attempt here to answer the complex question of why so many millions of genuine socialists and revolutionaries became such blind worshippers in the temple of the cult of the personality. Suffice it to say that the strength of this conformism lay, partly, in an ideological conviction that those whom history had appointed as the custodians of humankind's communist future seemed to be building

on foundations prepared by the founding fathers of Marxism. And there was not enough in classical Marxist theory about the nature of the transition period to provide a detailed guide to the future.

This under-developed state of classical Marxist theory in relation to the form and structure of future socialist society lent itself easily to the elaboration of dogma which could claim general 'legitimacy' from a selection of quotes from the masters. But the founders of Marxism

never invented specific forms and mechanisms for the development of the new society. They elaborated its socialist ideal...they provided the historically transient character of capitalism and the historical need for transition to a new stage of social development...As for *the structure of the future society to replace capitalism, they discussed it in the most general terms* and mostly from the point of view of fundamental principles' (my emphasis). (Gorbachev, *Pravda*, 26 Nov. 1989)

In particular, let us consider two issues: (a) socialism and democracy, and the related question, (b) social and economic alienation under socialism.

#### **IV. Socialism and Democracy**

Marxist ideology saw the future state as "a direct democracy in which the task of governing would not be the preserve of a state bureaucracy" and as "an association in which the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all" (Marx and Engels 1976, 6:506). *How did it happen that, in the name of this most humane and liberating ideology, the bureaucracy became so all-powerful and the individual was so suffocated?*

To find, at least, the beginnings of an answer we need to look at four related areas:

- (a) The thesis of the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' which was used as the theoretical rationalisation for unbridled authoritarianism.
- (b) The steady erosion of people's power both at the level of government and mass social organisations.
- (c) The perversion of the concept of the party as a vanguard of the working class, and

(d) Whether, at the end of the day, socialist democracy can find real expression in a single-party state.

### **A. Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

The concept of the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” was dealt with rather thinly by Marx as “a transition to . . . a classless society” without much further definition (Marx 1982, 65; see also Marx 1970, 26). For his part Engels, drawing on Marx’s analysis of the Paris Commune, claimed that it indeed “was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat” (Engels, 1969, 189). The Paris Commune of 1871 was an exceptional social experience which brought into being a kind of workers’ city-state (by no means socialist-led) in which, for a brief moment, most functions of the state (both legislative and executive) were directly exercised by a popular democratic assembly.

The concept of the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” was elaborated by Lenin in *State and Revolution* in the very heat of the revolutionary transformation in 1917. Lenin quoted Engels approvingly when he said that “the proletariat needs the state, not in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist” (Engels—Letter to Bebel). In the meanwhile, in contrast to capitalist democracy which is “curtailed, wretched, false . . . for the rich, for the minority . . . the dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to communism, will, for the first time, *create democracy . . . for the majority . . . along with the necessary suppression of the exploiters, of the minority.*” 91975A, 302–3).

Lenin envisaged that working-class power would be based on the kind of democracy of the Commune, but he did not address, in any detail, the nature of *established socialist civil society*, including fundamental questions such as the relationship between the party, state, people’s elected representatives, social organisations, etc. Understandably, the dominant preoccupation at the time was with the seizure of power, its protection in the face of the expected counter-revolutionary assault, the creation of “democracy for the majority” and the “suppression of the minority of exploiters.”

Rosa Luxemburg said, in a polemic with Lenin:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom

for the one who thinks differently... its effectiveness vanishes when "freedom" becomes a special privilege. (69)

These words may not have been appropriate as policy (which is what Luxemburg argued for) in the special conditions of the phase immediately after the seizure of power in October 1917. *Without a limitation on democracy there was no way the revolution could have defended itself in the civil war and the direct intervention by the whole of the capitalist world.* But Luxemburg's concept of freedom is surely incontrovertible once a society has achieved stability.

Lenin clearly assumed that whatever repression may be necessary in the immediate aftermath of the revolution would be relatively mild and short-lived. The state and its traditional instruments of force would begin to "wither away" almost as soon as socialist power had been won and the process of widening and deepening democracy would begin.

Lenin was referring to the transitional socialist state (and not to the future communist society) when he emphasised that *there would be an extension of "democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a special machine of suppression will begin to disappear"* "it is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word [because]... the suppression of the minority of exploiters [is]... easy, simple", entailing relatively little bloodshed, and hardly needing a machine or a special apparatus other than "the simple organisation of the armed people (such as the Soviets)" (1975a, 303-4).

We know that all this is a far cry from what happened in the decades which followed. The whole process was put in reverse. The complete "suppression of the exploiters" was followed by the strengthening of the instruments of state suppression and the *narrowing of democracy for the majority of the population, including the working class.*

The anti-Leninist theory advanced (in the name of Lenin) to "justify" this process was that the class struggle becomes more rather than less intense with the entrenchment of socialism. In some respects this became a self-fulfilling prophecy; a retreat from democratic norms intensified social contradictions which, in turn, became the excuse for an intensification of the "class struggle."

One of the key rationalisations for this thesis was the undoubted threat, even after the end of the civil war, posed by imperialism and fascism to the very survival of the Soviet Union and the continuing

Western conspiracies to prevent the spread of socialist power after 1945. But events have demonstrated that if the survival of the Soviet Union was at risk from the fascist onslaught it was, among other reasons, also the result of damage wrought to the whole Soviet social fabric (including its army) by the authoritarian bureaucracy. And if Western “conspiracies” have succeeded in threatening the very survival of socialism in places like Eastern Europe, it is the narrowing rather than the extension of democracy which has played into their hands.

The term “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” reflected the historical truth that in class-divided social formations state power is ultimately exercised by, and in the interests of, the class which owns and controls the means of production. It is in this sense that capitalist formations were described as a ‘dictatorship of the bourgeoisie’ whose rule would be replaced by a “dictatorship of the proletariat” during the socialist transition period. In the latter case power would, however, be exercised in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people and should lead to an ever-expanding genuine democracy — both political and economic.(17).

*On reflection, the choice of the word ‘dictatorship’ to describe this type of society certainly opens the way to ambiguities and distortions.*

The abandonment of the term by most communist parties, including ours, does not, in all cases, imply a rejection of the historical validity of its essential content. But, the way the term came to be abused bore little resemblance to Lenin’s original concept. It was progressively denuded of its intrinsic democratic content and came to signify, in practice, a dictatorship of a party bureaucracy. For Lenin the repressive aspect of the concept had impending relevance in relation to the need for the revolution to defend itself against counter-revolutionary terror in the immediate post-revolution period.<sup>8</sup> He was defending, against the utopianism of the anarchists, the limited retention of repressive apparatus.

But, unfortunately, practices justified by the exigencies of the earlier phases became a permanent feature of the new society. As time went on the gap between socialism and democracy widened; the nature and role of the social institutions (such as the Soviets, the party and mass organisations) which had previously given substance to popular power and socialist democracy, were steadily eroded.

***B. Elected bodies and mass organisations***

The steady erosion of the powers and representative character of elected institutions led to the alienation of a considerable portion of society from political life. The electorate had no effective right to choose its representatives. Gone were the days when the party had to engage in a political contest to win a majority in the Soviets. The legislative organs did not, in any case, have genuine control over legislation; by their nature they could only act as rubber stamps for decisions which had already been taken by party structures. The executive and judicial organs were, for all practical purposes, under the direct control of the party bureaucracy. *In practice the majority of the people had very few levers with which to determine the course of economic or social life.*

Democracy in the mass organisations was also more formal than real. The enormous membership figures told us very little about the extent to which the individual trade unionist, youth or woman was able to participate in the control or direction of their respective organisations. At the end of the day these organisations were turned into transmission belts for decisions taken elsewhere and the individual members were little more than cogs of the vast bureaucratic machine.

*The trade union movement* became an adjunct of the state and party. Workers had no meaningful role in determining the composition of the top leadership which was, in substance, answerable to the party apparatus. For all practical purposes the right to strike did not exist. The extremely thin dividing line between management and the trade union collective on the factory floor detracted from the real autonomy of trade unions. Apart from certain welfare functions, they tended, more and more, to act like Western-style production councils, but without the advantage of having to answer for their role to an independent trade union under the democratic control of its membership.

Much of the above applied to the *women's and youth organisations*. Instead of being guided by the aspirations and interests of their constituencies, they were turned into support bases for the ongoing dictates of the state and party apparatus.<sup>9</sup>

***C. The party***

In the immediate aftermath of the October revolution, the Bolshevik

party shared power with other political and social tendencies, including Mensheviks and a section of the left Social Revolutionaries. In the elections for the constituent assembly in 1918, the Bolsheviks received less than a third of the popular vote.<sup>10</sup>

There may be moments in the life of a revolution which justify a postponement of full democratic processes. And we do not address the question of whether the Bolsheviks were justified in taking a monopoly of state power during the extraordinary period of both internal and external assault on the gains of the revolution. Suffice it to say that the single-party state and the guiding and leading role of the party subsequently became permanent features of socialist rule and were entrenched in the constitutions of most socialist states.<sup>11</sup> *Henceforth the parties were 'vanguards' by law and not necessarily by virtue of social endorsement.*

This was accompanied by negative transformations within the party itself. Under the guise of "democratic centralism" inner-party democracy was almost completely suffocated by centralism. All effective power was concentrated in the hands of a Political Bureau or, in some cases, a single, all-powerful personality. The control of this "leadership" by the party as a whole was purely formal. In most cases the composition of the highest organ — the congress which finalised policy and elected the leadership — was manipulated from the top. The Central Committee (elected by variations of a "list" system emanating from the top) had only the most tenuous jurisdiction over the Political Bureau. Within this latter body a change of leaders resembled a palace coup rather than a democratic process; invariably the changes were later unanimously endorsed.

The invigorating impact of the contest of ideas in Marxist culture was stifled. In practice, the basic party unit was there to explain, defend, exhort and support policies in whose formulation they rarely participated. The concept of consensus effectively stifled dissent and promoted the completely unnatural appearance of unanimity on everything. Fundamental differences were either suppressed or silenced by the self-imposed discipline of so-called democratic centralism. In these conditions the democratic development of party policy became a virtual impossibility.

#### ***D. The Single-Party State***

Hegel coined the profound aphorism that truth is usually born as a

heresy and dies as a superstition. With no real right to dissent by citizens or even by the mass of the party membership, truth became more and more inhibited by deadening dogma; a sort of catechism took the place of creative thought. And, within the confines of a single-party state, the alternative to active conformism was either silence or the risk of punishment as “an enemy of the people.” Is this suppression of the right to dissent inherent in the single-party state? Gorbachev recently made the point that:

developing the independent activities of the masses and prompting democratisation of all spheres of life under a one-party system is a noble but very difficult mission for the party. And a great deal will depend on how we deal with it. (*Pravda*, 26 Nov. 21989)

Gorbachev’s thought has special relevance to many parts of our own continent where the one-party system abounds. It straddles both capitalist and socialist-oriented countries and in most of them it is used to prevent, among other things, the democratic organisation of the working people either politically or in trade unions.

This is not to say that all one-party states in our continent have in fact turned out to be authoritarian; indeed some of them are headed by the most humane leaders who passionately believe in democratic processes. Nor can we discuss the role they have played in preventing tribal, ethnic and regional fragmentation, combatting externally inspired banditry, and correcting some of the grave distortions we inherited from the colonial period.

In relation to the socialist perspective, it is sometimes forgotten that the concept of the single-party state is nowhere to be found in classical Marxist theory. *And we have had sufficient experience of one-party rule in various parts of the world to perhaps conclude that the “mission” to promote real democracy under a one-party system is not just difficult but, in the long run, impossible.*

But, in any case, where a single-party state is in place and there is not even democracy and accountability within the party, it becomes a short-cut to a political tyranny over the whole of society. And at different points in time this is what happened in most socialist states.

The resulting sense of *political alienation* of the great majority of the people was not the only negative feature of existing socialism. Of equal importance was the failure to overcome the sense of *economic alienation* inherited from the capitalist past.

### V. Socialist Economic Alienation

The concept of alienation expressed “the objective transformation of the activity of man and of its results into an independent force, dominating him and inimical to him...” (Marx, *Capital* 1:716) Alienation has its origins in class-dominated society based on private property. Under capitalism, in the course of the production process, the worker himself “always produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him.” (A. P. Ogurtsov: *Soviet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Thus, the exploited classes objectively create and recreate the conditions of their own domination and exploitation. Consciousness of this fuels the class struggle against capitalist relations of production.

The aim of communism is to achieve the complete mastery and control over social forces which humanity itself has generated but which, under capitalism, have become objectified as alien power which is seen to stand above society and exercises mastery over it. Communism, according to Marx, involves the creation of a society in which “socialised humanity, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, *bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power*” (*Capital* 3, chap. 48).

The relevance of all this for our discussion is that only genuine socialist relations of production can begin the process which will lead to the *de-alienation* of society as a whole and generate the formation of a new “*socialist person*.” The process of de-alienation — whose completion must await the stage of communism — cannot be advanced by education and ideology alone; conditions must be created which lead progressively to real *participation and control* by each individual (as part of “socialised humanity”) over social life in all its aspects.

The destruction of the political and economic power of capital are merely first steps in the direction of de-alienation. *The transfer of legal ownership of productive property from private capital to the state does not, on its own, create fully socialist relations of production, nor does it always significantly change the work-life of the producer.* The power to control the producers’ work-life and to dispose of the products of labour is now in the hands of a “committee” rather than a board of directors. And if the “committee” separates itself from the producers by a bureaucratic wall without democratic accountability, its role is perceived no differently from that of the

board of directors. It remains a force over which the producer has no real control and which (despite the absence of economic exploitation of the capitalist variety) dominates him as an alien power.

State property itself has to be transformed into social property. This involves reorganising social life as a whole so that the producers, at least as a collective, have a real say not only in the production of social wealth but also in its disposal. In the words of Gorbachev, what is required is “*not only formal but also real socialisation and the real turning of the working people into the masters of all socialised production*” (*Pravda*, 20 Sept. 1989).

De-alienation requires that the separation between social wealth creation and social wealth appropriation and distribution is ended *and society as a whole is in control of all three processes*. A degree of self-management (at the level of individual enterprises) is only one ingredient in the process of de-alienation; conditions must be created making possible full popular control over *all society's institutions of power not just as a 'constitutional right' but as a reality*.

### ***Alienation in existing socialism***

The unavoidable inheritance from the past and the most serious distortions of socialist norms in most of the socialist countries combined to perpetuate alienation, albeit in a new form. *Private ownership* of the main means of production was replaced by state ownership. Private capital, as an alien power, no longer dominated or exploited the producer. But without real socialisation the key condition for de-alienation continued to be absent.

The immediate producers were given very little real control or participation in economic life beyond their own personal physical and/or mental exertions. In general, the over-centralised and commandist economies of the socialist world helped to entrench a form of “socialist” alienation. *At the purely economic level this form of alienation often turned out to be the worst of both worlds*.

**Under capitalism** economic compulsion sanctified by the rule of capital (threatened unemployment, etc.) plays an important role in providing the “incentive” for rising productivity despite alienation by(4) workers from the products of their labour. Capitalist economic levers based on the sanctity of private property are, at the end of the day, not over-concerned with the problems of alienation and more easily provide the incentive (in relation to the workers) that ‘he who does not work, neither shall he eat’.

**Under socialism** guaranteed employment and the amount of

remuneration did not always depend upon quality, productivity or efficiency, opening the way to parasitism at the point of production. Reward based on the socialist maxim of “to each according to his contribution” can obviously play a part in increasing productivity. *But for socialist society as a whole to really come into its own requires an incentive based on the producer’s real participation in the mechanisms of social control over the products of his/her labour; a feeling that the means of production and its products are his or hers as part of society.* This incentive was too often absent and stood in the way of the process of de-alienation.

Episodes of direct compulsion against producers, such as the forced collectivisation of the early 1930’s and the extensive use of convict labour as a direct state and party exercise, made things worse. Like all forms of primitive accumulation, these episodes created a most profound sense of alienation whose negative consequences are still being felt. Pure exhortation and political “mobilisation” did not, in the long run, prevent the onset of stagnation. Alienation, albeit in a different form, continued and inhibited the full potential of socialist economic advance.

There were, of course, other negative factors which require more extensive examination than is possible here. These include policies based on what has been called the “big bang theory of socialism” which ignored the historical fact that many of the ingredients of social systems which succeed one another — and this includes the change from capitalism to socialism — cannot be separated by a Chinese Wall.

The economy of a country the day after the workers take over is exactly the same as it was the day before, and it cannot be transformed merely by proclamation. The neglect of this truism resulted, now and then, in a primitive egalitarianism which reached lunatic proportions under the Pol Pot regime, the absence of cost-accounting, a dismissive attitude to commodity production and the law of value during the transition period, the premature abandonment of any role for market forces, a doctrinaire approach to the question of collectivisation, etc.

But rectification of these areas alone would not establish the material and moral superiority of socialism as a way of life for humanity. Only the creation of real socialist relations of production will give birth to the socialist man and woman whose active participation in all the social processes will ensure that socialism reaches its full potential and moves towards a classless communist society.

Under existing socialism alienation has persisted because of a less than full control and participation by the people in these processes.

*In short, the way forward is through thorough-going democratic socialism; a way which can only be charted by a party which wins its support through democratic persuasion and ideological contest and not, as has too often happened up to now, by a claim of right.*

## **VI. A Look at Ourselves**

The commandist and bureaucratic approaches which took root during Stalin's time affected communist parties throughout the world, including our own. *We cannot disclaim our share of the responsibility for the spread of the personality cult and a mechanical embrace of Soviet domestic and foreign policies, some of which discredited the cause of socialism.* We kept silent for too long after the 1956 Khrushchev revelations.

It would, of course, be naive to imagine that a movement can, at a stroke, shed all the mental baggage it has carried from the past. And our 7th Congress emphasised the need for on-going vigilance. It noted some isolated reversion to the past, including attempts to engage in intrigue and factional activity in fraternal organisations, sectarian attitudes towards some non-party colleagues, and sloganised dismissals of views which do not completely accord with ours.

The implications for socialism of the Stalinist distortions have not yet been evenly understood throughout our ranks. We need to continue the search for a better balance between advancing party policy as a collective and the toleration of on-going debate and even constructive dissent.

*We do not pretend that our party's changing postures in the direction of democratic socialism are the results only of our own independent evolution.* Our shift undoubtedly owes a prime debt to the process of perestroika and glasnost which was so courageously unleashed under Gorbachev's inspiration. Closer to home, the democratic spirit which dominated in the re-emerged trade union movement from the early 1970's onwards, also made its impact.

*But we can legitimately claim that in certain fundamental respects our indigenous revolutionary practice long ago ceased to be guided by Stalinist concepts.* This is the case particularly in relation to the way the party performed its role as a working class vanguard, its relations with fraternal organisations and representatives of other social forces and, above all, its approach to the question of

democracy in the post-apartheid state and in a future socialist South Africa.

***The party as a vanguard and inner-party Democracy***

We have always believed (and we continue to do so) that it is indispensable for the working class to have an independent political instrument which safeguards its role in the democratic revolution and which leads it towards an eventual classless society. But such leadership must be won rather than imposed. Our claim to represent the historic aspirations of the workers does not give us an absolute right to lead them or to exercise control over society as a whole in their name.

Our new programme asserts that a communist party does not earn the title of vanguard merely by proclaiming it. Nor does its claim to be the upholder of Marxism give it a monopoly of political wisdom or a natural right to exclusive control of the struggle. We can only earn our place as a vanguard force by superior efforts of leadership and devotion to the cause of liberation and socialism. And we can only win adherence to our ideology by demonstrating its superiority as a theoretical guide to revolutionary practice.

This approach to the vanguard concept has not, as we know, always been adhered to in world revolutionary practice and in an earlier period we too were infected by the distortion. *But, in our case, the shift which has taken place in our conception of 'vanguard' is by no means a post-Gorbachev phenomenon.* The wording on this question in our new programme is taken almost verbatim from our Central Committee's 1970 report on organisation.

The 1970 document reiterated the need to safeguard, both in the letter and the spirit, the independence of the political expressions of other social forces whether economic or national. It rejected the old purist and domineering concept that all those who do not agree with the party are necessarily enemies of the working class. And it saw no conflict between our understanding of the concept of vanguard and the acceptance of the African National Congress as the head of the liberation alliance.

Despite the inevitable limitations which illegality imposed on our inner-party democratic processes, the principles of accountability and electivity of all higher organs were substantially adhered to. Seven underground Congresses of our party have been held since 1953. The delegates to Congress from the lower organs were elected without lists from above and always constituted a majority. The incoming

Central Committees were elected by a secret ballot without any form of direct or indirect “guidance” to the delegates. In other words, *the Leninist concept of democratic centralism has not been abused to entrench authoritarian leadership practices.*

Our structures, down to the lowest units, have been increasingly encouraged to assess and question leadership pronouncements in a critical spirit and the views of the membership are invariably canvassed before finalising basic policy documents. Our 7th Congress, which adopted our new programme, *The Path to Power*, was a model of democratic consultation and spirited debate. Special procedures designed to exclude suspected enemy agents as delegates to Congress limited complete free choice. But, in practice, these limitations affected a negligible percentage. Overall, despite the security risks involved in the clandestine conditions, the will of our membership finds democratic expression. *This spirit of democracy also informs our relationship with fraternal political forces and our approach to the political framework of a post-liberation South Africa.*

### ***Relations with fraternal organisations***

As we have already noted, one of the most serious casualties in the divide which developed between democracy and socialism was in the one-sided relationship between the ruling parties and the mass organisations. In order to prevent such a distortion in a post-apartheid South Africa we have, for example, set out in our draft Workers’ Charter that:

Trade unions and their federation shall be completely independent and answerable only to the decisions of their members or affiliates, democratically arrived at. *No political party, state organ or enterprise, whether public, private or mixed, shall directly or indirectly interfere with such independence.*

The substance of this approach is reflected in the way our party has in fact conducted itself for most of its underground existence.

Our 1970 extended Central Committee meeting reiterated the guidelines which inform our relations with fraternal organisations and other social forces. Special emphasis was once again given to the need to safeguard, both in the letter and in the spirit, the independence of the political expressions of other social forces, whether economic or national.

We do not regard the trade unions or the national movement as mere conduits for our policies. Nor do we attempt to advance our

policy positions through intrigue or manipulation. Our relationship with these organisations is based on complete respect for their independence, integrity and inner-democracy. In so far as our influence is felt, it is the result of open submissions of policy positions and the impact of individual communists who win respect as among the most loyal, the most devoted and ideologically clear members of these organisations.

Old habits die hard and among the most pernicious of these is the purist concept that all those who do not agree with the party are necessarily enemies of socialism. This leads to a substitution of name-calling and jargon for healthy debate with non-party activists. As already mentioned, our 7th Congress noted some isolated reversions along these lines and resolved to combat such tendencies. But, in general, the long-established and appreciable move away from old-style commandism and sectarianism has won for our party the admiration and support of a growing number of non-communist revolutionary activists in the broad workers' and national movement. We also consider it appropriate to canvass the views of such activists in the formulation of certain aspects of our policy. For example, we submitted our preliminary conception of the contents of a Workers' Charter for critical discussion not only in our own ranks but throughout the national and trade union movements.

### ***Democracy and the future***

Our party's programme holds firmly to a post-apartheid state which will guarantee all citizens the basic rights and freedoms of organisation, speech, thought, press, movement, residence, conscience and religion; full trade union rights for all workers including the right to strike, and one person one vote in free and democratic elections. *These freedoms constitute the very essence of our national liberation and socialist objectives and they clearly imply political pluralism.*

Both for these historical reasons and because experience has shown that an institutionalised one-party state has a strong propensity for authoritarianism, *a multi-party post-apartheid democracy both in the national democratic and socialist phases, is desirable.*

We believe that post-apartheid state power must clearly vest in the elected representatives of the people and not, directly or indirectly, in the administrative command of a party. The relationship which evolves between political parties and state structures must not, in any way, undermine the sovereignty of elected bodies.

We also believe that if there is real democracy in the post-apartheid

state, the way will be open for a peaceful progression towards our ultimate objective — a socialist South Africa. This approach is consistent with the Marxist view — not always adhered to in practice — that the working class must win the majority to its side: as long as no violence is used against the people there is no other road to power. (Lenin 1975b, 36)

It follows that, in truly democratic conditions, it is perfectly legitimate and desirable for a party claiming to be the political instrument of the working class to attempt to lead its constituency in *democratic contest for political power* against other parties and groups representing other social forces. And if it wins, it must be constitutionally required, from time to time, to go back to the people for a renewed mandate. The alternative to this is self-perpetuating power with all its implications for corruption and dictatorship.

### ***Conclusion***

We dare not underestimate the damage that has been wrought to the cause of socialism by the distortions we have touched upon. We, however, continue to have complete faith that socialism represents the most rational, just and democratic way for human beings to relate to one another.

- *Humankind can never attain real freedom until a society has been built in which no person has the freedom to exploit another person.*
- *The bulk of humanity's resources will never be used for the good of humanity until they are in public ownership and under democratic control.*
- *The ultimate aim of socialism to eliminate all class inequalities occupies a prime place in the body of civilised ethics even before Marx.*
- *The all-round development of the individual and the creation of opportunities for every person to express his or her talents to the full can only find ultimate expression in a society which dedicates itself to people rather than profit.*

The opponents of socialism are very vocal about what they call the failure of socialism in Africa.(28) But they say little, if anything, about Africa's real failure; the failures of capitalism. Over 90 percent of our continent's people live out their wretched and repressed lives in stagnating and declining capitalist-oriented economies. International capital, to whom most of these countries are

mortgaged, virtually regards cheap bread, free education and full employment as economic crimes. Western outcries against violations of human rights are muted when they occur in countries with a capitalist orientation.

The way forward for the whole of humanity lies within a socialist framework guided by genuine socialist humanitarianism and not within a capitalist system which entrenches economic and social inequalities as a way of life. Socialism can undoubtedly be made to work without the negative practices which have distorted many of its key objectives.

***But mere faith in the future of socialism is not enough. The lessons of past failures have to be learnt. Above all, we have to ensure that its fundamental tenet — socialist democracy — occupies a rightful place in all future practice.***

The subject matter of this discussion paper will no doubt be debated for years to come both inside and outside the ranks of communist and workers' parties. The publication of this draft has been authorized by our party's leadership, as a launching-pad for further critical thought. Some colleagues have made extremely valuable suggestions which have been incorporated. But, as a whole, it represents the first reflections of the author only.

January 1990

## NOTES

1. It is, for example, sad to record that among the early foreign policy initiatives of the new government in Hungary was to play host to South Africa's foreign minister. By doing this it has, without even the diplomatic niceties of consulting with the representatives of the repressed and dominated majority, moved away from one of the most humanitarian aspects of the policies of the socialist world, i.e. to be in the vanguard of those who shun apartheid.
2. Among other things, statistics recently published in *The Economist* (UK) show that in the Soviet Union — after only 70 years of socialist endeavour in what was one of the most backward countries in the capitalist world — there are more

graduate engineers than in the US, more graduate research scientists than in Japan and more medical doctors per head than in Western Europe. It also produces more steel, fuel and energy than any other country (*The World in the 1990s*; *Economist* publication). How many capitalist countries can match the achievements of most of the socialist world in the provision of social security, child care, the ending of cultural backwardness, and so on? There is certainly no country in the world which can beat Cuba's record in the sphere of health care.

3. Marx used the term 'primitive accumulation' to describe the *original* process of capitalist accumulation which, he maintained, was not the result of abstinence but rather of acts (including brigandage) such as the expropriation of the peasantry as happened during the British Enclosures (*Capital* Volume 1, Part 7). Preobrazhensky (1965) talked about "primitive socialist accumulation" involving the expropriation of resources from the better-off classes to generate capital for socialist industrial development. Here, the term is used to describe the arbitrary measures taken against the Soviet peasantry to forcibly "enclose" them into collectives.
4. Socialism, as a transition phase to communism, is not based on full egalitarianism. But clearly the socialist maxim "to each according to his contribution" is not applied absolutely in a socialist society which devotes a large slice of its resources to social services, subsidising basic necessities, and implementing the human right of guaranteed employment. *The middle strata in socialist society are inevitably worse off than their counterparts in the West. Access to the flesh-pots of consumer goods (which the West produces for the upper crust in almost mind-bending variations) is more restricted when society tries to use its surplus to achieve a more just distribution of wealth.*
5. In the recent period a number of European and African political parties have "officially" abandoned Marxism-Leninism as a theoretical guide. In the case of FRELIMO, the decision appears to be the result of second thoughts on what may, in the circumstances, have been a premature transformation of the movement into a communist vanguard. But in the case of some Western parties the decision seems to be a response (with undoubted electoral implications) to the distortions of the socialist experience rather than a reasoned conclusion that

Marxism is not a viable tool in the socialist endeavour. A leading Soviet academic (reported in *Work in Progress* no. 48, July [1987]: 7) has predicted that South Africa has no chance of becoming socialist for a century.

6. This must be understood as providing the immediate explanation of the way major social change manifests itself in a situation in which the relations of production have become obstacles to the development of productive forces.
7. This type of formulation is preferred to the one occasionally used by Gorbachev that there are certain universal human values which take priority over class values. This latter formulation tends to detract from the inter-dependence of working class and human morality. It also perhaps goes too far in separating morality from its class connection, even though it is clear that the assertion of certain values can be in the mutual interests of otherwise contending classes.
8. It is instructive to note how Western anti-Marxists and liberals understood and even welcomed the imposition of the most blatant dictatorial methods to deal with the counterrevolutionaries in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the Ceaucescu regime.
9. A stark illustration of this is the failure of any of the women's organizations in the socialist countries to mount agitation against the continuing inequalities between men and women in key social and political sectors. It is utterly inconceivable that the women's organizations could have failed to notice the continuing male-orientated structure of the family and the overwhelming male domination (more so than even in the capitalist West) of all structures of political power.
10. The total number of votes cast was 36.26 million. Of the major parties the Social Revolutionaries received 20.9 million, the Bolsheviks 9.02 million, the Cadets [Constitutional Democrats] 1.8 million, the Mensheviks 0.6 million, and the rest was shared among between other parties.
11. Some of the socialist countries were ruled by a front but in substance the allies of the communist parties had little, if any, power or effective autonomy.
12. They conveniently ignore the fact that most of the countries which tried to create conditions for the building of socialism faced unending civil war, aggression, and externally inspired

banditry; a situation in which it is hardly possible to build any kind of stable social formation—capitalist or socialist.

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## Book Reviews

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*Canadian Volunteers: Spain 1936–1939.* By William C. Beeching. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1989, 212 pages, cloth \$28.50.

In 1989 the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War again focused attention on those dark days before the outbreak of World War Two when the brief, flickering flame of Spanish democracy was extinguished by the combined military might of Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini. Not surprisingly, there has been no lack of armchair historians and political pundits to pronounce upon the futility of such “lost causes” as the efforts of the International Brigades to assist the Spanish people in their front-line battle against fascism. In these circumstances, there is probably no better antidote than William C. Beeching’s book, *Canadian Volunteers: Spain 1936–1939*.

More than ten years ago the surviving members of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, the Canadian contingent in the International Brigades, decided that a detailed account of their experiences produced by themselves was long overdue. Ironically, the only full-length study of the battalion had been done in 1969, by a U.S. professor of English literature, Victor Hoar. The veterans chose William Beeching, a lifetime political activist from Saskatchewan, who had served as a scout with the Lincoln Brigade, to research, edit, and write their history. The result is a skillful interweaving of personal narration, political insights, and little-known historical facts, which serves as a fitting tribute and memorial to the 1,448 Canadians who heeded the call from Spain.

One of the greatest merits of this book is that in it we hear the voices of so many of the veterans themselves. The personalities and heroism of the individuals emerge clearly amid the detailed description of battles, the scenes of horror and carnage, as well as in the more commonplace concerns of the universal soldier. Very rarely do we hear the voices of the many nameless and faceless people who in their combined impact are the real makers of history, but in the voices of the members of the Mac-Pap, and in the account

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of the country-wide network of support for them, the Committees to Aid Spanish Democracy, and the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, this oversight is in some measure redressed. This book is a genuine people's history, which by virtue of its meticulous research has earned a place in the mainstream of historical research.

The book begins appropriately with a Role of Honour, a list of all of those Canadians who volunteered to serve in Spain in any capacity. Only one other country, France, contributed a larger proportion of its population to the International Brigades. One notes among the many names which constitute a virtual Canadian mosaic, Dr. Norman Bethune, who pioneered the mobile blood-transfusion unit, as well as writers Hugh Garner and Ted Allan. Two women also appear on the list, Florence Pike, registered nurse, and Jean Watts, an ambulance driver.

The response to the Spanish people's call for assistance was a generous one, although volunteers were harassed by the security service, the R.C.M.P., and were forced to defy the Foreign Enlistment Act, which was applied to the Spanish conflict in July 1937. Violation of the act meant risking a \$2000 fine, or two years' imprisonment, or both. As Beeching writes, "young men bound to fight for democracy in Spain were forced to leave Canada like thieves in the night."

The journey to Spain itself was filled with unexpected hazards and even tragedy. Most of the volunteers crossed the Pyrenees by foot, a fifteen-hour walk over dangerous terrain, but some never did reach their destination and died off the Spanish coast when their boat was torpedoed by an Italian submarine. Canadians fought with distinction in the defense of Madrid, the battle on the Jarama, the Brunete offensive, and in some of the most difficult phases of the war, the Battles of the Arragon, the crossing of the Ebro, and the Retreats. Accompanying the first person accounts of these battles there are maps which greatly help to clarify the situation for the reader.

The story of the formation of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, named after the reformers of the Rebellions of 1837, is in itself an illustration of the spirit of internationalism. When the U.S. nationals in the ranks expressed a wish to form a third battalion with a view to establishing an all-U.S. brigade, the Canadians, who had already proposed setting up their own battalion, began to feel that they were in danger of being passed by. But in the end, the U.S. volunteers voted unanimously in favor of the formation of the Mac-Pap, a battalion which was not exclusively Canadian, and was at first

commanded by officers from the United States.

Chapter 6, "A War on Many Fronts," outlines the whole gamut of responsibilities assumed by the volunteers in Spain. The partisans, the artillery, the scouts, the medical services, transport services, armor, air force, and cavalry are all given credit for their many-sided efforts. The accounts of the suffering of the volunteers in prison camps and the atrocities inflicted upon the Spanish people in defeat make painful reading in chapter 7. At this point, the reader is grateful for the occasional glints of humor which emerge earlier, and relieve somewhat the unspeakable horror and tragedy of this war.

The fate of the surviving volunteers when they finally returned to Canada, sometimes after great difficulty, is not widely known. Many of these front-line anti-fascist veterans were harassed by the R.C.M.P., and found it difficult to find employment. When World War Two broke out, the battalion offered its services to the Canadian government, but was refused. In 1940, with the passage of the War Measures Act, many of the veterans were interned, and were not released until 1942. In spite of this treatment, many of them, including William Beeching, volunteered for the Armed Forces and served once again in the now world-wide battle against fascism. As recently as 1980, the veterans petitioned the government to be recognized as veterans and receive pensions; again they were refused.

The official treatment of the members of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion has never succeeded in extirpating interest in them and the appearance of this timely book does much to highlight their contribution in a very personal and moving way. If in the last decade of the twentieth century we are again drawn to examine their place in history, perhaps because they so richly deserve the tribute paid to them and to all of the departing Internationals by Dolores Ibaruri, La Pasionara, when she said in October of 1938:

You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality. We shall not forget you, and, when the olive tree of peace puts forth its leaves again, mingled with the laurels of the Spanish Republic's victory, come back!

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