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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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Nature, Society, and Thought

# NST

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# Whatever Became of State Monopoly Capitalism?

**Tom Meisenhelder**

ABSTRACT: The idea of state monopoly capitalism has a long history within Marxist thought. Beginning in the writings of Marx and Engels, the idea was developed and elaborated by Hilferding, Bukharin, Lenin, and others. If a lead is taken from recent criticism of the concept, the idea can be reconstructed in a way that is very useful to the analysis of today's global capitalist economy. Such a reconstruction of the concept of state monopoly capitalism results in the recognition of a new stage in the history of capitalism, called "state transnational finance capitalism." This new idea can, in turn, reveal several significant aspects of contemporary global capitalism and its contradictions.

## *The history of an idea*

### *Marx and Engels*

Although the specific concept of state monopoly capitalism may have originated in the 1950s, the general notion has a much longer heritage that stretches back to Marx and Engels. Marx himself had very little to say about "state monopoly capitalism." Although it seems he planned to analyze the development of capitalism as a world economy, unfortunately, like the discussion of classes, this remained an unfinished project. Still he was cognizant of the development of monopolies and corporations ("joint stock companies") in capitalism and began a discussion of them in volume three of *Capital*. The corporation is described as the socialization of capital within capitalism. In the corporation, capital ownership is separated from

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control over the process of production, which becomes the purview of salaried managers. According to Engels, Marx also was aware of the emergence of international cartels between national monopolies. In addition, Marx argued that the emergence of monopoly corporations produces increased state intervention in the economy and results in a kind of “financial aristocracy” based in share exchanges (1972, 596, 1045–47). In these few comments Marx seems to be pointing to the existence of a type of capitalism wherein capital is “socialized” in the sense that various individual capitals are joined together within a common process of production. This is explained as one consequence of the tendency toward a continuing concentration and centralization of capital.

Engels laid out in *Anti-Dühring* a more specific analysis of the latter stages of capitalism. He traced the development of monopoly capital through the forms of joint-stock companies, trusts, and monopolies. The last form itself leads, according to Engels, to increased state intervention in the economy, with the state itself eventually undertaking the direction of production. Engels suggested that the emergence of what we now might call state monopoly capitalism is likely to occur first in the sectors of communication and transportation. Engels also noted the internationalization of cartels and trusts, the increasing centrality of the stock exchange, and the concentration of economic power in the hands of financial “speculators.” He also proposed that, although such a development does not equal the establishment of socialism, it may indicate its propinquity in that it involves production according to a plan, the dispensability of the individual capitalist, and the increased visibility of exploitation (1987, 264–66).<sup>1</sup>

Engels outlined the major characteristics of the orthodox concept of state monopoly capitalism. These include the development of corporate forms of ownership and direction of the means of production, and increased state involvement in the economy. Engels attributed these developments to normal capitalist processes of the concentration and centralization of capital. Indeed Engels even begins to differentiate the internal dynamics of state monopoly capitalism by pointing out the key role of the stock exchange and finance capital.

### *Hilferding*

The most important classical theorist of state monopoly capitalism may well be Rudolph Hilferding. In *Finance Capital* (1981), he argued that increased state intervention in the economy may produce a long-term stabilization of capitalism. He called this result “organized



capitalism” and described it as a phase of capitalism in which the state and monopoly capital are dominant. Together these forces plan the economy and administer society.

As capital becomes more and more concentrated and centralized and as its organic component increases, Hilferding argued, industrial capitalists become dependent on banks as the sources of the increasingly large amounts of investment capital necessary for economic success and growth. These large long-term loans motivate banks to take a more intensive (and directive) interest in their corporate clients. Eventually this means that the banks begin to own *and* control the means of production. In the process, there emerges an intertwining of bank and industrial capital that Hilferding called “finance capital.” Hilferding wrote that a small number of banks control the major industrial trusts and cartels. The process is expansionary, so that as productive units become larger they are able to use new technologies and other benefits of size to gain a competitive edge and market success. They in turn become more dependent on bank credit for the capital needed for future expansion and newer technologies. In addition, stock markets develop so that a profit can be made simply through the speculative buying and selling of corporate stock, providing banks with another arena of potential power (90–95, 113–14, 135–40).

The successful economic hegemony of monopoly and finance capital results in a surplus of profits and the need to export capital. Hilferding thus explained the development of imperialism and the strengthening of the nation-state. State colonial policies provide monopoly capital with access to markets, raw materials, labor, and other factors of production at very low cost. Finance capital dominates the state, guaranteeing the domestic market through a protective-tariff policy as well as facilitating the conquest of foreign markets, through armed force if necessary. A strong state ensures respect for the interests of finance capital abroad and can intervene in every corner of the globe in order to transform the whole world into a sphere of investment (334–35). Hilferding posited that later in the development of organized capitalism monopolies may push for a free-trade system that enables them to expand their economic territory. He also noted that capital was beginning to transfer production itself to other countries. He predicted that in the end this would “amalgamate the world market into a single economic territory, would ensure the . . . most rational international division of labor” (311).

*Bukharin*

Nikolai Bukharin was a second great Marxist theorist of capitalism and imperialism. Bukharin felt that state intervention resulted in a stabilization of capitalism under the hegemony of monopoly-finance capital. Thus, “finance capital seizes the entire country . . . into one gigantic trust whose partners are the financial groups and the state” (1915, 118). The state’s primary instrument is the policy of imperialism, which creates a world market, complete with underdeveloped periphery, enabled by improvements in transportation and communication, and empowered by world finance capital ruled by a few giant banks. Disagreeing with Kautsky’s notion of “ultra-imperialism,” Bukharin asserted the continued importance of national conflicts regardless of the tentative emergence of some international forms of productive property (33–62). Bukharin denied that the internationalization of capital can overcome national boundaries due to the facts of national economic inequalities, or “uneven development,” and national economic policies such as tariff protections (130–43).

Bukharin thus noted a contradiction between capitalism’s tendency toward internationalization and the limitation of nationally organized economies and political nation-states. He suggested that this will be resolved by a hegemonic state widening its area of control in an imperial fashion; that is, the formation of a “world kingdom” or empire under one dominant nation (106–9). This means the development of a “world trust, a single world state obedient to the finance capital of the victors . . . as determined by military struggle” (120).

*Lenin*

Relying heavily on Hilferding and Bukharin, Lenin (1964a, 1964b) added to the developing idea of state monopoly capitalism in Marxist theory with his theory of imperialism. Without reviewing the complete theory in detail, we may outline the description of the emergence of the state and finance capital as increasingly important factors in the capitalist production process within the monopoly capitalism of early twentieth-century Europe. Lenin felt that the state intervenes in the economy in order to save capitalism from its inevitable “decay.”

In his introduction to Bukharin’s book on imperialism (1964a), Lenin wrote that capitalism had become internationalized and monopolized under the hegemony of finance capital. He further developed these ideas in his own study, *Imperialism* (1964b), where he highlighted the role of banks in capitalism. Banks too become huge monopoly corporations first on a national and then on an international basis. He also argued that it is through these banks that a small group of

capitalists achieve control of the world economy. Lenin noted that close interconnections develop between industrial and financial capitalists and between both forms of capital and the state. He accepted Hilferding's definition of finance capital as the capital that banks dispose of and that industrialists employ (210–25). As their power grows, bankers begin to dominate entrepreneurial capitalists. When they run out of profitable investments at home, they begin to export capital to less developed countries thus forming the economic base of imperialism and in a division of the world between capitalist powers (240–75). Lenin scoffed at Kautsky's idea that there might emerge an "ultra-imperialism" based in international finance capital and a unified world economy (294–98). Rather he foresaw continued rivalry between the major capitalist nation-states, perhaps interspersed with periods of interimperialist alliances, due to competition between various national capitals and the processes of uneven development.

*Comintern and later theorists*

These early uses of the idea of state monopoly capitalism were brought together into a formal conception by the theorists of the Communist International. Vargas, for instance, described the state's activities as services in the interest of monopoly capital that smooth out the contradictions of capitalism. Stalin saw state monopoly capitalism as capital's response to the crisis caused by the emergence of the socialist-bloc economies. Post-Stalinists shifted the source of crises to the process of decolonization in the Third World (Mandel 1978, 513–22; Hardach and Karras 1974, 52–64). These theorists suggested the development of a kind of fusion of capital and the state in the process of accumulating profits and expanding further the forces of production. The state spends and taxes more as it begins to regulate trade, banking, prices, and wages in order to reproduce the power of monopoly capital. Strategically these theorists call for the formation of a cross-class "antimonopoly alliance" that would struggle to make real the potential socialization of production manifest within state monopoly capitalism.

All this was more recently summarized and reasserted by Kurzweil and Richmond (1970). Describing the contemporary United States, they stressed the idea that monopolies have very strong influence over the policies of the state. Monopolies also represent the increasing socialization of production and an increase in the proportion of organic capital within the processes of production in advanced capitalism. Indeed it is the contradiction between socialized production and private

accumulation that leads monopoly capital to call on the state to control the inherent crises of capitalism and guarantee corporate profits. Kurzweil and Richmond emphasized that the state uses its taxing power to insure the profits of monopoly capital.

Kurzweil and Richmond further suggested that these policies in the end merely shift capitalist crises to the social sector as represented in problems of health care, education, crime, housing, and the wasteful violence of the military-industrial complex. They too call for an antimonopoly coalition of the exploited, particularly those, like working people of color, who suffer most from the social crises of state monopoly capitalism and the policies of imperialism.

### *Summary*

A review of the development of the idea of state monopoly capitalism reveals that the idea contains four primary elements. First, state monopoly capitalism refers to a stage in the development of capitalist societies in which the economy is dominated by large corporations, or "monopolies." Presaged by writings about joint stock companies, trusts, and cartels, the rise of monopolies is a consequence of the general tendency in capitalism for the centralization and concentration of capital. Indeed it is these processes, particularly the former, that seem to be the first motive behind the development of state monopoly capitalism. It is also important to note that Marxist theory generally understands the emergence of monopolies as an early (still capitalist) form of the socialization of production. With the joint stock corporation, capital become social capital, although accumulation remains based in a logic of private property.

Second, the development of monopolies leads to the ascension of "finance capital" to a position of hegemony. The economy becomes centered on investment funds and credit loaned to, or directly invested in, corporations by major banking institutions. It seems that as the process of the concentration and centralization of capital continues, monopolies emerge and grow ever larger, thereby continually increasing the organic composition of capital and further developing the technology of production. And each new and more sophisticated machine requires more capital, so that growing corporations must turn to financial institutions for the large amounts of capital needed to remain competitive and ensure profits. Bank and industry become closely articulated, and finance controls production.

Third, it is argued that finance capital turns to the state to provide for the further reproduction of capitalism through a foreign policy of imperialism as well as domestic economic policies that stabilize the

cyclical crises of capitalism. Imperialist state practices provide capital with cheap labor, raw materials, new markets for commodities, and—most important to finance capital—new markets for capital. They also bring with them the threat of war due to various rivalries for territory and influence between “national” capitals. Domestic state activities regulate prices, demand, costs, and other factors of production so that profits remain more or less secure.

Finally, imperialism, in turn, begins a process of the internationalization of capital wherein finance capital serves to interlink the whole world into one economic system. The worldwide expansion of investment and credit dominated by monopoly finance using the leading wedge of state imperialism is first premised on the development of new technologies of communication capable of high-speed transmission. It is here, with the notion of a nationally based international expansion of the power of monopoly-finance, that the classical concept of state monopoly capitalism ends.

***Weaknesses of the classical idea  
of state monopoly capitalism***

The classical idea of state monopoly capitalism has some serious problems. Looking at these shortcomings may enable a reconstruction of the concept that retains its usefulness within Marxist theory while updating it to the contemporary situation.

Some dislike the implication they find in the concept that an economic role for the state is a late development in capitalism, when in fact the state has always been involved in capitalist production (Baran and Sweezy 1966, 66–67). Others question the use of the term *finance capital*, believing it represents a total merger of industrial and banking capital (Harris 1983, 176). They point out that, on the contrary, in contemporary capitalism industry and banking remain relatively autonomous sectors, although with important common interests represented by key economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank that direct flows of investment and credit in a way that promotes the common interests of industrialists and bankers.

There are also controversies concerning the relationship between state and capital implied by the concept. Some, like Mandel and Baran and Sweezy, fear that the concept gives too much autonomous power over capital to the state, leaving the impression that the working class might be able to use the state to control monopoly capital (Mandel 1978, 515–17; Baran and Sweezy 1966, 66–67). Mandel feels that in

the end the state is more or less a tool of monopoly capital. Others, like Miliband, argue that this is a key problematic within the concept of state monopoly capitalism which does too little to clarify the relative autonomy of the state but rather sees it merely as an instrument of monopoly capital (1977). Miliband is correct in his description of the main tendency within the concept's development, but I agree with Mandel that it is wrong to overstate the autonomy of the state. This is particularly true in an age when nation-states operate within a global economy dominated by transnational capital. What at first glance seems to be the growth of state power and autonomy may merely reflect the need of finance capital for a way to protect its profits.

Contrary to its critics, state monopoly capitalism does not necessarily include a belief that this stage of development has overcome the fundamental contradictions of capitalist society. Indeed, the theory directly discounts Kautsky's position on "ultra-imperialism." It only proposes that these contradictions have been displaced. The most serious of the shortcomings of the classical idea is that it presumes a national context for observing capitalism. This premise is implied in most elaborations of all three terms—*state*, *monopoly*, and *capitalism*. *State* usually is taken to refer to the nation-state; *monopolies* are presumed to be based in some national economy, and *capitalism* is meant to refer to the economies of particular nations. These notions are quickly becoming outdated. Capitalism has become an integrated global economy based in large megacorporations and other transnational economic institutions. Transnational capital is not tied to a particular national economy or national capitalist class. In this situation capitalism's basic dialectical contradictions lie between forces of production that are increasingly transnational and social relations of production based in the nation-state.

These criticisms of the classical idea of state monopoly capitalism point to new elements in the development of capitalism since the 1970s, when the idea became more or less dormant. Adapting the model of state monopoly capitalism to these new realities can revitalize the empirical strength of the concept and make it once again a useful contributor to Marxist theory.

### ***State transnational finance capitalism***

Beginning with the 1970s, capitalism entered a stage that can be called "state transnational finance capitalism," characterized by the hegemony of institutions representing the interests of transnational finance capital. Contrary to Bukharin, Lenin, and other early state

monopoly capitalism theorists, capital is increasingly globalized and detached from any national base. Its principal institutions include the large international banks (such as Citicorp), a select group of megacorporations (like Xerox), and a few multilateral economic organizations (particularly, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). Since the 1970s, the weakening of the Bretton Woods order and the decline of the economic hegemony of the United States produced a globalization of capitalism based in multilateral institutions and transnational banks. Figures indicate a recent worldwide expansion of international bank capital, and researchers have discovered the increasing power of financial wealth within the ruling class of developed societies like the United States (Petras and Davenport 1990). The rules and criteria of multilateral lending institutions ensure an expanded accumulation of capital. The framework created by the international institutions of transnational finance capital dictates how states intervene in economic matters attempting to control the cycles and contradictions of capitalism. The multilateral institutions of transnational finance capital and the credit and investment resources they control are instruments for manipulating national economies, particularly those in the Third World. Increasingly the IMF commands key aspects of the economic, social, and political policies of nations, especially in the periphery, and local states and ruling classes merely administer programs. There is now a global capitalist economy in which “stateless” money and a “stateless” financial system dominate national economies and nation-states (Wachtel 1986).

The development of state transnational finance capitalism was stimulated by the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreements, which in a sense “deregulated” international monetary relations and increased the power of a private ruling class of international finance capitalists. It also was enabled by the development of global electronic communications that allow high-speed international transactions. The new global economy uses Eurodollars, dollars deposited in foreign banks, free from U. S. regulations and controls, and capable of rapid mobility due to electronic transfers, as its global currency (Wachtel 1986, 91–118). This, of course, includes the oil profits in the 1970s, the so-called “petrodollars.” International banks found themselves with a surplus of funds and made larger and larger loans to the Third World and elsewhere around the globe. These loans opened national economies to the controlling power of transnational finance capital. International debt increasingly characterizes both core and peripheral

nations. The worldwide flow of credit and money is state transnational finance capitalism's manifestation of the oft-noted mobility and power of capital. It has turned even multinational corporations into centers of finance rather than centers of production. This amounts to a reconstitution of capitalism as a global economy characterized by an international division of labor (the globalization of production), a world market, and a global culture based in the transnationalization of mass communications and popular culture.

The size and scope of transnational finance capital are revealed by glancing at the major international banks. Bankers make an increasingly large fraction of the ruling class (Petras and Davenport 1990). Banks like Bank of America, Citicorp, and Deutsche Bank have assets around 100 billion dollars throughout the world. Citibank, for instance, earns a majority of its profits and income outside the United States (Wachtel 1986, 113–16). As Wachtel sums it up, “The supranational economy . . . consists of banks and corporations that conduct their economic affairs beyond the political reach of national governments” (5). These huge financial corporations are perhaps the most recent outcropping from the dialectic of the forces and relations of production at the center of all capitalism.

Even the superstructure reflects the process of globalization. With the international communication of a mass consumerist popular culture through the mass media, McLuhan's global village has come—and CNN is its news channel. Indeed this process is crucial to the success of state transnational finance capitalism. People all over the world must be convinced to enter the world marketplace as workers and consumers. They must be taught to give up their traditional ways of life and thought in order to join the world culture of movies, McDonalds, and the work ethic. They must become the workers and consumers necessary to profitable loans and investments. This “world culture” is postmodern only in the sense that it is indeed decentered or detached from any particular territorial base, but it is in fact the material product of a culture industry increasingly owned by, or tied to, transnational finance capital.

The global capital market is stabilized by the World Bank and the IMF. In a sense these are the planning—or at least organizational—ministries of world capitalism. They regulate supply, demand, money flows, wages, prices, and other aspects of the international economy by controlling banking and credit. They use this power to influence and manage local economies, especially those of the periphery, for the benefit of transnational finance capital and perhaps local elites. They



ensure that profits and interest flow from around the world to the depositories of the international banks (Hoogvelt 1990, 117–18). Commercial bank debt and other capital transfers are key processes in the development of state transnational finance capitalism. Credit is replacing direct investment as the lever of choice as finance capital gains hegemony over industrial capital. Control of the international flow of investment capital means that these institutions have great influence over national economies as well. And control over money, in an economy organized according to the principles of the marketplace, easily translates into directive control, motivated only by money, over the creation and distribution of technology and other resources. If nations resist and adopt policies that offend the interest of transnational finance capital, money for investment (capital) flees to more agreeable surroundings, as discovered by France and Zimbabwe recently. Capital, having been concentrated in the monopoly international banks, though in surplus is in short supply unless state policies agree with the guidelines of these agencies.

There is emerging an international ruling class based on the worldwide accumulation of capital, increasingly in the form of interest on loans and credit. Transnational finance capitalists hold financially profitable investments throughout the world. These investments are guided and protected by the declarations of the World Bank and the IMF. Industrial capitalists operating huge megacorporations, based in expensive technologies of production and communication and probably already in debt to the banks, rely on their ability to turn to the large international banks for the capital they need to make payments or compete and expand in the world marketplace. Thus, industrial capital listens to—and is subordinate to—finance. Indeed, increasingly corporations themselves are more instruments of finance that use profits to invest speculatively than centers of production determined to expand their productive capacities.

While the intervention of the state in the capitalist economy is by no means a new development, it takes on new characteristics in the global economy of state transnational finance capitalism. Finance capital has become a global factor operating through multilateral institutions and transnational corporations; on the other hand, the state remains a political organization tied to specific national territories. Capital has outgrown the nation-state. It is no longer possible to conceptualize the merger of state and capital, for they operate at different levels of social reality. Nor is it any longer conceivable that the state possesses the kind

of autonomy that would enable it to exercise control over transnational finance capital. Now, it is clear that—though a notion of *relative* autonomy may remain useful in specific cases—“in the final analysis” capital is determining. The nation-state is subordinate to the power and interests of transnational finance capital while also of course conditioning its continued existence. It is used to guarantee the profitability of the investments of transnational finance capital through its use of policies recommended by the IMF such as economic deregulation and “structural adjustment.”

States act, internally and externally, to reproduce the power of the ruling class of transnational finance. Capital still requires a state with enough coercive power to stabilize social relations and control the working classes. Still, everywhere the sovereignty of the nation-state is in crisis. It is weak relative to international capital and increasingly vulnerable to the challenges of nonstate collectivities and identities as most clearly evidenced by the breakup of Eastern Europe and the reemergence of ethnic identities around the world. In an era of transnational finance capitalism, rather than being empowered by a national bourgeoisie the state is more likely to be manipulated by transnational finance capital. It is not autonomously in control of the economy of a territorial region but must abide by the rules and conditions of the global economy and its dominant interests. The state, as a historical product of earlier stages of capitalism, is in demise at least in its nonmilitary apparatus and practices. Even personal identities are beginning to supersede the nation as individuals define themselves as world managers, professionals, or workers rather than citizens. Likewise, social movements such as feminism and the ecology and peace movements are no longer defined by national boundaries. As is often the case, the economy is running ahead of politics. Only in its military role can the state even attempt to call up the patriotic emotions common to earlier times. The political dialectic of state transnational finance capitalism is formed by the contradictions between the global power of transnational finance capital and the continued existence of the nation-state (Amin 1990, 75–114).

All this reflects the global operation of the classical tendency within capitalism for the concentration and centralization of capital. Adding the stage of state transnational finance capitalism to existing schemas for the periodization of capitalism results in a four-stage model of the development of capitalism. The model includes the competitive capitalism described by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century;

monopoly capitalism as seen perhaps most notably by Hilferding, Bukharin, and Lenin at the turn of the century; state monopoly capitalism as theorized by the Comintern theorists; and, state transnational finance capitalism. State transnational finance capitalism describes a general international structure characterized by hierarchical organization, a powerful transnational ruling class, and subclasses within both core and peripheral regions and nations. The ruling class's power rests in the control over money capital. The inherent contradictions of capitalism are not resolved in the stage of state transnational finance capitalism. The effects and possibilities produced by these contradictions are shifted about, however, and become most readily manifest at the periphery of the global economy. The weakest point where exploitation is most palpable and revolution most likely is in the Third World. It is also here that the globalization of the world economy at the direction of transnational finance capital is most apparent. The IMF's control over investment and credit flows to the Third World dictates certain economic policies—such as “structural adjustment” packages—to Third World nations, making all too visible the controlling hand of transnational finance capital. The IMF demands nationally questionable policies such as currency devaluation, price and wage deregulation, decreased social spending, trade liberalization, export production, and privatization because they are in the interest of transnational finance capital. Often these policies in fact slow national economic growth (Stein and Nafziger 1991), but that is of little concern to transnational finance capital if they create short-run profitable investment opportunities.

Transnational finance capital lends money to peripheral states managed by local elites who agree to constitute the local economy in a way that is profitable to the ruling classes even at the cost of stunting national social development.<sup>2</sup> In the global structures of state transnational finance capitalism, “North-South” conflicts are the primary systemic conjuncture producing pressures for social change. Transnational finance capital already recognizes this and is directing the attention of its instruments, from the IMF to the U. S. Army, toward the Third World. It is in the periphery that the underlying contradiction of the global economy—the contradiction between transnational finance capital and the nation-state—produces social struggles through which peoples resist the logic of capital often via nationalist ideologies and populist programs.

***Implications of the idea***

The idea of state transnational finance capitalism helps to illuminate some recent specific developments in the history of capitalism. As the world economy grows beyond the possibilities of the nation-state, the hegemony of the United States is further and further reduced. No one country controls transnational finance capital, which itself has no particular national identity. The United States loses its world economic dominance and, struggling to resist the downward trend, offers its military power as a means of international social control to be used in the interests of transnational finance capital (Sweezy 1990). Thus we have the use of U.S. military might in the Persian Gulf War in protection of finance capital's access to "petrodollars." U. S. troops in "Desert Storm" did not fight to protect Kuwait or some vague international principle; rather the war was about using U.S. armed force to ensure the flow of oil profits to the international banks. Such insurance would also provide a vivid demonstration of the usefulness of U.S. military might to the "new world order."

Within the United States and other developed nations, physical infrastructures and social services are allowed to decay in part because the economy has been globalized by transnational finance capital. Those public-sector programs that provided for the maintenance of industrial production and the reproduction of labor so central to earlier forms of capitalism are marginal to state transnational finance capital. The new ruling class of finance capital is less concerned if social and physical infrastructures are falling apart, as long as they are not part of the communication and information services crucial to the new global economy. Education, public safety, medical care, housing, and the environment can decay because a healthy and skilled mass workforce is not essential to the profitability of worldwide investments. Mexico's border industries have demonstrated that poorly paid laborers with few so-called skills and terrible living conditions can use new productive technologies to manufacture products of high quality for the global marketplace. Other more speculative uses of investment capital are even less tied to social and physical infrastructures (particularly within core countries). State transnational finance capitalism is based in the symbolic economy of finance rather than old-style industrial production. The masses—and the services and social programs that assist them—are relatively insignificant to this economy. Governments of both core and periphery are pushed by the IMF and other global institutions to reduce social spending, cut wages, and lower taxes. At the same time personal, national, and international debts rise. The

beneficiaries of such developments are of course the very few wealthy enough to be involved in financial dealings.

The idea of state transnational finance capitalism also helps us to understand recent economic developments, such as the increasing role of bank loans and multilateral aid versus direct corporate investment in the Third World and evidence of the hegemonic role of transnational finance capital in the world economy. The multifaceted problems of debt and its increased economic influence also reflect the growing power of transnational finance capital. These problems characterize both North and South, as core and periphery both are increasingly indebted to the international banks. Similar evidence is provided by the increased presence of speculative activities in real estate, stocks, and bonds throughout the world economy. For instance, hand-in-hand with the rise of transnational finance capital has come the growth of international currency speculation as speculators shift money around the world in search of better exchange rates, thereby rendering impossible national-currency management by individual states. Indebtedness in turn increases a nation's vulnerability to the dictates of agencies like the IMF for the very policies outlined above. In addition, it leads to short-term borrowing in order to make payments on long-term debts thereby further subordinating national economies to the international banks.

Most recently transnational finance capital has been promoting the adoption of "free trade" policies as the best arrangement for integrating the global economy. Although national corporations and industrial capital often support, particularly in tough economic times, policies of protectionism, transnational finance capital's interest is with profitable investments anywhere in the world. This interest usually is not well served by national tariffs. Once finance capital has been freed from the bonds of the nation-state and recognizes its growing power in the world economy, protectionism is no longer an option. Hilferding sensed this development when he wrote that "There can be no doubt . . . that at an advanced stage of capitalist production free trade, which would amalgamate the whole world in a single economic territory, would ensure the highest possible productivity and the most rational international division of labor" (1981, 311). Free trade is the logical policy of a transnational finance capital bound to no particular state. The international banks are very interested in developing successful export economies based in the Third World but controlled by large

corporations because both peripheral states and transnational corporations are important clients. Free trade and “open” economies have become the policies promoted by the IMF. Core states like the United States, Japan, and Germany may hope to stop the process with the creation of regional blocs under their hegemony and serving their consumer markets, but the trend is toward worldwide integration. How long can it be before the European, North American, and Asian free-trade areas become fully integrated into a single global economic area under the hegemony of transnational finance capital?

So, the global economy sharply delimits the economic and political autonomy of nations. As happened recently with Canada and France, national monetary policies that impact negatively on the profits of transnational capital meet with capital flight. This is a prospect well known to Third World countries historically dominated by foreign capital but it is now impinging on first world states like Canada and France (Kwan 1991). The capital market has become globalized and capital is more than ever characterized by worldwide mobility. The new power of transnational finance capital helps to explain the policies of recent U.S. administrations that have again and again renounced controls over the movement of capital. Around the world nations are forced to recognize that raising taxes or placing strict regulations on the operations of capital is likely to result in economic decline and capital flight. To succeed economically, nations must now cater to the need of transnational finance capital even to the extent of creating things like “international banking facilities,” lowering capital gains taxes during a deficit crisis, or changing regulations to make it easier for banks to engage in stock-market speculation (Wachtel 1986, 116–18, 163–75).

This is the social reality behind the “new world order.” It is an updated version of the dream of “ultraimperialism” identified first by Kautsky, who may indeed have been more right than previously accepted. After all, the shift of conflict and war from “interimperialist” rivalries to the North-South axis may in fact result in a seemingly (to the people of Europe and the United States) peaceful world economy, controlled by a few transnational finance groups and evidencing only now and then brief conflicts fought in the Third World. Within the developed world the different nations are more and more economic equals similarly subordinated to the rule of transnational finance capital and—with the end of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the so-called Soviet bloc—now nearly the whole

world shares essentially the same economic model. Indeed it is possible to see the adoption by the nations of Eastern Europe and elsewhere of the really existing socialism of capitalism as further evidence of the existence of state transnational finance capitalism. The formerly socialist world has become merely another venue for investment commanded by transnational finance capital. Of course this should not be taken to mean that the internal contradictions of capitalism have been resolved, but perhaps they now are reflected in events like the demise of the nation-state and the positioning of "North-South" conflicts on the center stage of the history. The new world order, as the recent Gulf War reveals, will not really be peaceful. The consequences of the contradictions of state transnational finance capitalism may well be violent and deadly. Sometimes force will be required to guarantee the control of the oppressed, especially the working masses of the Third World so crucial to the new economy. In addition, previously hegemonic nations, like the United States, will be tempted to use military force to demonstrate their importance to the stability of the global economy that manifests no obviously dominant political center. Indeed, due to the fact of declining state significance in an era of transnationalization, governments may be increasingly likely to wage limited wars as a way of claiming importance to the workings of the global economy.

Possibilities for change always exist. Within state transnational finance capitalism they lie most readily in the Third World, where the working classes are punished and oppressed by government-enacted austerity programs suited mostly to the interests of the international ruling class and perhaps some local elites. At the periphery of the global economy, the oppressor is clearly identifiable as the IMF, international banks, and domestic elites. And it may be possible that progressive social transformations can emerge from the joint efforts of the working peoples in both Third and First worlds. More than ever, internationalism is essential to successful social transformations. Transnational capital must be countered by a transnational alliance of the working classes. Core labor unions can best protect their own members by working to improve the lives of workers in the periphery (Moody 1991). In fact the spread of transnationalization may assist the process as the demise of nations and national identities creates a space for workers to become more cognizant of their class position and what they share with fellow workers around the world. Class consciousness will increase, however, only if workers are able to reject the

individualism and racism that abound in the messages of the global mass media. Working-class resistance to transnational finance capital must itself be internationalized and globalized. International unions must become global organizations sharing information, strategies, and benefits. Social movements should address the worldwide nature of today's problems and injustices. The propaganda work of these organizations must make it clear that the declining standard of living of ordinary people around the world is due to the rule of transnational finance capital and can be reversed only if addressed as a global phenomenon. This new revolutionary movement will be anchored in the worldwide exploitation of a working class that increasingly resides in the Third World. Perhaps the most appealing ideology for organizing such a movement remains anti-imperialism. Personal empowerment and development, cultural autonomy, political liberation, and social equality in the world today all require confronting the transnational ruling class. No ordinary peoples can earn a sustainable freedom without facing up to this confrontation; nor can any working people achieve economic or social justice short of it. In the end revolutionaries as well must jettison the outdated and divisive language of nationalism and recognize the realities of globalization.

As Marx and Engels noted in *The Communist Manifesto*, the very processes of production in capitalism provide the organizational potentials for the progress of working-class struggle for a more just society. Labor must become transnational. Now more than ever, as the recent history of social democracy and really existing socialism should make clear, socialism in one country is not a viable option in an age of state transnational finance capitalism.

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## NOTES

1. See Engels's comments in vol. 3 of *Capital* (Marx 1982, 569 and 1045–47) and in *Anti-Dühring* (1987, 264–66).
2. For recent data on bank loans to the Third World, see J. Frieden 1987.



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# **Journalistic Representations of Anita Hill: Some Observations on the Performance of Women Newswomen**

**Leola A. Johnson**

ABSTRACT: This article examines journalistic representations of Anita Hill in the three major newsmagazines in the week following the Thomas-Hill hearings. Special attention is paid to the performance of women journalists, who treated the issues of sexual harassment more seriously than did men. Gender analysis alone, however, cannot offer a complete understanding of the coverage of the hearings.

More than a year has passed since the Hill-Thomas sexual harassment hearings. Yet Clarence Thomas has never put this episode behind him and he probably never will. Although he has participated in dozens of cases, clearly and unequivocally aligning himself with the most right-wing positions of the Court, the press continues to write about him largely in terms of his relationship to Anita Hill.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that the hearings continue to be a defining moment in his career. To borrow a bit of journalese, the hearings were "riveting television," and I was among those who could do little else but watch and listen while the hearings were on. In this regard, the polls show that I joined a large majority of the public. Between eighty and ninety percent of U.S. households tuned in to the hearings, according to the Gallup poll (Gallup, 1991, 23), paid attention to the hearings nearly around the clock. I listened to National Public Radio. I watched C-Span, CNN, and the networks. I read articles and editorials in the

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local newspapers, the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *Village Voice*. But unlike many in the audience, I suspect, I was captivated not only by the performances of Thomas, Hill, and the senators. What was equally interesting to me was that women journalists took the leadership in covering the issues. A large number of the voices and bylines associated with the story of the hearings belonged to women journalists. Never before had I seen women reporters have such an impact on a national story.

Nina Totenberg, one of the first to break Anita Hill's charges, reported on the hearings for "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered."<sup>2</sup> At a press conference on the day the charges were first reported, women reporters forced Senator Dennis DeConcini, a member of the Judiciary Committee, to acknowledge the harassment issue. The majority of the reports in *Time* and *Newsweek* carried women's bylines. In the *New York Times* and other newspapers, not only did women report the hearings, but they also wrote editorials, opinion pieces, and columns.

The prevalence of women in the coverage of the hearings reflects the remarkable entry of women into the journalism profession over the last twenty years. According to a recent study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, for example, women now represent about forty percent of all newspaper journalists (1989, 27–28).

To be sure, women were more visible in newspaper and magazine journalism than they were in broadcasting. When the principals were not performing, male anchors and their mostly male cadre of "experts" dominated the air time. But women journalists were an important presence even in broadcasting, particularly at the cable networks and in public radio. All of this raises questions. What difference did it make that women were involved in the coverage of the Hill-Thomas hearings? And how should we regard their performance in terms of whether or not it helped to advance public understanding of sexual harassment in particular and of the struggles of women in general?

In order to gather data bearing on these questions, I analyzed three major newsmagazines—*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*—that covered the Hill-Thomas hearings. All three issues were published immediately after the hearings during the week of 19 October 1991. Each magazine presented packages of stories, starting with a general description of the hearings and ending with features on sexual harassment. I divided the stories into those written by women and those written by men (based on the imperfect measure of bylines).<sup>3</sup> I then categorized each sentence in the story in terms of what theme

about the hearings, sexual harassment, or women it promoted (if any) and whether or not it was favorable or unfavorable to the case made by Thomas or Hill. I am in the early stages of analyzing this data, so the discussion I am presenting here is necessarily preliminary. I report broad findings rather than specific numbers. Nevertheless, what I have found already, I think, is provocative enough to warrant presentation at this stage. Before presenting the results of this analysis, however, I want to discuss briefly the historical and theoretical literature that might lead us to expect journalistic writing to differ by gender.

### ***The literature on gender differences in communication***

Academics have generated a large number of articles on gender differences in communication, most focused on interpersonal interactions and public speaking. Very little of this literature is sociological in the sense of focussing on gender differences at a group and institutional level. For example, relatively little has been written about stylistic and attitudinal differences between men and women in journalism, one of the nation's most important communication professions. Kay Mills's book on women journalists is an exception (1990). Mills interviewed dozens of women journalists throughout the country, and the way they described their accomplishments to her suggests that they view the profession differently from men. This seems especially true of the women journalists who entered the profession during the 1940s and beyond. Many of them went on to become leaders in the Newspaper Guild and in women's caucuses in their newsrooms. Some risked their careers to sue for changes in the profession for women. Some of them were responsible for bringing important issues (sometimes wrongfully considered women's issues) around government policies toward families and health off the women's pages and onto the front pages.

The women who inhabit newsrooms today, according to the portrait painted by Mills, are a multiracial and otherwise diverse group, but they have nevertheless collectively expanded the styles and approaches of the profession.<sup>4</sup> My analysis tends to be in harmony with this portrait. In general, what I found was that while the men and women tended to report similarly on the main story, the stories they wrote on sexual harassment emphasized distinct themes.

### ***Themes in coverage of the Hill-Thomas hearings***

All together, the newsweeklies ran twenty stories related to the Thomas-Hill hearings in the week of 19 October 1991. Each magazine ran a main story recounting the events leading up to the hearings as

well as the highlights of the hearings themselves. And each magazine ran a set of related stories that were not necessarily about the principals themselves but about the issues that both of them raised. These related stories included feature articles on the sexual harassment, the male supremacist character of the Senate, and the impact of the Hill-Thomas hearings on feminist politics.

Overall, there were four major themes in the main stories:

- Both Hill and Thomas were equally credible.
- The senators blew the investigation.
- There is no way to determine the truth of the charges, which means distinctions cannot be drawn between the veracity of Hill and Thomas.

- Both Hill and Thomas were victims.

In the related stories, there were also four main themes:

- Women and men see harassment differently.
- Beyond an small number of extreme cases, sexual harassment can be hard to define, especially when the issues of “verbal harassment” or “hostile environment” are involved.
- The murkiness or subjectivity of the way harassment is defined makes men especially subject to false harassment charges.
- Harassment involves the abuse of power.

My analysis here, consistent with a feminist analysis of women’s influence on the news, indicates that men and women tended to emphasize different themes depending on whether these themes are favorable or unfavorable to a feminist position on harassment. Before I present the information upon which that judgment is made, however, I want to examine in more detail the development of the major themes in the main stories.

### ***Main stories***

Of the three main stories, only the story in *Time* carried a woman’s byline. The writer for *U.S. News and World Report* was a woman, although two of the three correspondents were men. And the writer on the story in *Newsweek* was a man, although one of the three reporters listed was a woman. I believe that *U.S. News and World Report*’s main story was more supportive of Thomas’s case than of Hill’s; that *Time*’s main story was more favorable to Hill than Thomas; and that *Newsweek*’s story argued that both were equally credible.

Jill Smolowe’s piece for *Time* incorporated themes common to all three articles. In it, she argued that both Hill and Thomas were victims;

that both were credible witnesses; and that it was impossible to determine who was telling the truth, although it was also clear that someone was lying. This follows very closely the ideas mapped out in the headline: "HE SAID, SHE SAID/As the nation looks on two credible, articulate witnesses present irreconcilable views of what happened nearly a decade ago." To buttress the image of equal credibility, *Time* presented a large amount of background information about both Thomas (fifty-five sentences) and Hill (seventy-five sentences), including many direct quotations. Both were described as having escaped "rural poverty through diligence, perseverance and strong grounding in religious values." Their conservative credentials were further buttressed by the description of Hill as "prim" and the description of Thomas as "courtly." Even Hill's choice of teaching specialties, commercial paper, was used to show her conservative propensities. The implicit judgment in all of this—that Hill and Thomas are credible because they are conservative—was never questioned.

*Newsweek's* main story was exactly like *Time's* in most respects. *Newsweek's* main story said both were injured equally and that both were equally credible. But it also compared Anita Hill to Sojourner Truth and Rosa Parks, and denounced the Senate for being an instrument of male supremacy in much stronger terms than did *Time*. Under the headline "Anatomy of a Debacle: A behind-the-scenes look at how Thomas's nomination blew apart and led to the hearings that stunned the nation," *Newsweek* lambasted the Senate. It devoted thirty-eight sentences to material demonstrating that the hearings came out of "sleaze hunting" by liberal groups. The article also devoted ten sentences to the "stupidity and incompetence" of the Republican senators, and an additional seventeen sentences to how the White House engineered the assassination of Hill's character by Senate Republicans.

*U.S. News and World Report* also parroted the line that the hearings were "painful for both people." But here it departed from the others to take a position against Hill. Taking the Republican position that Hill's decision to keep working for Thomas had destroyed her credibility, the magazine called Hill's case "hardly ideal," saying that her behavior raised "questions about her credibility." Calling Hill's testimony "tentative and naive," it praised Thomas, using sixteen sentences of "Clarence stood up to them" material, and calling Thomas's "ringing condemnation of the hearings" the "most prominent note" of the event. Like their counterparts at *Newsweek*, however, the writers at *U.S. News and World Report* reserved most of their ire for the Senate and the

confirmation process. They devoted twenty-five sentences to material showing how the Senate had screwed things up, starting with the way it initially handled the charges. The one thing all three stories have in common is a disdain for the Senate process. All used Thomas's statement that the Senate had made him the victim of a "high tech lynching" of "an uppity black."

Although the most pro-Thomas and centrist main stories were written by women, while the most pro-Hill story was written by a man, most often the magazines tried to play both sides of the street. Each magazine presented material supporting Thomas and Hill and emphasized over and over again that both were credible. Thus far in my analysis, the main stories neither support nor defeat the expectation that there are sex differences in journalistic style.

A common failing of all the main stories, however, was their obliviousness to critical issues of race-gender interaction raised by the Hill-Thomas hearings. The main stories never mentioned, for example, Thomas's behavior toward his sister. This story has been told by the alternative press, and one of the things it suggests, if true, is that Thomas was generally contemptuous of poor African American women.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps he was also contemptuous of other Black women. Another racial blindness of the newsweeklies, and one they shared with the press generally, was in their uncritical use and praise of the "high tech lynching" quotation. Many African American intellectuals have accused Thomas of distorting history with that phrase. Lynching usually involved the accusation that a Black man had raped a white woman, not a Black woman. Also interesting is the fact that the newsweeklies did not examine why Thomas would describe himself as "uppity." Such a description runs counter to much of the coverage elsewhere describing Thomas as "courtly," "courteous," and "respectful." As a conservative, Thomas was never very uppity to anyone except other African Americans, who tended to be on the left.

The fact that all the main stories, whether written by women or men, omitted the same kind of material about race (like the story of Thomas's sister) suggests the possibility that the lens of gender analysis may be too narrow to provide a meaningful view of how the hearings were covered. I will return to this issue in the final section of the paper, in which I discuss the implications of this coverage for the emerging movement among women in the news industry to influence media content. First, however, I want to indicate clear evidence of gender differences in content I found in the related stories.



### *Related stories*

At this stage of the analysis, it appears that the stories on sexual harassment that ran in packages with the Hill-Thomas stories show clear signs of gender differences in emphasis and style, with the stories written by women emphasizing the clarity of the harassment charge, and the stories written by men focusing on the “murkiness” of the harassment charge.

*U.S. News and World Report* ran two stories on harassment, both written by men and both emphasizing the “murkiness” theme. In the first, headlined “Harassment’s Murky Edges,” John Leo said that some forms of harassment are clear, such as those where men demand sexual favors from subordinates in the workplace. But other instances are murky, especially those that involve actions that make women feel that they are working in a hostile environment. Those feelings can be idiosyncratic, he says, and can apply to unintended actions. Ironically, Leo relies on feminist Deborah Tannen to make his point, citing her theory that men and women have different conversational styles and often misunderstand each other. He maintained that Tannen proves that “not getting it” works both ways.

Furthermore, he argued, the workplace cannot be completely desexualized because consensual dating and courtship take place there as well as harassment. The problem with the current trend in harassment law is that it constructs all sexuality as eroticized male power. The second article was less opinionated, but again emphasized the existence of “gray areas” such as harassment by coworkers in a situation of equality and rude behavior (eight sentences). And despite its more evenhanded tone, this article had a headline that gave away its major theme: “Harassment: Men on Trial.”

*Time*, on the other hand, ran three articles on harassment, all under women’s bylines. “The Ultimate Men’s Club” attributed the Senate’s initial reticence about the harassment charge to its own male supremacy. In very strong terms, the article denounced the senators as the “pampered denizens of a virtually all-male bastion.” The article began with the observation that senators encounter women mostly as subordinates, almost never as equals. In addition, *Time* named some senators, Republican and Democrat, who have reputations as harassers themselves. The magazine named not only Ted Kennedy, who at the time of the hearings was being implicated in the Palm Beach rape case against his nephew, but also Strom Thurmond, who was identified as a groper. The article was accompanied by a picture of women from the House of Representatives marching to the Senate to demand that Hill’s charges

be taken seriously. The impact of the entire affair, according to *Time*, was to deconstruct the male supremacy of the Senate.

In its longest story on sexual harassment, "Office Crimes," *Time's* coverage was even stronger in its condemnation of male supremacy. Harassment is not about sex, but about power, the article suggested, and pointed out that it is usually the least powerful women who are subjected to abuse. It pointed out that the most common targets of harassment in blue-collar jobs are women integrating traditionally male fields. The most common targets in offices are members of the "pink collar ghetto"—clerical workers and lower-level administrators.

Harassment, according to this article, is part of the backlash against feminism. For balance, the writers quoted a leader of the men's rights movement, saying that men are the real victims of sexual harassment because women use sex to get power in ways that they cannot. They also cited men who argue that the laws have made them hypersensitive.

In *Newsweek*, the writer of the longest story on harassment was a woman, and all but one of the six reporters were female. The coverage was quite similar to *Time's*. The longest story on harassment was called "Striking a Nerve: Sexual Harassment is a Fact of Life for Millions of American Women. When Anita Hill talked last week, they heard themselves—and they're fed up with the fact that men don't get it." Like the harassment article in *U.S. News and World Report*, this one argued that men and women often define harassment differently. But it devoted far less space (three sentences) to developing this argument. The main point of the article was that the laws on sexual harassment have made a difference, and will do so increasingly in light of the consciousness-raising impact of the Hill-Thomas hearings. Two more articles by women in this issue took up this general theme. Under the same headline as a similar article in *Time* (e.g., "Congress: The Ultimate Men's Club"), *Newsweek* argued that the Senate is a male supremacist institution. It noted that some of the senators themselves are thought to be harassers, but have exempted themselves from the laws that govern everyone else.

A final article by a woman, "Why Women are Angry," carried the names of seven reporters, all of them women. It was really an extended review of Susan Faludi's book (1991), with emphasis on its connection to the Hill-Thomas hearings. This article was explicitly feminist, arguing that feminism had meant "clarity to many women" and had changed society for the better, although the change has not been revolutionary. Sexual harassment has continued, and women identify with Anita Hill because they share many of her experiences. Women

are outraged not only by harassment but also by a range of other indignities, according to the writers, and these are captured in the various themes of Faludi's book.

The backlash against feminism, which Faludi documented, revealed how important and fundamental was the challenge of women's power to male supremacy. As one of their many women sources, Mary Katzenstein, was reported to have said, "Every organization I know has a women's caucus." Despite data to the contrary, the article insisted, women still believe in feminism. Even though many women refuse to use that label, they nevertheless tell pollsters they agree with the specific goals and accomplishments of the movement. The writers concluded that it is time for women to own up to the title as well.

In contrast to these profeminist themes, two other articles about sexual harassment, both written by men, highlighted aspects of sexual harassment law that have been unfavorable to men. One author denounced "sleaze hunting," asking who among us would be able to withstand public scrutiny if the public expects us to be pure. In "Does Washington's Scandal Machine Go Too Far?" the writer argued that the Thomas case illustrates that the sleaze hunting has gotten out of hand. The danger of the false harassment charge is clear, the article said. It could drive perfectly wonderful public servants away from a desire to serve.

A more explicit warning about the dangers of the false harassment charge for the public generally was issued by another male writer under the headline, "A Tale of Sex, Lies and Audiotape." This story is about a gay professor who was wrongfully accused of harassing a student, according to the account of the *Newsweek* writer.<sup>6</sup> The article began with the proposition that not all accusations of harassment are reasonable. Some are "frivolous or malicious, motivated by vengefulness, fantasy or jealousy." According to the professor who was the subject of this story, the student had a bad case of unrequited love, and became vengeful when his affection was not returned. As an aside, the article said that the professor was outraged by feminists and others on his campus who tended to side with the student because it is "politically correct" to side with alleged victims in harassment cases. The article ended with the warning that the false harassment charge produces paranoid, hypersensitive men.

### ***Gender differences in coverage of the Hill-Thomas hearings***

My preliminary conclusion is that there is little difference between the way men and women journalists at the newsweeklies covered the

Hill-Thomas hearings, but there are clear differences in the way they covered the related issue of sexual harassment. Two similarities between men and women journalists are that both tended toward an uncritical, “evenhanded” treatment of Thomas’s and Hills’s arguments, and both ignored important issues of race-gender interaction. A major difference is that males tended to view sexual harassment as a highly subjective charge, while women tended to view sexual harassment as an abuse of power.

This analysis, as provocative as it has been for me, does not demonstrate general gender differences among journalists in the perception of the news. Although the findings suggest that in the reporting of an issue such as sexual harassment there are differences, in the reporting of an event such as a hearing, the differences disappear. In thinking further on this subject, I will attempt to explore why this should be so.

Even at this preliminary stage, however, the research has shown me what some of the limits and possibilities are for the movement of women newswriters to influence the content of news. This movement, which is grounded in the unprecedented entry of women into the journalistic workforce since the end of World War II, has given rise to newsroom caucuses and women’s groups in journalism throughout the United States. The lesson for these groups is that women have, at least in some cases, made a difference in the news. They have expanded the universe of issues that are newsworthy and the sources that are used to discuss them.

But another lesson that coverage of the Thomas-Hill hearings makes especially clear is that a situation such as this one, involving as it did the interaction of Black women and Black men, can be understood only if one goes beyond a narrow focus on gender to see also issues of race and class. Women in journalism, like women elsewhere in the predominantly white women’s movement, must learn that a understanding of gender inequality alone is not enough.

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## NOTES

1. The *New York Times* recently referred to Thomas as the “youngest and cruelest” justice after he said that a prisoner beaten senseless for a minor infraction had not suffered cruel and unusual punishment (27 February 1992).

For the most part, however, press comment on Thomas has focused on the sexual harassment charge against him by Hill.

2. Totenberg also became part of the story. Republicans were irate that she had learned about the Hill allegations. The most telling evidence of her involvement in the story for me was the argument Senator Allan Simpson picked with her during a "Nightline" program on the hearings. [[ref.]]

3. Byline names are an imperfect measure of the sex of the journalist, in part because many women use initials or pen names as first names (e.g., E.J. Shipp of the *New York Times* is a woman), and also because some first names are used by both men and women (e.g., Dodd).

4. Maurine Beasley's study at the University of Maryland (1988) was billed as a look at the difference women would make in the profession, given that they were becoming a much larger part of the workforce. But she examined the difference women would make in the status of the profession, not in news content.

5. The story of Thomas's sister was reported in the alternative press, but not in the newsweeklies. Lisa Jones of the *Village Voice* (12 November 1991), for example, wrote a story about the way in which Thomas distorted his sister's behavior to curry favor with the right. At the beginning of the Reagan administration, Thomas made a speech to a right-wing group in which he described his sister as a welfare queen and himself as Horatio Alger. The truth, according to Lisa Jones, is that Thomas's sister was only on welfare temporarily, to take care of their ailing elderly aunt to whom Thomas himself contributed nothing. His sister had found it impossible to take care of the aunt and her children on her minimum-wage hospital job. She only quit temporarily, until her expenses went down, and then she went back to hospital work. None of the news magazines explored what Thomas's nomination would mean to poor and working-class women of color, or what his attitudes toward this woman said about his attitudes toward Hill.

6. This story has very many holes in it, including the fact that the professor was censured not for harassment but for another offense, and the discrepancy is not explained.

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# **“The Police Cannot Be the Constructor of the New Life”: Petr A. Kropotkin and the October Revolution**

**Gudrun Richter**

ABSTRACT: After a short outline of his life and some important aspects of his ideas, Kropotkin's last years (following his return to Russia in 1917) are discussed. As a strict opponent of the state, he was critical of what he saw as the repressive consequences of a one-party dictatorship. He supported the social revolution and the idea of the Soviets, however, and therefore very seldom publicly criticized the Bolshevik government. His position is mainly expressed in letters and unpublished fragments. He remained true to his ideals until the very end of his life. Kropotkin's funeral was the last great anarchist demonstration in Soviet Russia.

“In the popular mind an anarchist is a person who throws bombs and commits other outrages, either because he is more or less insane, or because he uses the pretense of extreme political opinions as a cloak for criminal proclivities” (Russell 1966, 38).

This prejudice, formulated by Bertrand Russell in 1918, is today, I suppose, no longer a popular one. But nevertheless clichés about anarchism are rather widespread, even among social scientists. (I must confess that I had such misconceptions myself as long as I did not have to deal with the subject more seriously.)

Perhaps the use of the expression “anarchy and chaos” to characterize an untenable situation in society is partly caused by the fact that “an-archy” (from the Greek: without rule) is translated subconsciously as “without order.”

In this connection, Voline stresses that it would be an erroneous

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interpretation to maintain “that the libertarian conception means the absence of all organization. Nothing would be more false. It is not the question of ‘organization’ or ‘nonorganization,’ but of *two different principles of organization*.” Therefore a completely absurd accusation often made about the anarchists is that they can only destroy, having no constructive ideas. “The discussions between the political parties of the extreme left and the anarchists have always been about *the positive and constructive task* which has to be done after the destruction of the bourgeois state (on the latter, they all agreed)” (1969, 154–55).

But I hurry ahead. Back to the main subject. The name of Kropotkin was for a long time familiar to me only through the fact that the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow is situated near the subway station “Kropotkinskaya.” First, I read more about him in 1989 when the German-language issue of *Sovetskaya Literatura* published an article by N. Pirumova, “Dictatorship and White Gloves,” about Kropotkin’s attitude toward the October Revolution. I thus became interested; and the fact that the heritage of Kropotkin in connection with the seventieth anniversary of his death in 1991 and his 150th birthday in 1992 was brought into the Russian debate<sup>1</sup> was a welcome occasion to occupy myself in more detail with this subject.

Indeed, the life of Prince Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin (1842–1921) reveals an outstanding personality.

Kropotkin was born in a family of the higher nobility tracing back its roots to the legendary Rurik. He was sent to the corps of pages by the will of Nicholas I. As a page of Alexander II, Kropotkin shocked his surroundings with his decision to go to Siberia, upon completion of his education in the corps of pages—a first, self-desired “break” in his career. He did not want to give his life to parades and court balls but wanted to do something useful (Kropotkin 1971, 154). He soon realized, however, “the absolute impossibility of doing anything really useful for the mass of the people by means of the administrative machinery” (215). Looking backward, he summed up: “I lost in Siberia whatever faith in state discipline I had cherished before. I was prepared to become an anarchist” (217).

His interest and energy turned more and more to geography. He undertook some expeditions for scientific exploration, in the region of Amur and in Manchuria. His reports and hypotheses (about the disposition of mountains in Asia and about glaciation) aroused great interest among the specialists. As a sign of protest against the treatment of Polish exiles banned to Siberia after the 1863 insurrection, he left the military service. He returned to St. Petersburg in 1867 and continued



his geographical studies and research. He became a section secretary of the Russian Geographical Society (which secured his material existence). An offer in 1871 to accept the position of secretary to the Society brought him into inner conflict. "Science is an excellent thing. . . . But what right had I to these highest joys, when . . . whatever I should spend to enable me to live in that world of higher emotions must needs be taken from the very mouths of those who grew that wheat and had not bread enough for their children? . . . All those sonorous phrases about making mankind progress, while at the same time the progress-makers stand aloof from those whom they pretend to push onwards, are mere sophisms made up by minds anxious to shake off a fretting contradiction." He abandoned the offer—the second self-desired "break of career" (235–41).

Kropotkin wished to learn more about socialism and therefore in 1872 made a journey to Switzerland. In Zurich he joined one of the local sections of the International and studied socialist literature. In Geneva he visited workers' meetings. Disappointed by the leaders and their "wire-pulling," he "felt disheartened" and decided to acquaint himself with the "Bakunists" (280). His visit to the Jura watchmakers, the atmosphere among them, and especially his acquaintance with James Guillaume (expelled from the International shortly before that, together with Bakunin, at the instigation of the London general council) gave him the decisive impulse: "when I came away from the mountains, after a week's stay with the watchmakers, my views upon socialism were settled. I was an anarchist." (287)

This carefully considered decision, made at the age of thirty, determined Kropotkin's future life.

Having returned to Russia, he became a member of the revolutionary "circle of Chaikovsky." Henceforth he lived the "double life" of a scientist and a revolutionary agitator. In 1874, he was arrested like the others—the evening before a meeting of the Geographical Society where he had to read an important report; for this he had postponed his already planned escape. Two years of prison in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul followed (here he wrote, by special permission, the second volume of his "Glaciology"). After his transfer to the military hospital he was able to escape—a bold surprise attack that made great sensation in Europe. He first went to England, then lived in Switzerland and France; there, in 1883, he was arrested again and after a dubious trial was sentenced to five years of prison. After having been released in 1886 he lived in England, earning his living by scientific and anarchist

writing. He was no longer active as a revolutionary, not least because of his ruined health. All those who met him were deeply impressed by his modesty and his human and warm-hearted personality; so he gained the respect even of persons who had other views, and became England's "most famous emigrant."

Kropotkin was an "anarcho-communist." I can neither describe here the different factions of anarchism nor give a summary of Kropotkin's views as a whole (and in their development).<sup>2</sup> Nor can I discuss here the possibilities for a successful realization of projects for an anarchist society or of Kropotkin's projects in particular. I shall confine myself to some aspects of his ideas.

Like all anarchists, Kropotkin was a strict opponent of the state: "The State organization, having been the force to which the minorities resorted for establishing and organizing their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges. The lessons of history tell us that a new form of economic life always calls forth a new form of political organization; and a socialist society . . . cannot be an exception to this rule." (1968c, 170) Therefore, anarchism is for Kropotkin "the no-government system of socialism" (1968b, 46). So, the anarchist movement is in an unsurmountable antagonism to Marxism and social-democracy, always called by him "jacobinist," "authoritarian" or "state socialism." The revolutionary or popular state might be "as great a danger to liberty as any form of autocracy if its government be entrusted with the management of all the social organization including the production and distribution of wealth" (1968b, 50). A revolutionary state, too, inevitably produces new oppression because of being a *state*.

In contrast to the common prejudice mentioned above that anarchism is only destructive, Kropotkin stressed the creative, constructive character of the social revolution. "No destruction of the existing order is possible, if . . . the idea of what is to take the place of what is to be destroyed is not always present in the mind." (1968c, 156) In the previous revolutions, the people only destroyed, and left the construction to the bourgeoisie—which in its own interest re-erected the authority of the state (1978, 89). "We understand the revolution as a widespread popular movement, during which . . . the masses will have to take upon themselves the task of rebuilding society. . . . As to representative government, whether self-appointed or elected—be it 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' or an elected 'temporary government' . . . —we place in [sic] no hopes whatever. . . . In the task of reconstructing society on

new principles . . . the collective spirit of the masses is necessary” (1968c, 188–89).

Especially remarkable, in my opinion, is that Kropotkin always sought to give his anarchist conception a scientific basis and a philosophical foundation. “Scientific basis” meant for him that anarchism must find “a basis for its principles in the natural sciences of the time,” and even more—that it becomes “one of their departments” (156). In a philosophical definition he defined anarchism in the following way: “Anarchism is a world-concept based upon a mechanical explanation of all phenomena, embracing the whole of nature—that is, including in it the life of human societies. . . . Its method of investigation is that of the exact natural sciences. . . . Its aim is to construct a synthetic philosophy comprehending in one generalization all the phenomena of nature—and therefore also the life of societies” (150). This philosophy is materialistic, but not dialectical; “‘the dialectic method,’ which was recommended for formulating the socialist ideal . . . we do not recognize, neither would the modern natural sciences have anything to do with it” (150, 152). The discoveries of the nineteenth century in the natural sciences “were made—not by the dialectic method, but by . . . the method of induction and deduction” (152). Among those discoveries, Kropotkin especially esteemed Darwin’s theory of evolution. He vehemently fought against the social-Darwinist transfer of the “struggle for existence” to human society and its interpretation as “struggle of everyone against anyone else,” as T. H. Huxley did in 1888, in his essay “The Struggle for Existence: a Programme.” Drawing on an idea of the respected Russian zoologist Karl Kessler, who in 1880 read a lecture “On the Law of Mutual Aid” (which, he argued, exists in nature alongside the “law of mutual struggle”), Kropotkin stressed “that mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but that as a factor of evolution it most probably has a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy” (1972, 5–8, 30–31). Examples from the animal world, but also from human history—of the “savages” and “barbarians” as well as of the free medieval city-republics—form the material for his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.

This work gives in some sense the “biological foundation” of Kropotkin’s antiauthoritarian views about the organization of society. Rejecting the state organization for the postcapitalist society, he argues

that it is “the fundamental rule of the whole organic nature: that new functions demand new organs” (1978, 89); therefore, a “new form of economic organization will necessarily require a new form of political structure” (1968c, 181). The latter Kropotkin saw as a federalist structure, with local autonomy of self-governing authorities (that is, as organization “from below to the top”).

The February Revolution in 1917 was for Kropotkin, as for many others, a totally unexpected event. But neither his age nor his unstable health could prevent him from returning to Russia. When he arrived on 1 June, a crowd of about sixty thousand people welcomed him. Though Kerensky courted his favor, he remained true to his convictions and refused repeatedly to become a minister; he rejected a pension “from the State” (Starostin 1970, 226).

The Russian Revolution fulfilled the dream of Kropotkin’s life. In his memoirs, he stated “that revolutions—that is, periods of accelerated rapid evolution and rapid changes—are as much in the nature of human society as the slow evolution” (1971, 291). “The question is, then, not so much how to avoid revolutions; as how to attain the greatest results with the most limited amount of civil war, the smallest number of victims.” His answer: clear goals, comprehensive ideas are necessary—and the conflict will be decided through “the force of the creative genius which will be brought into action in the work of reconstruction of Society” (292).

Therefore, Kropotkin had to make efforts to support these constructive forces. According to his political convictions he could not welcome the Bolsheviks coming to power, for they embodied the centralistic “state” socialism that he rejected. In the words of his daughter, the revolution developed “from the first steps on a false path” (Kropotkina 1990, 8). At the beginning of 1918, Kropotkin wrote to a friend, “We are going through such an upheaval that constructive work is impossible for the immediate future. . . . I had wanted to begin a big work . . . about the demobilization and the “social reconstruction” inevitably accompanied by it, . . . but now that will not get us anywhere” (Tyurin 1924, 233). A month later, there are already some other notes: “I cannot do something serious: all things are changing so fast. I would have wanted to begin a serious work about the social reconstruction that is doubly necessary when an army of millions is demobilized. . . . But with the social-democratic method of solving all problems autocratically by decree—bypassing the creativity of the people— all this is, of course, useless.” But the postscript of the letter shows that Kropotkin all the same had found a field of activity: “At the moment I am busy with the federation. I founded a League of Federalists, organized lectures etc.” (Kropotkin 1924, 155).

And in May: "We have started a big work in our League of Federalists. We will publish 4 volumes, 20 printed sheets each . . . about the federation, from all sides: the geographic, ethnographic, economic, political, historical and so on. Each volume with a dozen of articles, all by specialists." (Tyurin 1924, 236) The first volume was finished, but not published.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1918, Kropotkin changed his living place. The first apartment in Moscow had been confiscated; the house in which his second apartment was located was nationalized; and though Kropotkin had a "protection document" for the rooms he lived in, he accepted the offer of a friend of Tolstoy's to move into his uninhabited wooden house in Dmitrov, about fifty miles from Moscow. Here, a cow and the vegetable garden cultivated by his wife guaranteed a great deal of his living. He also obtained food and firewood from fellow anarchists; the local cooperative supported him. But he did not want to accept a special food ration. Lunacharsky must have heard about this—he asked Kropotkin's wife to confirm to him "that the strange rumors that such help would be disagreeable to you are unfounded" (Starostin 1970, 229).<sup>4</sup> But for Kropotkin, even worse than these everyday difficulties was the inevitable intellectual isolation. Transportation and communications were wrecked; a journey from Dmitrov to Moscow was an energy-sapping venture.

In Dmitrov, Kropotkin turned again to his long-cherished plan to write a work on ethics. This work would be "*undoubtedly* necessary"; for, "to lay the foundations for a moral free from religion and of a higher level than the religious moral, . . . the help of well-elaborated books is necessary." He knew that his lifetime was near an end, and he sought to finish this work despite all the obstacles—not the least because he did not see that "in the time we are now living through, . . . something serious could be accomplished by weak, *single* forces in Russia" through agitational activity. (Kropotkin 1931b, 288).<sup>5</sup>

In the same letter, Kropotkin expressed his belief in the future. He thought that the future belongs to the syndicalist workers' movement and to the cooperatives. He also expressed similar ideas in the seldomly possible talks with friends and fellows. Thus, Emma Goldman recalled, "The basic factor . . . is the organization of the economic life . . . He had come to the conclusion that syndicalism was likely to furnish what Russia lacked most: the channel through which the industrial and economic upbuilding of the country could flow, . . . that such a system, by aid of the co-operatives, would save future revolutions the fatal

blunders and tearful suffering Russia was passing through.” (Goldman 1931, 864; see Goldman 1925, 36, 100).

Kropotkin took part in the activities of the Dmitrov cooperative, as well as in the organization of the local museum. The last time he spoke at a cooperative meeting was in November 1920. A week later, the leading members of the cooperative association were arrested (Ryshov 1921, 86). In 1918, the cooperatives in Russia had around twenty-five thousand organizations with nine million members and a capital of fifteen million rubles, and in 1917, they had two hundred million rubles turnover. But, as “bourgeois” organizations, they were confronted with ever-increasing obstacles and were then “liquidated.”

At a meeting that took place on 3 May 1919 at Lenin’s invitation, Kropotkin opened the conversation with this subject: “You persecute the cooperatives and I am for cooperatives.” After Lenin’s answer that the Bolsheviks were for them, too, but “against the kind of cooperative which conceals kulaks, landowners, merchants, and private capital in general,” and that they wanted to strip the mask from that pseudocooperative, Kropotkin replied single-mindedly that this undoubtedly must be done. “But in Dmitrov, I see that they are persecuting the cooperatives which have nothing in common with those you just mentioned”; and the local authorities obviously “think that the whole population is subordinate to them.” Lenin argued about the lack of culture, but Kropotkin replied that “as a result, it’s not any easier for those who are exposed to the influence of this unenlightened authority.” Lenin’s answer: “You can’t make a revolution wearing white gloves.” Kropotkin’s remarks about the English cooperative and professional movement were interrupted by Lenin—they could be, at the best, servants of the capital. Instead of this, what was needed was revolutionary action of the masses, open and direct struggle to the last drop of blood, civil war, massive red terror, war on all fronts. “All other ways—including those of the anarchists—have been surrendered to history, to the archives, and they are of no use to anyone,” Lenin stated in the reminiscences of Bonch-Bruевич—and after this he “suddenly stopped, smiled kindly” and apologized for having been carried away. After the conversation he was surprised by how much Kropotkin had grown old—living in a country moved by the upward flight of revolution, he could speak only of cooperatives; from this, one could see how poor the anarchist ideas were (Kropotkin 1970b, 327–32). Within less than one year, faced with economic disaster and the crisis of Soviet power, Lenin’s opinion would radically change.

The reference to “red terror,” however, concerns another point

Kropotkin could not keep silent about. As early as September 1918 he asked Lenin for a conversation “about a very serious question—about ‘red terror’” He turned to the experience of the French Revolution and wrote: “The police cannot be the constructor of the new life. But meanwhile, it is becoming the supreme power in every town and every little village. Where this will lead Russia?—To the worst reaction.” Obviously, the meeting took place, and seemingly, Kropotkin’s arguments did not completely fail (Pirumova 1989, 27; see Starostin 1970, 226).

In a letter to Georg Brandes, Kropotkin denied the rumor that he had been arrested, and he criticized the methods of the Bolsheviks which “paralyze the constructive work of the people.” But he protested “with all my strength against any type of armed intervention by the Allies in Russian affairs”—it would be bring back a chauvinistic monarchy and produce a hostile attitude toward Western Europe. This letter was published on 15 September 1918 in “Politiken” (Kropotkin 1970a, 318–22). Apart from this, only one more document reached the European public within Kropotkin’s lifetime (in 1920): his “Letter to the Workers of Western Europe.” There, too, he lodged a sharp protest against intervention—but an additional argument: “The evils natural to state communism have been increased ten-fold under the pretext that all our misery is due to foreign intervention.” (Kropotkin 1968d, 253) Kropotkin’s message to the workers of Western Europe: “I owe it to you to say frankly that, according to my view, this effort to build a communist republic on the basis of a strongly centralized state communism under the iron law of party dictatorship is bound to end in failure. We are learning to know in Russia how *not* to introduce communism” (254). The great idea of Soviets could not be materialized under the conditions of the party dictatorship or the Soviets would lose their entire significance. Instead of this, a formidable bureaucracy was developing. Kropotkin felt obliged to warn honestly about imitating the Russian model (255).

As a convinced supporter of the social revolution and the idea of Soviets, Kropotkin was in a plight. He was always afraid that the enemies of the October Revolution would take advantage of his criticism of the Bolsheviks. As Souchy relates in his reminiscences, until the end of his days Kropotkin stood for the revolution and the Soviets. He was also never against the use of force, which is indispensable in the struggle against rule and exploitation, for a free society (Zukhi 1931, 230). Despite all criticism, he recognized the lasting historical meaning of the October Revolution. In a letter to a Dutch comrade, he wrote on 23 December 1920, “Unfortunately, the social revolution in

Russia has a centralistic and authoritarian character. Nevertheless, it shows the possibility of transition from capitalist society to socialist . . . the centralistic mistakes made by the Russian communist revolution will undoubtedly help the workers of other countries avoid such mistakes” (Kropotkin 1931a, 201). But the Jesuit principle “the end justifies the means” was unacceptable to him. Therefore, he protested against methods that in his view would call into question the aim of the revolution and discredit it.

Indispensable to Kropotkin for the development of the new society was the freedom of the press and publications. Therefore not only did he protest in a letter to the Presidium of the Eight All-Russian Congress of Soviets against the liquidation of all nonstate publishing establishments (Goldman 1925, 188–89), but he refused to permit the publication of four volumes of his works by a state publishing house. In a letter to Mil’ner, who brought to him this proposal, which originated with Lenin, Kropotkin explained his refusal in a principled way: It was not because, apart from these four volumes, he had written others in which he criticized state socialism and which the government would therefore not publish—that would be a personal reason— but by accepting this proposal, he would be acknowledging that the “government was acting properly when it became the only editor of the whole people.” This would mean that

in a socialist state, where printing and publishing are nationalized, one is not only not allowed to express in print thoughts that are hostile to the existing government and that call for active resistance, but also such thoughts that simply *do not agree* with the principles by which the government operates and the methods by which they are applied.

This would mean, however, renouncing those achievements of the previous revolutions in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in the Netherlands, England, and France that made possible intellectual progress in Europe . . . and prepared the proletarian revolution, as the defender and leader of which the Soviet Government is seeing itself. . . .

If I would accept the above proposal, that would mean I would morally sanction an entire country being led down to the level of a slavish silence, which is, in my view, disastrous—not only for the development of thought and life in general, *but also of the Russian revolution itself.*

The *destruction of the free initiative* in the whole economic and political life of the country, and even in the *expression of*



*thought, leads inevitably fatally, if not to the full restoration of the prerevolutionary regime, then to a bad and deep reaction for several decades.*"<sup>6</sup> (1991, 56)

Kropotkin sharply argued against a one-party dictatorship and its repressive consequences that paralyze the whole life of society (and especially economic reconstruction). On 4 March 1920, he wrote to Lenin: "Even if the dictatorship of the party were an appropriate means to bring about a blow to the capitalist system (which I strongly doubt), *it is nevertheless harmful for the creation of a new socialist system.* What are necessary and needed are local institutions, local forces; but there are none, anywhere." The Soviets cannot serve this function; for "Russia has already become a Soviet Republic only in name." And he ended his letter: "If the present situation continues, the very word 'socialism' will turn into a curse. This is what happened to the conception of 'equality' in France for forty years after the rule of the Jacobins" (1970c, 336–37).

On 1 December 1920, Kropotkin turned to Lenin for the last time, after the publication in the press of a declaration that the government had decided to seize hostages, who would be "mercilessly exterminated" if an assassination attempt was made against the leaders of the Soviets. Such measures, Kropotkin expressed in outrage, "represent a return to the worst period of the Middle Ages and religious wars." He asked: "How can apostles of a new life and architects of a new social order have recourse to such means of defense against enemies? Won't this be regarded as a sign that you consider your communist experiment unsuccessful, and [that] you are not saving the system that is so dear to you but only [saving] yourselves?" (1970c, 338–39)<sup>7</sup> Kropotkin remained true to himself and to his ideals till the very end of his life.

In January 1921 he came down with pneumonia. By order of Lenin, medicines and food were sent to Dmitrov. Kropotkin died on 8 February 1921. His family and his fellow anarchists were allowed to organize a dignified funeral. Kropotkin's funeral was a very impressive event, the last great anarchist demonstration in Soviet Russia—even if not free from harassment, by the censorship and especially by the Cheka.<sup>8</sup>

*Berliner Debatte INITIAL e. V.*  
*Berlin*

## NOTES

1. In 1991 a round-table discussion was held in Moscow and “Readings” in Dmitrov, where he lived in 1918 until his death in 1921. A report of these events was published in *Voprosy filosofii* (Blauberg 1991) along with archive materials from his last years and an article by N. Pirumova (1991). An international conference was held 7–14 December 1992 in Moscow, Dmitrov, and St. Petersburg to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Kropotkin’s birth.

2. Kropotkin’s own memoirs (1971) end around 1890; see Woodcock and Avakumovic 1971; Pirumova 1972; Miller 1976; Udartsev 1989.

3. Emma Goldman writes that the League “was dissolved by the Government and all the material confiscated” (Goldman 1925, 187).

4. Goldman recalls: “Sophie had not even been able to induce Peter to accept the academic ration Lunacharsky had ordered for him. His increasing feebleness had compelled her to take it without his knowledge” (Goldman 1931, 770).

5. He finished only the historical part (Kropotkin 1968).

6. Kropotkin also asserted, “When I and my comrades . . . sat in prison in different places in France, our books always found an editor. In Russia, the Soviet Government obviously makes efforts to prevent even such a possibility” (1991, 56).

7. Bonch-Bruевич, by contrast, states: “In the revolutionary fight . . . literally all means are good ones. . . . The institute of hostages is an excellent one and extremely necessary in the civil war” (1930b, 196–97).

8. To make possible the printing of a four-page bulletin commemorating Kropotkin (permitted by the censorship) in time for the memorial service an anarchist printing office which had been sealed by the government was opened for the purpose (on the funeral commission’s responsibility). The often-cited release of imprisoned anarchists for the funeral was first refused by the Cheka [Russian acronym for the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage—ED.] with the argument that “there are no anarchists in prison who, in the judgment of the Chairman of the Extraordinary Commission, could be released for the funeral.” Only fear of public exposure (the Funeral Commission decided to inform the assembled people about this and to withdraw all the wreaths presented by official Communist bodies) brought about the release—of only seven persons from the “inner jail” of the Cheka, but none from the Butyrki prison (Goldman 1925, 190–91; see also: Bericht 1921, cols. 25–26).

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## **Critique of the New Politics of Racism/Nationalism in the United States**

**E. San Juan, Jr.**

ABSTRACT: Mediated through racial and ethnic antagonisms, the sharpening of class conflicts in the United States today has revived a hegemonic project of reconstituting a pluralist nation that recuperates traditional ideas of individualism and "American exceptionalism." National identity, however, has always been a political effect of a managed consensus based on material inequality and hierarchical stratification. A common identity or culture is rendered untenable by the logic of capital in reproducing class divisions marked by cultural differences. Faced by economic crisis, demographic changes, and the counterhegemonic resistance of people of color, U.S. capitalism refunctions racism through the ideology of differential culturalism centered around ethnicity, immigration, and the continuing U.S. government intervention around the world.

"Can we all get along?" The pathos of Rodney King's televised comment while the fires were raging in Los Angeles last May underscores the centrality of racial conflict in the constitution of a stratified and class-hierarchized social order such as the United States. Recent events, however, have revised the terms of group identity and differentiation. Now the conflict is to be conceived no longer between Black and white as before, no longer construed in fact as racial. What preoccupies the ruling bloc (the monopoly elite and their representatives) is the task of displacing flagrant class conflicts and subsuming them into a new hegemonic, reactionary project, one which recuperates an old model of the United States as a nation of assimilated

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immigrants geared for what some observers have called a “dis-organized,” more flexible mode of twenty-first-century global capitalism (Harvey 1989).

The new rhetoric of racism assumes a nostalgic invocation of the old days of consensual peace and togetherness. A typical Establishment opinion instanced by Tom Morganthau dusts off from the museum of pragmatic liberalism a *fin-de-siècle* culinary relic:

The devastated hopes of L.A.’s Korean-immigrant community, meanwhile, are a powerful reminder that the nation is rapidly moving toward a multiethnic future in which Asians, Hispanics, Caribbean islanders and many other immigrant groups compose a diverse and changing social mosaic that cannot be described by the old vocabulary of race relations in America. The race crisis of the 1960s has been subsumed by the tensions and opportunities of the new melting pot: the terms “black” and “white” no longer depict the American social reality. . . . Like it or not, we Americans are a hyphenated, intermarrying and increasingly blended people—and we are likely to become both more diverse, and more nearly like each other, as time goes by. (*Newsweek*, 18 May 1992)

A meliorist gradualism is invoked here to bless the culinary mixing and domestication of the multitudes for an agenda to resurrect a mythical homogenizing if not homogeneous polity. Morgenthau proposes the classic universalizing and fundamentalist solution: “We now believe government must teach the values of work, thrift, marriage and personal responsibility to millions of resisting subjects . . . and the new gospel of family values and personal responsibility” is needed to revive the myth of the American “dream of success.” Politics is once again mystified by the aesthetic aura of American exceptionalism, i.e., the final resolution of class antagonisms that plagued the ethnic homelands of the old world.

Ever since the days of Hector St. John Crèvecoeur and Alexis de Tocqueville, the quest for defining the essence of “the American” has been motivated by the “specter” of Europe’s class-ridden social formations. Today, despite the demise of Soviet-style communism, the same specter compels the elite to resuscitate an ideal or trope of the American nation as united, democratic, egalitarian, harmonious. Coinciding with this program of recuperation is a refurbished rhetoric of *divide et impera*—divide and rule—which draws its power not only from traditional nativism and ethnocentrism but indeed from a conception of genuine Americanness. This “genuineness” is equated with individual liberty and worldly success through diligent work and

self-reliant discipline. The paradigm of liberal democracy pivots around personal liberty that guarantees social equilibrium and functional integration. In the Cold War sixties, Seymour M. Lipset theorized the uniquely American ethos as centered in the norms of egalitarianism (equal opportunity) and achievement (“ethic of hard work”). National identity and consensus are therefore concretely realized through the effects of inequality and difference.

In the last twenty years, especially during the Reagan-Bush administrations, the profound disparity of wealth and power between the elite and the working people has seriously destabilized the national consensus. To insure the preservation of hierarchy and undisturbed accumulation of capital, it became necessary to rearticulate markers of cultural plurality along the axis of equivalence, dissolving alterity into the sameness of “an American.” Cultural diversity, however, has to be preserved. A populist strategy of displacing class contradictions by foregrounding ethnic antagonisms is used by the apologist of “white popular wisdom” Charles Murray, a leading spokesman of the rightist American Enterprise Institute:

When blacks say they’ve suffered years of neglect, a lot of whites are looking at pictures on TV of black looters taking things from stores as a disconsolate Asian sits by and watches his life’s work go down the drain. They’re saying, “How is it that this Asian guy, who we’ve not done one damn thing for in terms of social programs, how come he doesn’t deserve our sympathy instead of the looters?” Unless blacks come to grips with that reaction, we’re never going to get anywhere. (*Newsweek*, 11 May 1992, 50)

Unfortunately, Murray’s white spectators may not be really sympathetic to the Korean merchants—are they really perceived as struggling and suffering persons?—whose long immigrant history of discrimination and ostracism cannot be divorced from the anti-communist crusade of the Korean War of the fifties, U.S. neocolonial domination of South Korea, and the U.S. public’s attitude toward Asians in general. This attitude has been colored by World War II, anti-Chinese propaganda, and the defeat of the United States in Vietnam. The war against Japan, which culminated in the first use of nuclear bombs, also led to the incarceration of 112,000 Japanese Americans. In 1982, a Chinese-American (Irons 1983), Vincent Chin, was killed by two Detroit autoworkers who were virtually exonerated after a long trial. The victim was mistaken for a Japanese in the context of a nationwide campaign of scapegoating Japan’s economic success as the cause of U.S. unemployment and economic decline.

The complex history of U.S. imperialism is thus occluded by the media tactic of valorizing the “instant knowledge” afforded by simplified TV spectacles. What the media has done in the case of the Los Angeles revolt is to displace the anger (triggered by the verdict of police acquittal in the King trial) of the African American and Latino communities toward police brutality and decades of neglect and exploitation by zooming in on the plight of Korean storeowners and the Latasha Harlin incident (a 15-year old girl was shot by Korean grocer Mrs. Soon Ja Du, for which she was fined \$500 and some community service). Is it Koreans or African Americans who constitute a social “disease” that needs to be quarantined? The racializing phantasm of segregation revolves around an implied “American” identity grasped only when stigmata of Otherness (once biological but now sociological and cultural) are shifted in accord with conservative and national-chauvinist political agendas.

Why is this interethnic antagonism seized by the media and academic scholars as equally if not more important than the contradictions between the communities and the state/business monopoly of power, between subaltern people of color and the Euro-American majority?

Postmodern thinkers on the “left” spectrum fail to comprehend the new dynamics of racism embedded in the project of reconstituting the “essence” of the “American nation.” Obviously the term “nation” needs to be problematized in the context of the interventionist state, the microtechnologies of ideological control, and the changing nature of labor diasporas after the free trade agreement between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. I agree with Howard Winant that racial conflict in the United States functions as “the axis of political and cultural mobilization” in a highly politicized society, but his argument that in postmodern times there is no “fundamental ordering principle or hegemonic racial logic” that would articulate the existing political/cultural projects is a questionable claim (1990). If anything, it is, I submit, a testimony to the failure of dialectical reason (the Marxist mode of historical analysis) to comprehend the laws of social motion and hegemonic praxis in the United States.

In contrast to the fashionable view that racial meanings and identities have become “decentered,” I suggest that we engage ourselves with a critique of the process of centering, namely, the hegemonic process itself, whereby the subjectivity or subject-position of “the American” and the “American nation” is constituted and reproduced in discourses, representations, and practices of everyday life, in what Henri Lefebvre calls a “bureaucratic society of controlled



consumption.” As a first step, I have challenged the absolutism of the ethnicity paradigm in my recent book *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations* (1992) as the dominant epistemic framework in analyzing racial and ethnic relations. Postmodernist theorizing, however, has reinforced capital’s reification of social agency by eliminating history and any explanatory narrative of exploitation that would elucidate the mediation of class, race, and gender in the accumulation of surplus value.

What is imperative for the oppressed working masses, especially the internally colonized people of color in the United States, is a materialist critique of U.S. nationalism as the enabling ideology of racialized class domination. Given the historical specificity of U.S. capitalism, class struggle cannot be theorized adequately outside the conjunctures of the racial formation in which it acquires valency. I suggest that Étienne Balibar’s thesis of the reciprocal determination of racism and nationalism can provide initial guidelines in understanding the historical specificity of U.S. racism as a complex conjuncture of social relations (1990). Signifiers of “culture” and ethnic difference are today replacing biology (although past racist formations are continuously revived) in affirming a “common culture,” which, in retrospect, is a euphemism for white, Eurocentric supremacy. A common pluralist culture in the United States is an imaginary invention, whose resonance in recent academic debate ranges from the neoconservative project of Bloom and Bennett to the “cultural literacy” of E.D. Hirsch (see Barbara Herrnstein Smith 1992) and the fluid, plural “national identity” of feminists like Alice Kessler-Harris (1992). The cry for a common multicultural milieu in effect drowns the voices of people of color—Native Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Asians—resisting such liberal incorporation into the hegemonic compromise known as “the American nation.”

In his inquiry into the discursive logic of racism and nationalism, Balibar discerns in theoretical racism the basic intellectual operation of classification and establishment of hierarchies. What this does is to naturalize the social and historical, that is, to project social and historical differences “into the realm of an imaginary nature.” Human nature and natural differences are given “movement” by the symbolic category of genealogy and the legitimacy of filiation, already a principle of exclusion/inclusion premised on certain anthropological or cultural universals, in particular the difference between humanity and animality. Balibar notes that “the systematic ‘bestialization’ of individuals and racialized human groups . . . is thus the means specific to theoretical racism for conceptualizing human historicity.” When

culture and other social codes replace race as a signifier for difference, concepts of “heritage,” “ancestry,” and “roots” lead toward a notion of a human ideal (the quest for the superior man, the pure type, etc.) and thus an aestheticization of social relations. Racism and nationalism join together when they invoke “a vitalized metaphor of certain sexualized values: energy, decisiveness, initiative and generally all the virile representations of domination or, conversely, passivity, sensuality, femininity, or again, solidarity, *esprit de corps*, and generally all the representations of the ‘organic’ unity of society along the lines of an endogamous ‘family’” (58). In sports events, classroom programs, mass media, and citizenship rituals of various ideological state apparatuses and sites of civil society, we witness with obsessive iteration the sexual and aesthetic cathexis of Americanizing symbols transcending class through the celebratory rhetoric of multicultural, pluralist American democracy.

In the practice of mass political mobilization in the United States, the project of hegemonic recuperation reaffirms the ubiquity and usefulness of class-defined racialization. Class politics operates through ethnic/racial codes of alterity and equivalence.

Whenever a call is made by Establishment ideologues or liberal academics to unite, purify, or strengthen the nation, to restore its integrity, and halt degeneration and “decay of moral fiber” so as to reaffirm the nation’s spiritual greatness and secular supremacy in the world, in the same breath a call is made to control, expel or eliminate those who do not belong, the exogenous or impure, the foreign with their stigmata of inferiority and exteriority defined either by somatic features (vulgar racism) or coded cultural/sociological qualities. A metaphysics of prophylactic essentialism supervenes. Balibar remarks that it is not by chance that the birth of the U.S. nation was accompanied by the systematic genocide of the Native Americans:

For its part, the “American revolutionary nation” built its original ideals on a double repression: that of the extermination of the Amerindian “natives” and that of the difference between free “white” men and “Black” slaves. The linguistic community inherited from the Anglo-Saxon “mother country” did not pose a problem—at least apparently—until Hispanic immigration conferred upon it the significance of class symbol and racial feature (104).

This foundational conjuncture of national identity and social formation is rehearsed in many synoptic historical accounts, among them Gabriel Kolko’s *Main Currents in Modern American History* (1976), Howard

Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980), and Manning Marable's *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (1983). Unfortunately, this lesson cannot be found in the official textbook histories and government publications.

One may hazard the speculation that the mass appeal of Black nationalism (as signified by the popularity of Malcolm X) and the vulgarized spell of Afrocentrism may have checked "white supremacy" (see Goldfield 1991) and the persistent marginalization of African Americans. However, the recent elections dissolved the racial question underscored by the Los Angeles urban revolt into the politics of white suburbia. We should also take note of the official celebrations of Columbus (following the U.S./Western victory over a rising Islamic/Arab power, Iraq) and the unmitigated utilization in films and journalism of the historic subjugation of Native Americans now allegorized as a heroic epic of the sacrifices made by Western civilizers, all symptoms of the dialectics of racism and nationalism (see Parenti 1989) that distinguish the symbolic construction of U.S. global power and its claim to uniqueness in world history.

The quasi-religious appeal of a powerful and exemplary "American nation" neutralizes class, ethnic, and gender differences in the service of a messianic telos. When persons in the United States are interpellated as free, sovereign individuals participating in the heritage and destiny of the American nation, in this same process inequalities of class, race, and gender are sublimated into the symbolic corpus of a compensating identity and its aura of all-encompassing power and privilege. This is the matrix of a putative "common culture." It is perhaps understandable why one woman from the Ojibway nation in Canada told me recently that everywhere she went her U.S. audience could empathize with her as a victim of sexism or male supremacy, but could not understand the racism to which she was subjected. I replied that for them to be able to approach such a possibility, they have to question their identity as "Americans," an identity founded on the conquest and domination of Others/people of color (within and outside the continental U.S.) whose presence is both needed and negated at the same time.

Such a task of problematizing and interrogating a totalizing "American" identity, an ideal configuration of inclusions and exclusions, has not even been faced by U.S. socialists, who claim to be in the vanguard of world proletarian revolution. There are of course a few exceptions (like Manning Marable, Howard Zinn, Gabriel Kolko), but they prove the rule. In general, one can say that both revolutionaries of Marxist vintage and left-wing liberals ignore the problem of

nationalism by the pretext that U.S. imperialism is either declining or no longer meaningful in the era of the permanent crisis of “disorganized,” post-Fordist capitalism.

The fact is that U.S. imperialism is trying to revitalize itself by pursuing the hegemonic project of nationalism via coded racial interpellations. The phenomenal rise of David Duke in Louisiana and his appeal to a great number of people should portend the trends of U.S. racial politics and popular movements in the next decades. Carl Freedman describes the postmodern fascism of Duke as one that tapped the hidden but vast “reservoir of white hatred for blacks”—not only hatred but paranoid fear (1992). While it is true that Duke demagogically mobilized the class resentment, frustrations, and fears of many unemployed poor and middle-class whites as well as of small entrepreneurs, he also deployed the racially coded references to “drug dealers on welfare” used by the Right and the core values of U.S. liberalism signalled by the rhetoric of “fair deal,” “equal opportunity,” “level playing field,” etc. Racism can thus refunction the “principles” of liberal democracy insofar as they sanction the preservation of unequal power and property relations. In addition, the metaphysics of the exceptional U.S. experiment in democracy serves to postpone the legitimacy crisis of the system.

What Duke and any number of neoconservatives do is to work within the problematic or frame of reference of U.S. nationalism. One of its key documents may be glossed here: Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.’s “What Then is the American, This New Man?” (1985). In this text we have a celebration of the diligence, sobriety, and individualism of the pioneering farmers, the gospel of work, optimism, the “traditional spirit of self-reliance and free competition” that inaugurates the founding of the Republic, the idealism of making money, and “the profound conviction that nothing in the world is beyond its power to accomplish.” This pervasive liberal ethos has falsified Marx’s theory, according to Schlesinger: “Thanks to equality of opportunity with plenty for all, the class struggle in America has consisted in the struggle to climb out of one class into a higher one” (25). In this search for what Balibar calls “fictive ethnicity” to define the American nation, a search formalized (to allude to an egregious example) in the anthropological field devoted to culture and national character/personality formation, we see a characteristic gesture of classification and construction of hierarchy. What emerges in effect is a differentialist culturalism that ascribes rights and positions as though they were natural or providentially decreed by mystical forces. Solidarity through participation in the forging of a singular national destiny compensates

for anomie, economic deprivations, and individual powerlessness.

In the sixties and seventies, the institutional elaborations of the ethnicity paradigm functioned *inter alia* as a strategy to defuse racial tensions by shifting class contradictions to that between the Blacks and the relatively deprived white majority who tended to favor religious fundamentalism, authoritarian family patterns, and patriotism. White workers afflicted by alienating labor wanted to be different, too. Irving Louis Horowitz argues that the affirmation of ethnicity valorized race, sex, and property in order to surmount “the vacuity and vapidness of postindustrial capitalist life” and the breakdown of achievement orientation. In opposition to the welfare model of entitlement allegedly used by Blacks and the educational model of empowerment used by Jews, Horowitz points out that ethnicity emphasized the renewal of ascribed values whose locus is the *Gemeinschaft* or precapitalist community: “a pristine era in American life, before the melting-pot ideology boiled out the impurities of the immigrant generation with a weird mixture of external pressure and internalized guilt” (1977, 74). In this pursuit of authenticity, one apprehends the prophylactic drive of nationalized racism to classify, purge, and rank qualities in order to unify a discordant mass with a fiction or myth of oneness.

It is now generally acknowledged that the practice of internationalism dating back to the League of Nations and its privileging of the right of nations to self-determination has enhanced and exacerbated nationalist impulses everywhere. This trend is bound to ramify and condition global confrontations such as the ongoing wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Africa, Peru, and the Philippines. Extrapolating from the contemporary scene of racial polarization in the United States, one can surmise that the politics of racism for a future characterized by trade wars between nation-states and politico-economic blocs will be harnessing with renewed militance the dynamics of national identity, of national self-definition of purpose and tradition, and, as a supplement, the ideology of regional (e.g., European Community; Japan’s new “co-prosperity sphere”) destiny and mission in the “New World Order.” In the United States, “American” nativism and populism (see Higham 1971) will be revitalized in the exchange of symbolic capital and its infinite replication. Mediated by liberals like Glazer and Moynihan in the sixties, the intervention of the discourse of ethnicity in articulating the relation between class and race will be renewed in the new versions of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism. But its real function is hegemonic and ideological: it sublates or displaces class and racial antagonisms to their marginal place in the task of interpellating individuals as “Americans.” Multicultural nationalism, the ethos of

racial diversity and heterogeneity, will be geared to the project of constructing citizens as participants in the assertion of U.S. power and U.S. uniqueness vis-à-vis rivals like Germany, Japan, and of course threats by Third World Others like Iran.

Recent electoral politics has been portentously silent on immigration and the ongoing flight of U.S. transnational capital. The dispute over reproductive rights may have overshadowed that over affirmative action, but the racialized terrain of contestation and its issues are there for all to see in the easily decipherable references to urban crime, drugs, and welfare. The unending supply of labor-power through immigration, illegal importation of labor, and influx of refugees feeds the drive for national identification via ethnicity. Colin Greer points out the linkage between immigration and the political use of ethnicity:

Key in this framework is the continuing stream of immigration which has remained a basic ingredient in society. It is at once an aspect of active ethnic self-definition and a focus of the struggle between capital and labor in the context of which ethnic ideology derives. Ethnicity, then, can be seen as a central characteristic of American identity which is most clearly observed in relationship with, not by any means simply as a successor to, immigration. [The importance of ethnic identity] must be sought in its mediating role between two distinct functions in U.S. life. In effect, two basic, semi-autonomous realms are merged in the ethnic idiom: on the one hand, the belief in the do-it-yourself marketplace of immigrant achievement continues to justify an immigrant stream; on the other, the reality of government involvement in the lives of most Americans and their reliance on government is both hidden and justified through the identification with immigrant forebears. (1984, 131)

Here we encounter the immigrant myth of success, the mediation of state policies and programs, and the genealogical impulse to transcend class interests and recreate (for the new immigrants) a new “American identity” even while “native identity is constantly recreated.”

One key insight needs to be stressed: political pluralism based on immigrant success and self-reliance, the constitutive elements of public ethnicity, serves corporate hegemony as the chief national dogma. It now becomes clear how “the inclusionary power of ethnic identification as a national self-characterization” allows the reactionary pundit Murray (quoted earlier) to speculate on the sympathy of white viewers for victimized Korean proprietors even as the dominant

proponents of law and order spontaneously release their fear/contempt on the Blacks and Latinos more victimized by corporate and government policies than the Korean middlemen of the internal colonies. Immigration thus serves the mandate for reconstituting a distinct U.S. national identity as a guarantee for the maintenance of law and order, the unimpeded accumulation of surplus-value, in the vicissitudes of the marketplace.

What then is the prospect of socialist transformation in the wake of resurgent populist nationalism in the U.S. political arena? Why is nationalism and its passion for an “American national identity” with a populist rhetoric and implicit fascist agenda the public countenance of an emergent new racist politics? I venture a provisional and heuristic answer in the concluding paragraphs.

Mapping the future as an imperialist clash between the three spheres of global power—United States, Europe, and Japan, we see the need to rebuild consensus for war and other interventions. Crucial to this is the consolidation of the “internal colonies,” the pacification of the people of color who will be demographically substantial in the next five decades, that can only be secured by interpellating them as “Americans,” people participating in the U.S. global mission of safeguarding individual freedom for all humanity, of promising for everyone material affluence and self-gratification through unlimited consumption. Sublimating the traditional notions of “the white man’s burden” and the *mission civilizatrice* of the Europeans, the “American nation’s” global role is no longer to defend the free world from the “evil empire” of Soviet communism and its satellites. It is now (as it once was, in another modality) to guarantee the “universal liberty of mankind” (Lincoln’s words), to be “the guardians at the gate” of progress, and in so doing offer the promise of personal fulfillment as it once did to the Pilgrims from an oppressive Europe (see Ahmad 1980) or barbaric fundamentalists like Iran. In the context of a future marked by sharpening rivalry between the three spheres of power centered on Japan, Germany, and the United States, the corporate elite’s reassertion of a patriotic consensus in one guise or another, answering the question of “who is the authentic American?” and redefining the global destiny of the United States, will be the hegemonic project of an internal racial politics centered on market rationality, civil privatism, individualism, and other Eurocentric ideals now christened as traditional American values.

Ideological struggle claims primacy in our overdetermined and uneven global scenario of the next two or three decades. In his suggestive essay *Toward A Socialist Theory of Racism*, Cornel West

correctly emphasized the need for Marxists to pay attention to cultural practices—the vindictive return of the repressed superstructures!—that engender subjectivity or subject-positions beyond those circumscribed by the paradigm of social production (1990). He proposed investigating the genealogy of racist ideology, the institutional mechanisms that sustain white supremacist discourse, and the structural configurations of class exploitation and political repression. In spite of his will to formulate a comprehensive critique, West is strangely silent on the articulation of racism with U.S. nationalism. His analysis privileges the Black-white confrontation in U.S. history. United States nationalism is, I daresay, the secret of racism’s universal appeal and its protean durability, serving as the new “opium of the masses.” It is time for progressives to examine the hegemonic discourse of the U.S. national identity, and with it the parallel aesthetic essentializing of the U.S. national purpose and “self-evident” national character. For I think it is here where racist ideas and practices are formed, refined, elaborated, and reproduced daily as doxa and consensus, making the fires in Los Angeles but one of those TV spectacles and events that are repeated and recycled and sanitized, packaged for academic forums, and thus making tomorrow safe for “business as usual.”

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

### **On Hans Heinz Holz's *Downfall and Future of Socialism***

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 3, was a special issue containing the full text of the book *The Downfall and Future of Socialism* by the German Marxist philosopher Hans Heinz Holz. As we indicated in the publisher's preface, it was not our intention to present the book as an ideological manifesto for Marxists in the 1990s, but because the important theoretical issues raised by Holz have yet to receive adequate discussion in the Marxist publications in the United States, and we expressed the hope that Holz's book would stimulate more extensive discussion of these subjects. In this spirit we asked Daniel Rubin, knowing that he would have wide-ranging differences with Holz, to open the discussion with a critique focussing on chapter 2 of *The Downfall and Future of Socialism*. Rubin was in the national leadership of the CPUSA for many years, most recently as head of the Education Department. He left the Party after the December 1991 national convention.

In order that the discussion could begin in the issue of *NST* following the one containing Holz's book, we provided Rubin with chapter 2, constituting about half the text of the entire book and dealing principally with questions related to Marxist-Leninist parties, but only parts of other chapters because the translation was still under way. Rubin agreed that a reply by Erwin Marquit would appear with his critique. Marquit, editor of *NST*, joined the CPUSA in 1946, lived in Poland as a political exile during the fifties, and has been active in political and ideological work in Minnesota in recent years. He left the Party after the December 1991 convention. We again invite readers to continue the discussion with their comments on any aspect of Holz's book.

# **For an Organization Based on Scientific Socialism, Not the Old Model of a Communist Party**

**Daniel Rubin**

In chapter 2 of *The Downfall and Future of Socialism (Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 3 [1992]: 31–80) Hans Heinz Holz lays out and defends the theoretical argument for the need for a communist party. The argument is essentially for the model of a communist party that was current in the world communist movement prior to the late 1980s. It is an argument which I made for the past forty-five years, particularly in various national leadership posts of the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA) in the last thirty-two years, but now find quite lacking.

Hans Heinz Holz is a scholar, Marxist philosopher, and serious thinker generally. He wants to overcome neglect of theory and promote discussion of new processes, both of which he recognizes have been problems in the world communist movement. He is concerned about overcoming bureaucracy and promoting democracy within communist parties. But his primary purpose is to defend what he considers the basics of Marxism-Leninism and of communist parties against abandonment or distortion in a “social democratic” direction.

I sharply differ with Holz’s main thesis, but my sometimes sharpness of criticism is, of course, not aimed at Holz personally. He does not and probably would not defend the more dogmatic and undemocratic theories, concepts, and practices of the socialist countries and most parties.

Nor is my irritation with the past. The world communist movement has made a monumental contribution to the cause of the working class and the preservation and advance of humanity. Along with most other

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Marxists, I grieve that this was accomplished at a terrible cost in lives and material resources—a cost beyond what was forced on us. The cause of socialism has received very serious setbacks in which the crimes and mistakes of “our side” played a big role.

At the time we were not up to knowing what was really going on; we did not have an advanced enough theoretical and political understanding, nor a party that could have avoided much of the tragedies. There is nothing we can do to change the past. We did our best with all our limitations, particularly in theoretical and political understanding, to work in the interests of the working class and humanity, and we did it through “the only ball game in town.”

To avoid repetition of past mistakes and find a way forward, we must not minimize the problems of the past and make them singular departures because of the economic backwardness of Russia and the low level of consciousness of the Russian masses (whose high level of consciousness we lauded for years). We must not hide the universality of the problems, whether in backward Russia and China, or economically advanced Czechoslovakia and East Germany, or in the communist parties in developed capitalist countries such as the United States, West Germany, and France, for all their distinctions in particulars. We must open our minds to examination of basic concepts of the party to see whether as we understood and practiced them, they were really scientific and Marxist or not.

We not only have the opportunity to make such an examination, but the historic experience clearly demands it. Here I differ deeply with Holz's approach. It is necessary to point to the objective conditions that were faced by the revolutionary movement in Russia. It is sound to say we underestimated the reserves of world capitalism and its ability to adjust to its difficulties and that we overestimated the advance of socialism and underestimated the difficulties inherited from the past. Holz is also correct in acknowledging the weaknesses of bureaucracy, inner-party democracy, and theoretical work. But this is insufficient.

We are then left with the particularity of the situation in Russia (which does not explain the universality of the problems) and with the plea that we should do better in living up to the model of a communist party with respect to bureaucracy, democracy, and theoretical work. Such good intentions are precisely what we expressed for all the years prior to the crisis without preventing the crisis of socialism and the crisis of the world communist movement. Without reexamining, in an open-minded way in the light of experience, basic questions of Marxism and of the communist party, we might well repeat the mistakes of

the past. More likely, we shall never get the opportunity to repeat them as parties of government because we shall fail to gain the confidence of working people.

The purpose of chapter 2 is to defend what used to be considered the orthodox Marxist view on the nature and necessity of the party from attacks by those Holz believes would liquidate the character of the communist party. Holz is concerned about liquidation of a "real" communist party by those who do not accept the theoretical need for one and who move away from the class-struggle concepts of Marxism.

Holz argues that capitalism continues to be subject to a basic contradiction, one between the growing socialization of production and the private, capitalist nature of appropriation and distribution. The capitalist owning the means of production owns the product of production and appropriates surplus value in the form of private profit. This contradiction can only be resolved by social ownership of the means of production, by socialism. The capitalist expropriation of surplus value is inherent in capitalism and gives rise to the class struggle of the workers against the capitalist class. Only the working class has both the self-interest and the power to lead the change to socialism, to end capitalist economic exploitation and dominance of the political, social, and cultural life. Production is the key to understanding the dialectical, contradictory development of society and capitalism as a whole.

To lead the change to socialism in sharp class struggle, the working class needs to become class conscious and understand that its class interests irreconcilably conflict with those of the capitalist class. It also needs to be guided by scientific theory of social development and of the path of struggle to win. Class consciousness and scientific theory, which is Marxism-Leninism, can only come from an organization that is organized to embody these, a communist party. Workers cannot learn these only from their own experience in fighting the boss on the job. The party, to be able to play this vanguard role, must be not only a part of the working class, but its advanced sector. It must be based on the science of society, Marxism-Leninism, and its membership must adhere to this science, to be able to bring the necessary theory and class consciousness to the working class as a whole.

To be able to play this role, the communist party must be organized on the principle of democratic centralism. Holz indicates that his model of a communist party is only for developed capitalist countries (51), but the argumentation is presented in universally valid terms. Holz says his point is not to examine the concrete practice of the parties but to reestablish the theoretical need for the communist party as against those

who undermine or question it or forget it. "What is said here is not a description of the present state of the DKP [German Communist Party]; rather the question of what a communist party must be like to fulfill its historical function." A few pages later he states, "By its nature, a communist party is not just one of many instruments of political dispute within capitalism. Rather, it is the institutional mode of existence in which the historical movement that will lead (if successful) to the abolition of class society achieves its conscious (reflective) form. This is a historical-philosophical-categorical definition, not an empirical description" (58).

In passing, Holz states that dogmatic influences led in part to the underestimation of the strength of capitalism and the overestimation of the strength of socialism. He views inner-party democracy as part of the preventive of dogmatism (57). But what exactly were the dogmatic concepts and theories that produced such wrong estimates and why they were so universally held in the world communist movement is not explored.

Theoretical and ideological work was inadequate and insufficiently convincing. There was insufficient work in exploring the meaning of the scientific and technological revolution (STR) and of the changing make-up of the working class. The closest Holz comes to an explanation for these things is that the backwardness in Russia caused bureaucracy, and the bureaucratization of theoretical and ideological work helped make possible steps away from Marxism under Khrushchev and full abandonment by Gorbachev.

### ***Methodology***

It is important to respond to those who think that Marxism and socialism may be things of the past but who do not like capitalism and are open-minded. There is a need to convince them that there is a left alternative to capitalism to believe in. But there is a great deal of work to do to separate what remains scientifically true from what were antiscientific, mainly dogmatic, and Stalinist views and practices. Above all, it is necessary to develop Marxist analysis much further in the light of present realities and developmental tendencies.

One would expect the examination of experience and particularly the big setbacks for the socialist countries and communist parties to be discussed first, so as to explain why these took place, before arguing the validity of basic Marxist theory and the nature and necessity of communist parties. But the discussion of what has taken place and why is almost exclusively in the last chapter. As we have seen, Holz's

argument for the validity of the need for communist parties does not rest on estimating strengths and weaknesses of their practice.

Apparently no real discussion of what has happened and why is given in chapter 2 or before in order to emphasize its methodological irrelevance to the question of why communist parties are required. The content of the explanation in the last chapter makes it irrelevant. There is no examination of whether this or that development raises any issues about the soundness of the theoretical premises of the need for a communist party or about its basic character. There is no presentation of the theoretical, ideological, and policy justifications for the responses given to the objective pressures in terms of the character of the party, its role, its model of democratic centralism, etc. There is no probing of why the wrong estimates of the main trends in the world and of many other things were made and could not be corrected.

In my view, a fundamental cause of the problems was the growth of sharp contradiction between the productive forces of the scientific and technological revolution by the early 1960s and the statist form of social ownership and the command-administrative economic mechanism. This led to inability to apply the STR and to meet wide differentiation in consumer needs. What is required, as is now recognized by nearly all the parties in the socialist and formerly socialist countries and even by such orthodox parties as those in France, Italy (Communist Refoundation), and Portugal, is direct-interest, closer-to-the-base forms of social ownership, working-class leadership of the state, and wide role for the market mechanism along with strategic planning. But Holz finds the market mechanism to be necessarily identical with capitalism.

Some, including Holz to a large degree, blame the collapse of socialism on imperialism and the Gorbachev leadership. They overlook or do not accept the fact that in April 1985 (when Gorbachev became the leader of the CPSU) socialism was stagnating and on the edge of a crisis that was inevitable without a sharp turn in all aspects of society, and moreover that the whole world communist movement, almost without exception, was in a similar situation. The role of imperialism, headed by the United States, was a necessary but not sufficient causal explanation of the situation that the Gorbachev leadership confronted.

Those who do not accept this assessment of where the world communist movement was in April 1985 do not feel the necessity to probe very deeply. In fact, we need to look at the dialectical relationships between the objective conditions under which the first socialist country functioned and the development of our theoretical and political concepts, and, in turn, at the role of these ideas on the economic, political, and party structures that came into being. Objective conditions in



Russia in the early years explain why the policies and theories of the Stalin grouping would have strong support, but more has to be said to explain why this grouping won out over contending groups and policies. It was not inevitable. But once in power the practice of the Stalin group was defended by theories and concepts that were spread throughout the world communist movement and became the "orthodox" approach.

When the economies got into serious trouble, the communist leadership tried to hide the truth from the people, and even from themselves—for twenty years they kept promising big progress that never came—and it became predictable that political crises would arise and the old methods of leadership and control, good and bad, would prove ineffectual. The battle to convince the people that socialism was superior was bound to lose ground in the face of real developments and no amount of ideological work could prevent this..

The result was a growing decline in credibility, cynicism, isolation of the leadership, and weakening of the influence of the communist party, of Marxism, and of commitment to socialism. One has to explain why the leaderships, whole parties, and institutions of socialism crumbled like a house of cards, with no real defense by masses of workers of the old regimes led by the communist parties.

Only where there was a deep self-examination and break from the influences of Stalinism, as with the South African Communist Party, has there been major progress in the struggle and growth in influence and membership.

Such examination, alongside continued participation in the daily struggle for the needs of working people, is the need of the day. And only by addressing this historic task posed to the Marxists, communists, socialists, and all progressive forces of the world is it possible to combat know-nothingism. It is not possible successfully and persuasively to defend socialism, Marxism, and the need for Marxist organization without intertwining defense with such probing.

Holz's method of arguing for the old model of the communist party is faulty, unscientific, and unconvincing. It starts from certain theoretical premises and deductively shows the necessity for such a party. But is not practice the test of theory? If there are very few ruling communist parties left in the world, and some of them are clearly in trouble with respect to the support of the class they are supposed to lead, and if in the rest of the world the parties are not making headway in gaining the support of working people, must we not take a new look at the theory of the party to see if it is scientifically sound overall? Is it not also necessary to ask whether we have properly understood the theory

of the party? A method that makes practice irrelevant is suspect as being unscientific.

### *Marx, Engels, and Lenin on Marxist organization*

There are a number of difficulties with the traditional argument for the communist party. Marx and Engels did not put it forth theoretically nor use it in their practice. The Communist League of 1848 differed from this model in major respects, as did the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). The mass socialist parties, in Germany and other countries, which Marx and Engels highly valued as a big step forward over the IWA period, even while they criticized them, were also a far cry from the Holz description.

Lenin's theory of the party of the new type first developed in *What Is To Be Done?* in 1902 is what Holz and the rest of us thought we were putting forward. Lenin, however, did not put forward his ideas as universally applicable, without which a party claiming to be Marxist was really "opportunist." Until the 1912–14 period and the differences in regard to World War I, Lenin held the German Social Democratic Party and the Second International in high regard as Marxist parties, even though they already differed radically from what he proposed for Russia.

The national-liberation fronts and parties in the developing countries of socialist orientation, those in which Marxism was the leading current, almost all failed to meet the standards set by Holz. There was an ongoing debate about this in the world communist movement, with some considering the absence of the textbook communist party a result of petty-bourgeois nationalist and/or social democratic influences and others feeling that the model did not fit this type of situation. This latter view of practice suggests there is no model valid for all the different stages of capitalism and levels of development, rather that a variety of models are needed. According to Holz's position, then, Marx, Engels, and those claiming to be inspired by their heritage in many parties in the developing countries, in the industrialized capitalist countries, and in countries formerly defined as socialist were and are profoundly wrong and hold positions contrary to Lenin. This approach thus claims more for Lenin's view than Lenin claimed for it. It presents as Lenin's something that in important ways was not Lenin's theoretical model and certainly not his practice.

### *Science of society*

There is in the model projected a system of views that tends to produce a departure from reality in the direction of substituting wishes and

illusion, that views a science of society—Marxism—in an antiscientific way, and thereby fosters dogmatism and an approach of religiosity, that requires a cult of personality, that is steeped in an elitism making secrecy and misinformation a way of life, that prevents any serious drawing of the membership into policy formation and election of leadership.

Marx, Engels, and Lenin founded the science of society, including the theory of the need for socialist revolution and the general requirements for its attainment. Those requirements include the possession and use of a scientific theory of social development. And a sound understanding of their theory and methodology is that Marxism is capable of growing, expanding, and self-correcting to include all scientifically true facts, theories, and laws of development that reflect reality in its process of development ever more accurately, without limit, and in a never-ending future.

In every science, the specific features of its particular realm must be recognized. A science of society, because it deals with society, has differences with the natural (biological and physical) sciences and mathematics. All events, actions, and developmental tendencies and laws express themselves through the more or less purposeful activity of large numbers of people. Laws of social development express themselves usually as long-term tendencies appearing always and necessarily in different concrete forms and subject to the influence of countervailing tendencies.

We had a grossly oversimplified view of social development and considered the science of society as relatively simple, a sure thing. The party possessed this science, we believed, and no one else did. Our leading bodies, made up of the most theoretically developed and experienced Marxists, would almost always come up with the scientifically correct theory, estimates, policies, tasks, and organization, which would at the same time represent the interests of the working class and humanity. Any small mistakes made initially would soon be corrected as a result of further practice.

### ***Science and party leadership***

The central committee (CC) contained the elected representatives of the whole party, elected because they were the most theoretically and politically developed and experienced collective of the party. They could be counted on to apply and develop this science without any serious mistakes. From its midst the CC elected the most developed and experienced of the most developed and experienced to a political bureau (PB), supposedly subordinate to the CC and composed of from

nine to twenty-five people. The CC elected from among these most developed and experienced of the most developed and experienced, *the* most developed and experienced as *the* leader of the party, the general secretary. The CC regarded the PB as almost infallible masters and practitioners of the science and the PB regarded itself, and even more so the general secretary, in this light.

Differences in these leadership bodies were expected to be held within certain limits. There could be quantitative differences over estimates of situations but not qualitative ones with those of “the leadership.” “The leadership” meant the general secretary and the two or three persons in the PB closest to the general secretary and the PB reporter in CC discussions. Only a further development of initial policy or theoretical conceptions in the same direction or disagreement on a secondary detail would be tolerated.

To go beyond these limits with views in a qualitatively different direction was almost by definition a departure from science, from Marxism, from a working-class standpoint in the direction of petty-bourgeois or bourgeois ideology, revisionism, sectarianism, reformism, social democracy, or opportunism. This was so because the leader of the party and the PB majority could not be so qualitatively wrong as to have so departed from the Marxist science that they themselves had become one or another of the aforementioned Marxist epithets. By definition either one or the other of the positions had to be Marxist-Leninist, scientific, and working class and the other had to be non-Marxist, nonscientific, and non-working-class.

#### ***Pluralism and Marxism allegedly contradictory***

For Holz the idea of pluralism within the communist party is also viewed as in contradiction with working-class ideology and Marxism as a science of society. It is also seen as contrary to the recognition of democratic centralism as the necessary principle of organization of a communist party. “A communist party, the existence of which is based on the reality of two and only two classes, can hardly give in to this illusion of pluralism, which is the product of the ideology of its class opponents” (62).

I would agree with Holz in rejecting a philosophical approach that says social development cannot be explained within a consistent methodological framework, that it is simply a collection of unrelated causes or events, unknowable or accidental. I would also agree that not everyone claiming to be a Marxist or scientific socialist is actually one.

In the Holz view, a qualitative difference on a single question might be permissible but not on a series of questions in which there was a

certain consistency of view. That would amount to permitting "pluralism" in a communist party, permitting coexistence in the same party of a non-Marxist trend alongside the Marxist one. To permit that prevents the party from performing its historically necessary function. That function is to be the source of working-class, Marxist-Leninist science and theory necessary to lead the working class to emancipate itself. The party, in order to perform that function, can only allow one trend to exist within it, the Marxist-Leninist one as enunciated by the CC and PB majority and the general secretary, and "confirmed by practice."

Holz puts it this way: "The political organization of the class struggle of the working class is a communist party, which thereby becomes the medium in which historical truth emerges and prevails. The emergence of truth requires a plurality of aspects, and its victory is tied to unity of action and to an action-oriented perspective. Therefore in a party striving for unity of theory and practice there can be no pluralism." (39).

This intolerance of differences, promulgated in the name of upholding Marx and, in particular, Lenin's theory of the party of the new type, is quite contrary to the practice of Marx, Engels, and Lenin and is nowhere called for by their theory. Each founded, worked in, supported, and praised Marxist organizations in which there were always different trends. They argued hard for their own positions but they did not try to exclude from leadership or membership those who represented other trends within the framework of Marxism. The existence of other trends was considered something natural and normal, not something impermissible.

Among the nine-person central committee that served until shortly before Lenin's death were Stalin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev. Not only did they have different positions on single questions but they represented more or less consistently different trends. Even though Lenin most of the time did not consider the Mensheviks as a trend within Marxism, he sought on more than one occasion to reestablish party organizational unity with them. This was his approach at the Fourth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1905 and on the eve of the October Revolution.

Lenin was against organized factions in a Marxist party but he was for providing avenues in party publications and elsewhere for the presentation to the membership of contending views. He even proposed publishing the platform of the minority, that is, a document produced by a group of people that presented a more or less consistent alternative to the position of the majority. He viewed this as different from an

organized faction that met to decide the course of action of its members outside meetings of the party, for example, to organize outside party channels to win the leadership of the party. He considered as necessary and healthy and not factionalism nor contrary to the rules of the party the presentation of conflicting points of view for the membership to consider through party channels.

### *Scientific knowledge and comparison of views*

Part of the way we gain more scientifically sound knowledge of social development is to compare views with their accompanying evidence. Among those members of Marxist organizations who consider themselves and are considered scientific socialists, there must be comparison of views on what is happening and what should be done in the interests of the working class and humanity. This is required to approach ever more closely truthful knowledge of social development and to act on the basis of this knowledge. The result may be to accept one point of view over another based on that comparison, to combine elements of each to achieve a closer, more scientific view, or to reject both and in the process have yet another view come forward.

### *Various interests, differences, and scientific conclusions*

Try as one might to escape one's own background and limitations of individual experience to approach matters scientifically, to consider the views and knowledge of others, and to seek to determine the actual interests of the working class and humanity in a given situation, one's own background and interests are bound to shade his or her own view of working-class interests. The "Marxism" of the white, male, skilled worker and of the African American female, unskilled worker will have many points of similarity that are very important but they will also have some important, consistent differences reflecting their different backgrounds and current interests in addition to their common class interests. This is not a bad thing, but something natural and unavoidable. We have no way of knowing automatically which viewpoint will represent the most sound, scientific knowledge of a given situation and of what should be done.

There has been a strong tendency in the world communist movement to assert that there is only one Marxism, the "orthodox" Marxist view, and all other views are non-Marxist. We viewed those who called themselves Marxist feminists as not really Marxists and those who attached a nationality—domestically or internationally—to their Marxism as not really Marxists since there is only one universally true Marxism irrespective of where you live, your nationality, class, etc. But this

"orthodox" Marxism turned out to be seriously out of step with reality and has suffered big defeats and evidently was not Marxism at all on many major questions, or at least not as Marxist as it thought itself to be. It made grave mistakes on the national question, on full real equality of women, youth, etc.

Moreover, the science of society is not, cannot be, and does not need to be an exact science. Some parties that were thought to be a model of theoretical soundness turned out to suffer big setbacks. In the early years of the Cuban Revolution, most of the world communist movement felt they departed seriously from Marxist theory, but they were relatively successful. The point is not that theory is irrelevant but that there is not a precise one-to-one relationship between sound theory and practice in either direction.

Theoretically, in every situation there is only one possible truth, the point of view that most closely corresponds to reality, science, and the interests of the working class and humanity, at least up to the current level of development of our knowledge and understanding. But how is that truth most likely reached in practice? By collective discussion and comparison of different points of view, each claiming to be the scientific, Marxist approach to the question, each reflecting not only various degrees of mastery of scientific methodology incorporating prior Marxist theory and the influence of working-class consciousness and partisanship but also personal background and other factors such as nationality, race, gender, age, and occupation. After such exchange and comparison of conclusions drawn, the final test of science and truth is the test of acting on the basis of the conclusions, culminating in the confirmation, modification, or rejection of what was projected as the scientific view.

It is to be expected that there will be substantial differences of a fairly consistent kind, that is, different tendencies and even trends among those who adhere to Marxism, to the same methodology, basic theory, and working-class partisanship because of various additional interests and backgrounds. The exchange and comparison of conclusions is necessary to lead to the most complete truth and knowledge possible. The elimination of different tendencies and trends can only be accomplished artificially, by proclaiming that only one set of interests and background can give rise to the truly Marxist view, all others then being suppressed within the organization and driven outside it. Over a period of time the result becomes a reliance on "the leaders" to do all the thinking on big questions and a paucity of independent and serious discussion.

When this situation persists over any sustained period of time, it is

highly likely that the absence of such comparisons among substantial differences over what the “Marxist view” should be will lead to an ever-increasing one-sidedness and departure from reality and Marxism. This is what has happened. Therefore, pluralism within the framework of Marxism is a necessary condition for Marxism to remain scientific and to remain Marxism rather than being a contradiction in terms.

### ***The cult of personality***

The only way the parties could work without allowing more than one tendency or trend was to proclaim one tendency as the only Marxism, the only scientifically correct view that alone was in the interests of the working class and humanity. And to do this requires investing leading bodies and the leaders of those bodies with absolute or near infallibility, with the most extreme form constituting a clear cult of personality around the general secretary. The cult makes it much easier to rule out the existence of significant differences and the possibility of other tendencies within the framework of Marxism.

In other words, a cult of personality is required for the system to work, with the highest cult around the national leader of the party. And so it has been in life—every socialist country had a cult of personality, as did every communist party, in capitalist and socialist countries alike.

Some parties recently have been able to break with the cult by introducing radical changes in their concept of science and Marxism, and in their attitudes toward the existence of different tendencies, inner-party democracy, and checks and balances.

### ***Communist modesty and elitism***

The notion that only a communist party can develop a science of society and the theory necessary for the working class to be able to play the leading role in replacing capitalism with socialism is also dogmatic and contrary to the evidence. It leads to ignoring the thinking and work of other organizations and individuals. Have not the Rainbow Coalition and Jesse Jackson contributed to our understanding of how to break the political power of reaction, of how to move toward mass political independence and a political formation not dominated by monopoly? Other democratic organizations and forces have made contributions that Marxists need to learn from. They are scientifically valid and conform to the interests of the working class and humanity. For years the Socialist Party of Japan was the foremost fighter there for peace and against remilitarization, and the Communists needed to learn from them. There are left individuals, organizations, and social democrats who have



contributed insights, theories, initiatives that the communists learned or should have learned from.

Noncommunist academics, many of whom support capitalism, have made studies of political and social developments that are scientifically sound in whole or in part, contributing to the science of society, and Marxists need to learn from them. While one would expect Marxists and their organizations to make a more consistent and substantial contribution to the further development of the science of society because that is a reason for their existence and they have accumulated theory to help do it, such contribution has been limited by the exclusive, elitist approach.

The view that we alone own the science of society and can contribute to its development has been self-defeating, since it implies that the work of others in the social sciences is totally wrong or at least tainted by bourgeois ideology and consequently that we should keep away from it or we also will be influenced by such ideology.

### ***"Marxism-Leninism"***

The tendency to treat scientific socialism in a non-Marxist and non-Leninist way, as doctrinaire, dogmatic "teachings" that in themselves give the answers for today, grew continually. By the early 1950s, the world communist movement was speaking of "Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism," and by the 1960s in China and elsewhere, it was "Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought." Naming scientific socialism, the science of society, after its founders, no matter how profound their contributions, fed the notion that all answers could be found in their works, that they alone were the source of the science.

The real issue is not whether a view is "Marxist" but whether it is true, that is, scientifically accurate. To question whether it is Marxist leads to substituting for current probing a comparison with the texts of the classics or with what we used to consider "orthodox" Marxism and have now found to be unscientific and un-Marxist in many areas.

The real tribute to the great founders of scientific socialism is to find conclusions about new developments that are scientific and to work out policy based on them that is in fact in the interests of the working class and humanity. Then it is Marxist and Leninist; anything else would be a repudiation of Marx and Lenin and their scientific approach to society and political policy.

### ***Class consciousness and the party***

In Lenin's day the party was for all practical purposes the sole

source of class consciousness and of theory capable of guiding the revolution. He argued that workers knew only about their own shops and so their consciousness could not rise above the level of trade-union consciousness, how to get more for the workers from their particular boss through collective trade-union struggle. He insisted that in order to develop a class-conscious proletariat, it was necessary for them to learn about the whole range of struggles in the country and world, including the general democratic struggle against the Czarist autocracy in Russia. He pointed out that the proletariat had no source for such information and knowledge except what the party of Marxists would bring to them through its publications and other means at its disposal.

Today, the situation is no longer that either a communist party brings this knowledge, class consciousness, and theory or there will be none. In Germany apart from the German Communist Party (DKP), there is also the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the former communist party in the German Democratic Republic. It does not describe itself as a communist party and has some qualitative differences from the old, "orthodox" description of a communist party as presented by Holz and others. While it pays tribute to the role of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in founding a science of society, like most of the successor parties in Eastern Europe and like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) at its Twenty-Eighth (and final) Congress, the PDS says it draws on this heritage and a wider socialist and progressive heritage, and it does not characterize itself as a Marxist-Leninist party. More than one trend is present and accepted within it. It is organized differently, with internal checks and balances, and its advocacy of socialism goes beyond the old definition of social ownership of the means of production plus working-class power. It also treats the question of the party as the vanguard of the working class quite differently.

The PDS and DKP are not the only sources of knowledge and class consciousness for the working class in Germany, though certainly they are the main ones. Some workers can and do develop class consciousness without a direct connection to either of these organizations. Their sources of information in the mass media and radical publications are much wider, and there are many individuals whose class consciousness has arisen perhaps out of some earlier connection with the organized movement or with connected friends or relatives, etc. There are other left organizations that play some role in spreading class consciousness and advanced theory.

While Holz does not take the most extreme position that only a communist party can contribute to developing the science, he comes

close. "A party that chooses the side of the proletariat exclusively can and must fulfill the role of the vanguard of the working class. . . . Not that the party is omniscient . . . nor that it cannot learn from the experiences of people and the discoveries of science. It does mean that it is the spearhead and vanguard of the working class in its struggles to realize its interests. . . . The vanguard can only be in advance of the class when it has a theory of its own action" (55–56).

### ***The social democrats***

Within the Social Democratic Party of Germany, its youth movement, and some unions it heavily influences are different tendencies. There are right social democrats, who mainly dampen mass action and weaken class consciousness, but there are also left social democrats, who view themselves as Marxists or think highly of Marx's contribution. They help spread class consciousness and contribute to the necessary guiding theory.

It is wrong of Holz to treat social democracy only in a negative way and in one undifferentiated lump, as a hostile competitor of Marxism-Leninism, to be rejected. That is going back in a more sectarian direction to times previous to the conferences of Communist Parties in 1957, 1961, and 1969 that spoke positively of the need for and possibility of cooperation with left social democracy. Since then the developments both among the social democrats as a whole and in the world communist movement warrant an even more positive estimate of cooperation and reduction of differences.

Holz makes three similar references to social democracy in chapter 2. He says, "Nobody escapes from the logic of the interconnectedness of knowledge. The political capitulation of the social democratic parties confronting capitalism and their purely reformist accommodation to its system are a warning example; neither of the world wars nor fascism could be averted with such accommodation" (39).

What differences have been eliminated or reduced and what differences remain and the concrete developments among different sections of social democracy require much study, thought, and discussion. The point here is that at least a section of social democracy today in Germany and in most other countries, including our own, is yet an additional source of some development of class consciousness and theory needed for radical change and socialism.

There is a need for sources for the spread of class consciousness and development of scientific theory for the struggle for progress and socialism. That need is no longer inevitably filled by only one source, a communist party of the old type. In some countries now, there is both

such a communist party, often very small and/or stagnating, and a new party or organizations, in which scientific socialism is the dominant trend, that make a contribution or even the biggest contribution to the task of developing class consciousness and scientific theory to inform social struggles. And it has been argued that it is questionable whether an old-style communist party can produce and spread the quality of Marxist theory and class consciousness needed. This is because such parties rule out Marxist pluralism and with that tend to drift away from objective reality and replicate the cult of personality, an extremely hierarchical structure, and are unable to rely on their own membership for real democratic input.

### ***Party democracy***

A dogmatic view of the science of society—regarding it as an exact science that does not require comparison of significantly different views, that does not permit different trends within Marxism, that finds the scientific view located almost exclusively in the leader of the party and the PB—leads to a patriarchal attitude toward the membership. “We leaders should not allow the members to be misled and confused by wrong points of view claiming to be Marxist,” so publications carry only *the* party line and minor differences. “You don’t want to spread pessimism among the members,” so the publications present only the good news about the party.

The real figures on membership and organizational status are hidden. The membership is not permitted the information necessary and the forms for any real input in decision-making and election of leadership. Forms for electing leadership are used that guarantee self-perpetuation under cover of “working-class democracy, collectivity, and democratic centralism.”

### ***Vanguard***

When you have the unique possession of “Marxist science” that no one else has or can have, then the vanguard concept easily becomes elitist. There is an elitist tone in some of the following statements by Holz: “The potential subject of the class struggle is the class of wage laborers, . . . but the real subject is . . . the party of class conscious workers. Its task is to develop class consciousness and inject it into the working class, to manifest the theoretical principles and perspectives of the class struggle, and to prepare and carry out the actions required by the class struggle” (74).

With such an approach, there is a tendency to operate on the basis

that what your organization thinks and wants *must* win out or all is lost. This is a recipe for participation with others without a give-and-take approach allowing for the possibility that they have something to contribute that we may have overlooked. It leads to seeking domination over others, to operating like a faction in other groups when you would not permit them to operate that way in your organization. In socialist countries it led to undemocratic party domination of all legal organizations and institutions and even substitution of the party for these other forms.

### ***The class struggle***

Holz's treatment of the class struggle of the working class against the capitalist class comes close to reductionism. And for many of the old-style communist parties such as the CPUSA that is a strong tendency. Reductionism is the tendency to say no other struggles exist or are of any importance but the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class. It also tends to say that the dispossession of the capitalist class by the working class will resolve all other struggles, and thus must take precedence and occur first.

Holz says, "The consciousness of class opposition as the historical reality of the society in which we live can only be awakened and maintained by a party whose mode of existence is critique and whose only identification is with the working class" (59).

Holz agrees that the struggle to prevent nuclear war takes precedence and cannot await victory in the class struggle. He also acknowledges there are other global problems, but he finds that there is no difference here from the class struggle, as the working class is on one side and must lead the way while the capitalist class is on the other side.

There are necessarily many social struggles that are distinct from the class struggle though strongly influenced by its development and strongly influencing its development. They are basically complementary in that advances in the class struggle tend to strengthen and make easier advances in all these other struggles and vice versa. They are distinct in that their aim is not to dispossess the capitalist class and replace it as the leading class in the political power structure. They are distinct in that a solution or qualitative turn and new plateau from which to struggle can be achieved prior to changing the socioeconomic system.

At least in theory their strategic objective can be achieved on the basis of the self-interest of a constellation of forces on the side of

progress and against it that is different from that in the class struggle. The division of forces on each side in these struggles can only be predicted as a tendency and may vary significantly in practice.

### *The peace struggle*

In Holz's view the Gorbachev-initiated concepts of new thinking and universal global interests conflict with the role of the class struggle: "While global problems . . . concern humanity as a whole, only class struggle can resolve these problems because of the contradictions immanent in the system, contradictions between the special interests of the rulers and the general interests in which the ruled find themselves" (44). "The struggle for socialism will also be a struggle for the solution of global problems and not the reverse" (50).

We long worked for a broad coalition of class and social forces for peace and in all struggles we sought to bring the working class forward as the leading force. But the new Gorbachev leadership and the CPSU urged an even broader approach. They argued that weaponry had reached the level where war between the USSR and United States could not be won by anyone and would destroy humanity and all that working people had created. It would destroy the U.S. capitalists and all they owned as well. There was, therefore, now a "universal human interest" in preventing such a war occurring through intention, accident, or by growth of a regional war into such a war.

If the world's peoples could be brought to this understanding and mobilize around it, and if the Reagan administration could be brought to accept the "new thinking" as in their own real human interests, then disarmament agreements pulling the world back from the precipice would become possible. The arms race had begun to become a drag on the U.S. economy overall, on the capitalist extraction of maximum surplus value, and on the stability of the economy. The arms-makers, however, although they had a human interest in avoiding nuclear war, also had a profit interest in continuing arms spending at the same or even greater levels.

Although the Reagan administration and the capitalist class as a whole had human self-interest to avoid such a war, it did not follow that they would understand this and act on it. It would still be necessary to estimate concretely the actual policy that would be pursued but the issue of the need to avoid nuclear war as a universal human interest had a potential which the world communist movement had not understood. During the leadership of Chernenko immediately prior to Gorbachev, *The Communist*, theoretical organ of the CPSU, published an article which the CPUSA's theoretical organ, *Political Affairs*, promptly

republished. It contended that the military-industrial complex now dominated the U.S. economy and political life and it would never agree to any serious disarmament.

Khrushchev had on occasion spoken of nuclear war meaning the perishing of humanity, but this estimate of nuclear war had not been repeated in many years by the leadership that replaced him. Some articles in Soviet publications merely stated that U.S. imperialism could not win a war with the USSR. This overlooked the historically new fact that no one could win such a war. Dogmatic views held back the launching of the kind of peace offensive that could have and later did achieve a historic breakthrough in moving away from the high risk of nuclear war.

### *Universal human interests*

It is true that the way the working class is capable of approaching such universal human interests as avoiding nuclear war is different from that of the monopoly capitalists due to differences in class interests. The monopoly capitalists have a human interest in avoiding nuclear annihilation and may be convinced and pushed to act on it. Corporations involved in military production will try to prevent any cut in arms spending and the main sector of monopoly will try to limit the measures taken. They still want to be able to threaten and sometimes use military action against nonnuclear powers and will have complex, mixed economic and political motives with respect to the specific disarmament measures, while resisting any real peace dividend.

This is different from the actual interests and potential activity of the working class. Yet it is dogmatic to say that there are no new factors that can affect interests and potential actions of the monopolies as a result of the existence of actual human interests alongside their class interests.

There are parallel situations with respect to other universal human interests, such as the environment, each with its own specifics that require study. But it is wrong to accept the existence of global problems and then assert that they have no bearing on the activity of the capitalist class and our ability to influence it, even sections of it, in the interest of social progress. To characterize any other position as abandonment of the class approach is evidence of a reductionist approach that dogmatically ignores new objective processes.

Other struggles that have their own identity and are not simply forms of the class struggle or identical with it include the struggle to curb radically the power of the monopoly section of the capitalists, the struggle for democracy, and the struggle to defeat the most reactionary

section of monopoly. In all of these, the struggle for African American equality and against racism is central.

***Historical materialism, base and superstructure, and democracy***

There is nothing in a class-divided society that is not touched in some way by the class struggle, but there are big differences in the nature of the relationships. There are the economic, political, and ideological components of the class struggle proper. But laws of the natural and physical sciences and language are not one thing for the capitalist class and another for the working class. They are, therefore, not part of the superstructure, the dominant ideas and institutions of which defend the existing property class relations. The use to which these laws are put, however, is clearly influenced strongly by class interests.

Even in the area of superstructure, where class interests have a profound impact, everything is not as simple as the world communist movement had assumed. We considered the question of democracy to be in the area of the political superstructure, but we tended to underestimate its importance for more than one reason. We observed Lenin's discussion in *State and Revolution* that there is democracy for the working class and democracy for the capitalist class, that there is bourgeois democracy and socialist democracy, and that for the working class socialist democracy is infinitely more democratic than even the greatest democracy achievable under capitalism.

We did not, and I doubt that Lenin did, conceive of what took place in socialist countries—political and state superstructural formations with a content in regard to democracy that was incompatible with the socialist socioeconomic system. Also, as a result of the whole history of progressive struggle and of the competitive pressure of socialism, democratic structures did exist in some capitalist countries, although with all the limitations from ownership of the means of production by the capitalists. In some respects these democratic structures were more advanced than those actually existing in socialist countries.

Some failed to observe that Lenin, in addition to his already-cited views, and not in contradiction to them, laid stress on the need to build upon valuable achievements in the superstructural areas of both culture and democracy. Lenin, Marx, and Engels never sneered at anything that represented a people's achievements even though it existed under capitalism and bore its earmarks.

Putting the class struggle and its role in historic perspective, Lenin wrote:

From the standpoint of the basic ideas of Marxism, the interests of social development are higher than the interests of the



proletariat—the interests of the working-class movement as a whole are higher than the interests of a separate section of the workers or of separate phases of the movement. (“A Draft Programme of Our Party.” In *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works* 4:236 [Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960])

This in no way contradicts the words in the *Manifesto* that the history of all previous class societies is a history of class struggle. As Marx demonstrated in many works like the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, this broad generalization about historic development does not obviate the need for concrete study of each specific situation to determine the relative weight of different causal factors.

Holz says the communist party is a part only of the working class. It is true it cannot be a part of the capitalist class as well. But in the United States is it to be an all-white, male, blue-collar worker party? Why can it not also be a part of and the party of African Americans, Latinos, and all the nationally oppressed, of the youth, of women, standing for their best interests? Even the CPUSA prior to its current dogmatic, sectarian binge said exactly that in its basic documents. Why such narrowness?

As Lenin often pointed out, the millions learn mainly through becoming involved in struggle on initial levels of understanding. The fact is the U.S. working class is influenced by interests sections of it have that are not class interests and by illusions of escaping from the working class. As a result they are often ready to become involved first in struggle on issues of the working class's potential allies, and this can lead toward more advanced and class understanding.

### ***Fanaticism and political balance***

This reductionist approach to the class struggle can easily drift into an intolerant fanaticism that lacks balance and disregards wider issues that should help shape policy. As Gus Hall said, just after provocative military actions by some Soviet military forces in Lithuania, about defending socialism, “There are many methods short of the use of force. But if these democratic methods are deemed to be exhausted, then by any means necessary, is necessary” (*Report to the National Committee, CPUSA*, January 25, 1991). And as the Hall grouping demonstrated in the pre-25th Convention period and at the 25th Convention that led to the split in the CPUSA and the founding of the Committees of Correspondence, the “true working class outlook,” understood only by this group, was to be upheld within the CPUSA “by any means necessary.”

I do not believe Holz would want to go this far, but his approach to

the class struggle and the working class, to Marxism-Leninism, and to democratic centralism sets the stage for moving to such an extreme, and this actually took place in most of the parties of the socialist world and in many other parties.

***What is and is not needed?***

There is a need for an organization that helps the working class gain class consciousness and that plays an important role in developing scientific socialist theory, but the idea of exclusive possession of a science of society is no longer warranted. If it is the communist party model that was nearly universal in the early 1980s it will necessarily drift away from science and real working-class interests and will be unable to play a leading role in the struggle for social progress and socialism and will become isolated, as well as trail events. In organizational principles, it must uphold pluralism within the frame of scientific socialism in the way discussed. And it must provide the maximum possible of direct democratic decision-making by its membership, really democratic elections for leadership, and checks and balances with respect to leadership. At the same time it needs enough voluntary discipline so that it can become a force in the struggles of the day and for socialism.

Part of its task is the reexamination discussed. That is not to say that there is very little from the past that is still valid or of importance for building upon. There is a need to examine dialectical materialism to learn how to apply it dialectically and not as a schema into which the facts of social development are to be pushed. There is a need to update and include in dialectical materialism the most modern methods of gaining authentic knowledge of the real world. Many aspects of historical materialism need fresh study in light of what appears to have been Stalinist distortions. The political economy of capitalism needs serious updating and correcting of one-sidedness. The concept of the socialist socioeconomic formation as simply social ownership of the means of production and worker power needs serious revamping.

Many aspects of the theory of socialist revolution, of the relationship of reform and revolution, also need reexamination. There also obviously were serious errors in theory and policy in relation to national oppression, oppression of women, in the area of the state and democracy, and on the theory of the communist party. There is neither room for complacency that we Marxists have the answers or for know-nothingism, that we know nothing and start from ground zero to recreate a science of society.

### ***The path to significant Marxist organization***

One cannot wish such a "communist" organization into existence. I hesitate to use "communist party" because it has become so identified with the old model initiated by the Stalin grouping in the USSR. While Holz treats "communist party" as synonymous with Marxist and scientific socialist, the old model reflected mainly the Stalin group's views of what was Marxist.

There are those who argue such an organization should be created immediately in each country no matter how small it is by "we" who are "Marxists." Holz says. "Even if it is small, it can carry out the conceptual preparation needed in advance of and parallel to the spread of class consciousness. Growing class consciousness, in turn, leads to the organizational growth of the party that represents the class standpoint without compromise, no matter how long this process may take" (58–59).

But this is the view that only "pure" Marxists can develop the science of society and that the mass movement at its many different levels of development can go nowhere significant until the "real Marxists" play a vanguard role in it, views that I have already argued against.

Such an organization formed in the United States now would likely have no more than two hundred members, some of whom would be Trotskyists (most of whom I consider extremely dogmatic, sectarian Marxists) and a small part of those who left the CPUSA and want the CPUSA but in a more democratic form. Because of both its doubtful Marxist politics and its tiny size, such an organization would become stagnant at birth.

Instead, the issue is how to associate closely with the vast majority of the some 100,000 adherents of socialism in the United States, creating and developing a scientific socialist current among them that has the possibility of substantial growth among socialists and others who are becoming progressive-minded, gradually demonstrating the value of scientific socialism. For those who have been used to an organization of quite like-minded people, such a process can be frustrating but it is more worthwhile.

The conference of the Committees of Correspondence held at Berkeley in July 1992 is a step in that direction. Publications like *Nature, Society, and Thought* can make a significant contribution to the development of that scientific socialist current in this much larger pool.

*Brooklyn, New York*

## **On Retaining the Science in Scientific Socialism: A Reply to Rubin**

**Erwin Marquit**

Daniel Rubin's many years in the leadership of the CPUSA as a member of the Party's National Board (formerly Political Bureau) and head of its Education Department up to the time of his departure from the Party in December 1991 have led him to associate Holz's theoretical position on the need for, and characteristics of, a Marxist-Leninist party with what many communist parties now recognize to have been deformations of this theoretical position in their past practices. The issue, however, is not the extent to which the CPUSA appropriately fulfilled, or will fulfill, the historical role of a Marxist-Leninist party as projected by Holz, but whether Holz's theoretically projected role for such a party necessarily leads to the deformations that Rubin claims spring from the model. The question then follows as to whether an entirely different organizational form would be the most effective base of activity for the realization of the goal effecting a transition to socialism in the developed capitalist countries.

Rubin favors "An Organization Based on Scientific Socialism, Not the Old Model of a Communist Party." I shall argue that the model Rubin is criticizing is not the model Holz discussed. The organization Rubin proposes, moreover, is not only not based on scientific socialism, but is not necessarily even socialist.

Rubin argues for three basic positions that shape his criticism of Holz:

(1) The communist parties that Holz argues for proved to be undemocratic, dogmatic, sectarian, dictatorial structures whose leaders considered themselves to be the ultimate carriers of the truth. The principal flaw in Holz's book is his failure to take into account in his theoretical discussion the actual practices of these old-type communist parties.

(2) Marxists should not form Marxist parties. What is needed is a

pluralistic, broad-left organization of progressives of socialist orientation. By associating themselves in a Marxist party, Marxists cut themselves off from the creative contributions that can be made by non-Marxists. They arrogantly assert that only they are capable of knowing the truth. Because the Marxist worldview regards thought as the reflection of an objective reality, only one correct thought is possible. Experience shows that Marxists have often been seriously wrong, which is proof that Marxists cannot claim that only their knowledge is adequately accurate. Marxists, therefore, need creative input from non-Marxists through participation in broad, progressive, socialist-oriented mass organizations in which the Marxists can gradually demonstrate the value of scientific socialism.

(3) The problems we confront in the world today transcend class issues. The solution of global problems concerns even sections of monopoly capital. Holz's concept of a party based solely on the working class is therefore too narrow.

I shall discuss Rubin's comments in the approximate order in which he presented them. At the conclusion of my comments, I shall summarize my response to Rubin's three main areas of criticism. I hope others will join the discussion.

### ***Methodology***

Rubin begins his substantive criticism with a discussion of what he sees as a fundamental methodological flaw in Holz's argument for the validity of basic Marxist theory on the need for communist parties. Rubin asserts that the starting point for such a discussion should have been an analysis of the reasons for the major setbacks in the socialist countries and in their communist parties and that the validity of the theory can only be established on the basis of the experience with its application. This is a rather strange logical inversion, since it is necessary to have a clear idea about the theoretical role of a communist party before one can evaluate the extent to which the practical experiences were a consequence of the application, distortion, nonapplication, or incompleteness of the theory.

### ***Marx, Engels, and Lenin on Marxist organization***

Rubin asserts, "There are a number of difficulties with the traditional argument for the communist party. Marx and Engels did not put it forth theoretically nor use it in their practice. The Communist League of 1848 differed from this model in major respects as did the International Workingmen's Association (IWA)." He adds that Marx and Engels highly valued the mass socialist parties in Germany and

other countries and that Lenin too held the German Social Democratic Party in high regard.

Marx and Engels did not regard the Communist League as an organization that would actually prepare a revolutionary transformation of society and it was dissolved on Marx's motion after a split had developed on this question (Marx 1983, 287; Engels 1979, 389–90). The decline of the IWA and its dissolution in 1876 was associated with two factors. It was gradually becoming apparent that working-class revolutionary movements had to be organized on a national basis. The immediate cause for the decline, however, was the pluralistic character of the IWA after Bakunin and his supporters joined it, leading to battles between anarchists and the Marxists that hopelessly split the organization (Foster 1955, 101–31).

The situation in the German Social Democratic Party was somewhat similar. As the party of August Bebel, William Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and other outstanding Marxists, it gave militant leadership to working-class struggles. But as a pluralistic party in which the reformist, class-compromising ideology of Ferdinand Lassalle and Eduard Bernstein would ultimately shape its policies, culminating in the support of German imperialism in World War I, it proved to be incapable of giving leadership to a socialist transformation in Germany, and the Marxists felt compelled to form the Spartacus League to continue their struggle for socialism, as Rubin himself finally acknowledges.

Rubin asserts that the “national-liberation fronts and parties in the developing countries of socialist orientation, those in which Marxism was the leading current, almost all failed to meet the standards set by Holz.” Rubin already had pointed out that Holz had made it clear that his discussion on party organization was intended for developed capitalist countries but then proceeded to state that Holz's “argumentation is presented in universally valid terms.” Holz, however, made no such claim. The difficulty in applying a “universally valid” model to underdeveloped countries was underscored, for example, by the events that led to the collapse of the Grenadian revolution just prior to the U.S. invasion (Marquit 1989).

Rubin then asserts that the model Holz projects “tends to produce a departure from reality in the direction of substituting wishes and illusion, that views a science of society—Marxism—in an antiscientific way, and thereby fosters dogmatism and an approach of religiosity, that requires a cult of personality, that is steeped in an elitism making secrecy and misinformation a way of life, that prevents any serious drawing of the membership into policy formation and election of

leadership." Rubin ties these developments to the organizational practices of the CPUSA, which were based on "a grossly oversimplified view of social development" that "considered the science of society as relatively simple, a sure thing." It was assumed, continues Rubin, that the party possessed this science and that no one else did and that "the leading bodies made up of the most theoretically developed and experienced Marxists would almost always come up with the scientifically correct theory, estimates, policies, tasks, and organization." Rubin does not link here, however, any of these dogmatically rooted organizational practices to the party model advocated by Holz. I shall return to this question when discussing Rubin's later attempts to establish such a link.

### ***Pluralism***

Rubin criticizes Holz's position on pluralism by arguing that Marx, Engels, and, in particular, Lenin, accepted the concept of pluralism in a Marxist party. It turns out, however, that what Rubin refers to as pluralism here is not at all the pluralism that Holz is referring to. Moreover, it is not even the kind of pluralism that Rubin advocates later in his commentary.

Holz does not take the view attributed to him by Rubin that "a qualitative difference on a single question might be permissible but not on a series of questions in which there was a certain consistency of view." Holz's comments on pluralism deal with the inclusion within a Marxist-Leninist party of viewpoints that reject the basic Marxist theory of history and social development. Here is what Holz actually wrote:

Development of Marxism today must proceed via many contradictory ideas. But this does not mean that anything and everything should be included. Scientific knowledge develops in manifold ways within a "paradigm" (as the theoreticians of science call it), and also within an explanatory model and framework of reality. This framework is defined for Marxism-Leninism by a series of basic conceptions, the most important of which our ten theses attempted to summarize. The new historical developments give no reason to depart from the following basic conceptions:

The material exchange of humans with nature, that is, the preservation and development of the human species, occurs through production, not only through consumption. Therefore the unfolding of the forces of production and their organization

in the relations of production is the determining factor of history. Since the dissolution of ancient society, the relations of production have been determined through class division, and political history has proceeded as class struggle. Class struggle is reflected through class-based worldviews and conflict between them. Hence questions of theory are not only abstract questions of truth but also always questions of class. Historical truth lies with the class that is the carrier of social progress. It can be the carrier of social progress only in an organized form. The political organization of the class struggle of the working class is a communist party, which thereby becomes the medium in which historical truth emerges and prevails. The emergence of truth requires a plurality of aspects, and its victory is tied to unity of action and to an action-oriented perspective. Therefore in a party striving for unity of theory and practice there can be no pluralism. (38)

The pluralism that Holz is arguing against is not the tolerance of different viewpoints among Marxists within a single Marxist organization, but inclusion of members who do not share the organization's Marxist orientation.

Rubin continues his discussion on pluralism in subsequent sections, using the term *pluralism* in a variety of ways, at times merely referring to a difference in emphasis, rather than to fundamental differences in philosophical and political outlook. His principal criticism, however, is not directed at what Holz has written, but what he sees as the consequences of the application of Holz's views in the past practice of the CPUSA and other communist parties, even though the practices he criticizes are alien to Holz's concept of Marxism-Leninism.

I shall try to follow Rubin's arguments here to demonstrate that the practices criticized by Rubin do not spring from Marxism-Leninism, but are directed against its spirit.

Rubin correctly points out that background and interests are bound to shade anyone's view of working-class interests, so that the "'Marxism' of the white, male, skilled worker and of the African American female, unskilled worker will have many points of similarity that are very important but they will also have some important, consistent differences reflecting their different backgrounds and current interests in addition to their common class interests." In this situation, Rubin notes that one cannot automatically decide which viewpoint represents the most sound, scientific knowledge of a given situation. Rubin then states:



There has been a strong tendency in the world communist movement to assert that there is only one Marxism, the "orthodox" Marxist view, and all other views are non-Marxist. We viewed those who called themselves Marxist feminists as not really Marxists and those who attached a nationality—domestically or internationally—to their Marxism as not really Marxists since there is only one universally true Marxism irrespective of where you live, your nationality, class, etc. But this "orthodox" Marxism turned out to be seriously out of step with reality and has suffered big defeats and evidently was not Marxism at all on many major questions, or at least not as Marxist as it thought itself to be. It made grave mistakes on the national question, on full real equality of women, youth, etc.

Here we have two different levels of differences. One involves assessment of how to take into account the various interests and needs in the development of a strategic line of activity in a revolutionary organization. This is not a problem unique to revolutionary organizations. Policies for action must be decided on the basis of assessments of input from people with different backgrounds and experiences. It will not be unusual to find lack of unanimity in the final decision on the course of action. The demand for unity of action requires acceptance by the organization of a theoretical assessment or analysis, but adoption of a theoretical position by a Marxist organization cannot be conditioned on unanimity of acceptance of such a position on the part of its members. The adoption of a strategic line and the demand for unity of action in the implementation of this policy need not be accompanied, as Rubin suggests, by the proclamation "that only one set of interests and background can give rise to the truly Marxist view" and that "all others then [be] suppressed within the organization and driven outside it." Documents from the recent conventions of Marxist-Leninist parties such as the Communist Party of Canada, the German Communist Party, and the Communist Party of Portugal make it quite clear that this is not their understanding of democratic centralism, though it has been acknowledged that dogmatic tendencies in this direction existed in the past. In fact the German Communist Party at its convention in January 1993 removed the prohibition on the formation of factions, though it still regarded them as harmful.

The other level of difference to which Rubin refers is one that attempts to redefine Marxism in a fundamental way, against the spirit of what Rubin refers to as the "'orthodox' Marxist view" and he cites as an example Marxist feminists. In the United States today, there are

“orthodox Marxists,” in Lenin’s sense of the term, active in the women’s movement who have no difficulty identifying themselves as Marxist feminists to indicate their special interest and activity around issues of the women’s movement. Within the women’s movement one does speak of “socialist feminism.” These are people of socialist orientation with wide-ranging attitudes to Marxism. A Marxist-Leninist organization should have no difficulty in including within its ranks a socialist feminist who accepted Marxism-Leninism.

In the developed capitalist countries, the communist parties, burdened by dogmatic heritages from the Stalin period, were slow to recognize the importance of supporting the emerging women’s movement, partly due to the fear that bourgeois-feminist influences would deflect struggles away from working-class issues, partly due to a sectarian reluctance to support movements not led by communists, and partly due to failure to confront sexist attitudes within the communist parties themselves. A further factor, by no means less significant than the others, was the modeling of their positions on the practices in the socialist countries, which would not allow the women’s organizations to define their own issues. Cuba, for example, like other socialist countries, was outstanding in opening the opportunity for women to participate in all areas of social life, but only within the last two years abolished the obligation of the Confederation of Cuban Women to seek approval of the central party organs for its program of activity.

Rubin raises the question of others who “attached a nationality—domestically or internationally—to their Marxism” and challenges the right of the “orthodox” Marxists to declare that these are not really Marxists. Rubin argues that after all “this ‘orthodox’ Marxism turned out to be seriously out of step with reality and has suffered big defeats and evidently was not Marxism at all on many major questions.” Unfortunately, he gives no examples, but from the context of the discussion I can assume that he is dealing with two types of situations that have arisen in the past, some of which continue to the present. Some socialist countries embarked on political and economic programs that deviated radically from those practiced by the USSR and those allied most closely with the USSR politically. In this way, there arose “Yugoslav Marxism,” “Chinese Marxism,” “North Korean Marxism,” “Hungarian Marxism,” for example. Within individual countries there also developed philosophical currents that considered themselves further developments of Marxism, for example, the Poznan school in Poland, the Praxis school in Yugoslavia, analytical Marxism in Great Britain. The influence of these political-economic and philosophical

policies and currents spread across their borders of origin. The question that needs most attention is not how these "deviations" were dealt with in the past, but how Marxist-Leninists should deal with them in the present.

We see today that none of the models tried in the past were adequate for the needs of the individual socialist countries. Holz presents one view on the reason for the collapse of the Soviet model. Some have argued that the principal reason for the collapse was to be found in the impossibility of developing adequate models under conditions in which democratic centralism was wantonly violated, leading to the complete absence of accountability of the party leadership to the bodies that supposedly elected them, and the obstacles that such leadership placed on the ability of the mass organizations to fulfill their role as the principal expression of people's democracy by vigorously representing the interests of their constituencies (Slovo 1990; Steigerwald 1990; Bloice, Marquit, and Schaffner, 1993). The point here is that it was not Marxism-Leninism that failed, but that the political leadership that considered itself Marxist-Leninists in the socialist countries, and those in the leadership of the Marxist parties of the nonsocialist countries who supported such positions uncritically, violated the most basic principles of Marxist-Leninist organization and were in no position to decide what was or was not consistent with Marxism. Moreover, in the European socialist countries that initiated economic models that differed significantly from the Soviet model, the political bureaus of the ruling parties conducted themselves in the same elitist, dogmatic, bureaucratized, paternalistic manner without any serious pretense to accountability, and thus also could not succeed.

What about the philosophical currents that claim to advance dialectical and historical materialism beyond Lenin's orthodox Marxism? Here one has to be specific and deal with each theoretical "updating" individually, and this is not the appropriate place to do so. There are many areas in dialectical and historical materialism that have come under discussion within the Marxist-Leninist tradition. Dogmatic distortions and oversimplifications of Marxist philosophy also occurred, as, for example, in the widely disseminated section on dialectical and historical materialism written by Stalin for the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (1939), in what became known as Lysenkoism, in Mao Zedong's writings on contradictions, and in the applications of Marxist scientific methodology to various fields—economics, biology, and physics, among others. These questions are appropriately debated in theoretical publications and cannot be decided upon by party resolutions. I disagree, for example, with Holz's

statement that the differentiation of classes is a logical contradiction (58), because in my view materialist dialectics, in contrast to Hegel's idealist dialectics, does not require, and consequently should not accept, the objective existence of logical contradictions. Holz has stated his view in his book; I have argued for my view in an article on the subject (Marquit 1990). We can continue to debate this question in the appropriate publications and at philosophical conferences. Neither Holz nor I would dream of turning to a party body to resolve the question and to declare the other not a Marxist.

In regard to other currents such as the Praxis school or the Poznan school, we are dealing with a very different matter. These are currents that accept certain aspects of Marxist philosophy, but reject others that are fundamental to dialectical materialism, for example, the applicability of dialectics to nature or of materialism to society. The downplaying of the materialism in Marx's materialist conception of history can, for example, lead to the neglect of the organized material forms of class struggles, such as trade unions and Marxist political organizations, and to a focus on consciousness raising instead. In their theoretical activity, Marxist organizations must constantly review their theoretical assumptions to take into account advances in knowledge. It is then not unreasonable, after adequate consideration and discussion, for Marxist organizations to support organizationally the results of such discussions in their publications insofar as they influence the methodological basis of their political and economic analysis. They should not close the door, however, to continuing discussions on philosophical-ideological questions as new arguments are made.

Marxist-Leninists have no argument with Rubin when he writes that the real issue is not whether a view is "Marxist" but whether it is true, that is, scientifically accurate. Non-Marxist, and even anti-Marxist, social commentators have made important contributions to our knowledge of social issues, as Holz recognizes in his citations from the works of Max Weber (108). Marx, of course, relied heavily on bourgeois political economists.

### ***Social democracy and the vanguard party***

In his sections subheaded "The social democrats" and "Vanguard," Rubin argues against the need for a vanguard party of the working class. In Rubin's view, the vanguard concept that the party has unique possession of Marxist science easily becomes elitist. "This is a recipe for participation with others without a give-and-take approach allowing

for the possibility that they have something to contribute that we may have overlooked. It leads to seeking domination over others, to operating like a faction in other groups when you would not permit them to operate that way in your organization." Here again Rubin identifies distortions of the vanguard concept with the Holz's concept.

Rubin argues that a vanguard organization is no longer needed because there are other sources today for the development of class consciousness. He chastises Holz for what he sees as a one-sided criticism of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. "The point here," writes Rubin, "is that at least a section of social democracy today in Germany and in most other countries, including our own, is yet an additional source of some development of class consciousness and theory needed for radical change and socialism."

Holz's only criticism is directed at the party as led by its right wing and the party's ideologues that defend its principal class collaborationist position. Of course there are right- and left-wing social democrats and Marxist-Leninists have at times cooperated politically with both and will continue to do so. The question on hand is not whether to form political coalitions with one or both around particular issues, but Rubin's attempt to demonstrate that a vanguard organization is not necessary because there are now other sources of class consciousness, in particular, left social democrats who "view themselves as Marxists or think highly of Marx's contribution" and who constitute "an additional source of some development of class consciousness and theory needed for radical change and socialism."

First of all, a distinction has to be made between class consciousness and revolutionary class consciousness. The membership of many social democratic parties is predominantly working-class. Their right-wing leaders are content with a class consciousness in the working class as long as this class consciousness does not threaten their class-collaborationist policies. In fact, the right-wing social democratic leaders usually stress that their parties are primarily the parties of the working class so that the workers do not seek an alternative party. The feeling of ultimate helplessness runs very deep among workers today. I remember vividly a TV interview with a worker who had supported Reagan for president. "Sure he's for the rich," he said, "but they give us our jobs." This same feeling of helplessness extends to many class-conscious workers as well, fueled, of course, by right-wing social democratic leaders, so that socialism is not considered a viable alternative to capitalism. Moreover, socialism is widely confused with social welfare measures.

Despite ideological differences with left social democrats, Marxist-Leninists have long valued the positive role played by left social democrats. High inflation, unemployment, and cuts in social services do not in themselves radicalize the population. Revolutions do not occur because conditions are bad. Social revolutions occur when people are convinced that the conditions can be better and the power to change their condition lies in their hands. Marxist-Leninists participate in all struggles directed toward improving the life of the people, never rejecting them as reformist—alleviating human suffering under capitalism, but not ending it. Through victories in such struggles, people come to know their strength. Such victories, however, do not lead spontaneously to revolutionary class consciousness. This is why a vanguard Marxist-Leninist organization is needed. Left social democrats span a range of ideological positions, from being “unaffiliated” Marxist-Leninists to militant reformists. While they can recognize the class character of the existing bourgeois states, they generally do not accept the Marxist understanding of the class character of every state and the need for the working class to wrest control of the state from the bourgeoisie and replace it as the dominant force in the state. Left social democrats who consider themselves Marxists can be staunch allies in many kinds of political struggles, but, hesitant to accept Leninist concepts of party and state, they generally lack the organizational and ideological basis for extending revolutionary class consciousness.

The development and extension of revolutionary class consciousness involve more than participation in day-to-day struggles by a revolutionary vanguard. They involve conscious educational activities that will lead the participants in such struggles to a theoretical understanding of the relation of one such struggle to others and their connections to advancing humanity to socialism. Holz stresses the need to strive for theoretical unity as part of the process of achieving unity in activity. A unified theoretical understanding is the organizational goal of discussion and debate, but, as Holz notes, such unity can only come about through the give and take of a diversity of viewpoints in discussion. A Marxist-Leninist organization needs a unified theoretical position on which to base its program of action.

Although striving for theoretical unity, an organization cannot impose upon its adherents a unity of thought. Even if a unified theoretical position is arrived at, no one can guarantee that it is the best one or even correct. Although activities are undertaken on the basis of whatever understanding is achieved, continual theoretical examination is necessary. For example Holz points out that the communist leadership

in the socialist countries incorrectly assessed the significance of the general crisis of capitalism:

It was *false to conclude* that the general crisis of capitalism also meant its increasing weakness and collapse. . . . First of all, the resources of social wealth at the disposal of capitalism to use against the exploited were grossly underestimated. Second, it was not understood that *crisis is a form of motion of capitalism*, in which internal contradictions form a unity of opposites and that the contradictions had by no means reached the limits of tearing that unity apart. Third, it was not recognized that a controlled development of the productive forces was possible within the framework of capitalist relations of production; problems arising from this development could be overcome even with decreasing expectation of long-term stability. Therefore, although the general explanatory model was not wrong, inadequate concretizations and the incorrect, schematized way in which they were applied led to mistaken estimates, errors in intermediate- and long-term planning, and unjustified self-confidence. (83–84)

The general crisis of capitalism continues under conditions of increasing transnationalization of capital. The locus of the superstructural institutions arising from the transnationalization of the relations of production is expanding significantly beyond the boundaries of the national states. Suprastate institutions are playing an increasing role. The response of revolutionary working-class movements to such developments is yet to be developed theoretically (Meisenhelder 1992). Marxist-Leninists have the responsibility to organize studies of such questions, just as they have had historically the role of organizing theoretical study of all major questions confronting the working class.

Rubin notes that in some countries there are a "communist party of the old type," "often very small and/or stagnating," and "a new party or organizations in which scientific socialism is the dominant trend that make a contribution or even the biggest contribution to the task of developing class consciousness and scientific theory to inform social struggles." He gives no concrete examples and would be hard put to cite any because of a basic contradiction in his position. He claims he supports the concept of scientific socialism, but in contradiction to the title of his commentary, he opposes any explicit organizational association with this concept. He therefore shifts his ground from "an organization based on scientific socialism" to an organization "in which scientific socialism is the dominant trend," by which he can only

mean a non-Marxist organization whose members are mostly Marxists. In Italy, eastern Germany, and Great Britain the parties that formerly considered themselves Marxist-Leninist parties all changed their names and no longer call consider themselves Marxist parties or advocates of “scientific socialism.” Perhaps most of the members still regard themselves as Marxist. Let us look at the ideological dynamics of one such organization, one that Rubin praises in his commentary, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). With its base still in eastern Germany, the PDS at its convention 29–31 January 1993 adopted a new program in which it states: “The PDS considers itself an association of different left forces. Its support for a democratic socialism is not bound with any definite worldview, ideology, or religion.” The program states:

Socialism is for us a necessary goal—a society in which the free development of the individual is a condition for the free development of all. Socialism is for us a movement against the exploitation of humans by humans, against patriarchal oppression, against the plundering of nature, for the preservation and development of human culture, for the guarantee of human rights, for a society in which people guide their affairs in a democratic and rational way. Socialism is for us a value system in which freedom, equality and solidarity, human emancipation, social justice, preservation of nature and peace are inseparably bound.

This statement on socialism carefully avoids identification of exploitation of humans by humans with exploitation of wage labor by capitalists. The program never calls for an end to capitalism and refers only to the need for “overcoming the domination of private capitalist property.” The program states that differences of opinion exist on what this “overcoming” involves. In no sense could this be considered a party that bases itself on “scientific socialism.”

The failure to confront the political-economic meaning of socialism means that the PDS is not committing itself to public ownership of the means of production because it is intended to be a political coalition that includes progressives who are not ready to accept socialism. The abandonment of an identification with a worldview or ideology is, in effect, a denial of the class character of ideology. This is similar to the kind of organization that Rubin is proposing for the United States in place of a Marxist-Leninist one or even one that considers itself simply Marxist. Rubin considers the route taken by the PDS to be the path to significant Marxist organization. The brief history of the PDS already indicates that it has taken the path away from any type of Marxist organization.



This is an appropriate place to comment on cases in which two or more parties in the same country claim to be committed to scientific socialism, which, in my view, means today a party that accepts in essence Holz's ten theses of Marxism-Leninism. In many countries (India, Great Britain, the Philippines, among others) there are two or more such parties that trace their ideological heritage back to the Communist International (or Comintern) through what has been considered to be the world communist movement. Others do not necessarily claim this historical continuity, or broke with it at different times after Lenin's death (such as various Trotskyist and Maoist organizations), but still consider themselves communist parties. How does one deal with this situation in view of the following statement by Holz?

The party, with all its contradictions and inadequacies, is the general medium within which the struggle of the classes, and thus also the struggle for the liberation of humanity, takes place with the most advanced (scientifically grounded) consciousness. No individual person can assume this historical position. Each is bound to his or her own standpoint and the perspectives it affords. Individuals can only contribute to the strength and orientation of the party by bringing their knowledge and effort to it and joining together with others. As we have said, a mode of production that engenders in each individual the appearance of his or her unique and separate individuality is an obstacle to insight into the collectivity of political conduct. To subordinate one's own will to that of the party in these times of individualistic ideology seems to be a quite unreasonable demand . . . The communist must tolerate this demand. Party discipline is indispensable in an organization of struggle.

A pragmatic view would be superficial, however. If the party is the organized vanguard of the working class, then the merging of the individual wills of its members—given all their various understandings, points of view, and motives—into a common action for acknowledged reasons is the form in which class consciousness achieves its advanced, militant reality. The *historical truth* of a situation (relative to the class position of the historical subject) lies not in the abstract correctness of individual knowledge (although in some cases this may be superior to that of the collective), but in the sum total of individuals' knowledge relative to the accomplishment of a goal set by the politically active community. This sum total is arrived at through organization and fervent cooperation of comrades.

Particular individuals may be “ahead of their time,” and they should assert their ideas so as to keep the perspectives open, but in the unity of theory and practice they remain bound to the party and its capacity to act. Being thus bound is the condition that gives the party its effectiveness, and its formal principle is that of voluntarily acknowledged party discipline. (60–61)

The identification of one or more vanguard organizations cannot be dealt with strictly on the basis of their programmatic pronouncements. Each organization or group has a history of activity which may or may not be in accord with its program. Many of these parties or organizations are small collectives that, from the time of their formation, have pursued in practice or theory sectarian policies that perpetuate their isolation from the working class, undermining their ability ever to fulfill in practice the role of a vanguard organization. Lenin analyzed such tendencies in his *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. Because of their petty-bourgeois radicalism, these organizations cannot take root in developed capitalist countries.

Among the Marxist-Leninist organizations that emerged or split off from the parties that at one time or another were associated with the world communist movement can be found not only such sect-like collectives but organizations with mass followings that can claim to be fulfilling vanguard roles. India has two such parties, the Communist Party of India, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Holz, in urging communists to “remain bound to the party,” even in case of disagreements with “the party,” clearly had in mind the German Communist Party, which is the only party in Germany that he regards as capable of fulfilling a vanguard role. In India, a Marxist-Leninist must decide whether one or both parties meet the criteria of being Marxist-Leninist and if both do, then decide which party pursues policies most suitable for the conditions in that country.

In Great Britain and Italy, where the party that had been historically linked to Marxism-Leninism abandoned its Marxist ideological foundations and new Marxist-Leninist parties came into being, it should be obvious that Holz would not urge communists to remain bound to the party that turned reformist.

It can also happen that a party originating from the Marxist-Leninist tradition falls under the control of a bureaucratized leadership that ceases to be accountable to its members and clones its undemocratic structures on all organizational levels. This is what happened in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and to the communist parties of the Eastern European socialist countries. Communist parties in Western

Europe (Portugal, France, and Germany, for example) attribute the collapse of the European socialist countries largely to such a development.

What communists in a such a socialist country should have done in that situation goes beyond the scope of this commentary. What, however, should communists do in a capitalist country when such a state of affairs arises in their own party? A Marxist Leninist has to assess the possibility of reversing this deformation of democratic centralism. If there is convincing evidence that no possibility exists for the restoration of democratic control by the membership, then a new Marxist-Leninist formation is called for. If there is a reasonable possibility of reversing the organizational deformation of democratic processes, then communists should remain with the party and work to change its undemocratic practices. There are no easy blueprints to guide one through this process. Sober analyses of the forces at work within the organization are necessary.

What about Rubin's criticism of the vanguard concept on the grounds that "it leads to seeking domination over others, to operating like a faction in other groups when you would not permit them to operate that way in your organization"? The vanguard concept would be essentially without meaning if the vanguard party isolated itself in practice, for example by alienating other class-conscious workers, or socially conscious activists in general who were not ready to join the party, by attempting to force its "leading role" on them. Members of the Communist Party of South Africa participate actively in the African National Congress, but they avoid the left-sectarian error of acting as a disciplined caucus in the ANC. It is not that members of a vanguard party active in a broader mass organization should not caucus or otherwise meet to analyze developments in it. But, generally speaking, they should not be bound by a discipline that stands above the mass organization in which they are participating; they must be open to changing their positions and modifying their activities in discussions and meetings involving nonparty people who may, at times, have a clearer analysis and more convincing arguments. A sectarian concept of vanguard can be particularly self-destructive in the case of mass organizations in which members of a Marxist-Leninist party have considerable influence. The danger lies in the sectarian temptation to make decisions for the organization on the basis of party discussions held entirely outside the organization. The problem Rubin raises is not with the theory of the vanguard, but again reflects his experiences with a sectarian conception of it.

*Class struggles and other struggles for social justice*

In the final part of his critique of Holz, Rubin argues for dropping the organizational identification of the working class as the vanguard in relation to other sectors of the population in the struggle for a socialist future. He focuses on three questions.

First, Rubin argues that universal human interests transcend class interests, that even monopoly capitalists are concerned about avoiding nuclear war, that similar concerns exist in regard to the environment and other global problems, and therefore an organization that identifies itself with the class interests of the working class has too narrow a focus to deal with such problems.

Holz actually mentions three global problems: war, mass poverty in the Third World, and life-threatening environmental destruction. These three problems are generated by the capitalist mode of production and the insatiable drive for capitalist profit. Monopoly capitalists are interested in avoiding war only to the extent that their own lives and property are endangered. Mass poverty in the Third World concerns them only insofar as it might fuel social revolution. The collective corporate interest in the bottom line of the corporate balance sheet can even overshadow the personal safety of the individual capitalists, so that capitalism is quite capable of pursuing environmental destruction past the point of no return. This is why the solution of global problems is primarily a question of class struggle. It is true that socialist countries pursued short-sighted, disastrous policies in relation to the environment, in part because of economic pressures from the capitalist countries. The insatiable profit drive of capitalism, however, will always tend to generate these global problems, while the long-term interests of the working class, under conditions of capitalism or socialism, lie in the struggle against them. This is why global problems are primarily class questions.

A second argument made by Rubin on global issues is that Holz puts aside struggles on global issues because he sees them as conflicting with class struggles. Rubin quotes Holz as follows (the page numbers refer to Holz): "While global problems . . . concern humanity as a whole, only class struggle can resolve these problems because of the contradictions immanent in the system, contradictions between the special interests of the rulers and the general interests in which the ruled find themselves (44). "The struggle for socialism will also be a struggle for the solution of global problems and not the reverse" (50). A more complete quote from Holz will show that Holz does not take the position Rubin attributes to him:

Struggle, through citizen initiatives, against environmental destruction, against arbitrary government officials and companies. Struggle, above all, for the preservation of peace. In short, struggle for everything humane that is being denied and destroyed by capitalism. But not simply struggle to alleviate this or that shortcoming here or there, but combined with the explanation that there is a social alternative—a social system, socialism—in which the structural causes that have led to inhumane conditions will be eliminated, an explanation that this is not a utopian dream, but is based on scientific knowledge of history. The struggle for the socialism will also be a struggle for the solution of global problems and not the reverse—and for the solution of global problems we need a Marxist theory. (50)

In his third criticism of what he characterizes as Holz's reductionist approach to the class struggle, Rubin suggests that there are superstructural and nonsuperstructural areas that go beyond class interests and in which there are valuable achievements that must be built upon. Why, asks Rubin, must the communist party be a part of the working class alone? "Why can it not also be a part of and the party of African Americans, Latinos, and all the nationally oppressed, of the youth, of women, standing for their best interests?" Rubin then cites Lenin: "From the standpoint of the basic ideas of Marxism, the interests of social development are higher than the interests of the proletariat." Rubin here misinterprets Holz, as well as Lenin. Lenin here was expressing essentially the same thought as Marx did as early as 1843/44 in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction*, the study that transformed Marx into a Marxist. This is the work which began to shape the Marxist understanding of the unity of theory and practice. It is also the work in which Marx first recognizes the need for the working class to develop forms of class struggle that are both material and ideological. Lenin was particularly aware of the importance of this work and in his own writings paraphrased ideas from it. Lenin's concept of a vanguard party is a logical development of the path Marx began to lay out here for the revolutionary transformation of society mediated by the experiences of the working-class movement over the rest of the nineteenth century. Let us see how Marx arrived at the recognition that the working class must consciously organize itself so that it can educate and mobilize both the proletariat and nonproletarian masses to liberate all of humanity.

Marx, the revolutionary democrat, focussing on the path to the liberation of Germany from feudal rule, was trying to understand what characteristics of the French bourgeoisie enabled it to succeed in

overthrowing feudal rule, while the German bourgeoisie was unable to do so. Because of the important role this analysis has played in the development of Marxist theory, it is worthwhile looking at how Marx arrived at his conclusion that the proletariat could play this role in Germany.

After discussing how the class that leads a social revolution must claim that is acting in the interests of all of society, Marx writes:

No class of civil society can play this role without arousing a moment of enthusiasm in itself and in the masses, a moment in which it fraternises and merges with society in general, becomes confused with it and is perceived and acknowledged as its *general representative*; a moment in which its demands and rights are truly the rights and demands of society itself; a moment in which it is truly the social head and the social heart. Only in the name of the general rights of society can a particular class lay claim to general domination. For the storming of this emancipatory position, and hence for the political exploitation of all spheres of society in the interests of its own sphere, revolutionary energy and intellectual self-confidence alone are not sufficient. For the *revolution of a nation* and the *emancipation of a particular class* of civil society to coincide, for *one* estate to be acknowledged as the estate of the whole society, all the defects of society must conversely be concentrated in another class, a particular estate must be the general stumbling block, the incorporation of the general limitation, a particular social sphere must be looked upon as the *notorious crime* of the whole of society, so that liberation from that sphere appears as general self-liberation. For *one* estate to be *par excellence* the estate of liberation, another estate must conversely be the obvious estate of oppression. The negative general significance of the French nobility and the French clergy determined the positive general significance of the immediately adjacent and opposed class of the *bourgeoisie*.

But no particular class in Germany has the consistency, the severity, the courage or the ruthlessness that could mark it out as the negative representative of society. No more has any estate the breadth of soul that identifies itself, even for a moment with the soul of the nation, the genius that inspires material might to political violence, or that revolutionary audacity which flings at the adversary the defiant words: *I am nothing and I should be everything*. The main stem of German morals and honesty, of the classes as well as of individuals, is rather that *modest egoism*

which asserts its limitedness and allows it to be asserted against itself. (184–85)

In a word, what Marx is saying here is that the German bourgeoisie was so narrowly focussed upon its own needs and interests that it could not issue the call for Liberty, Equality, and Freedom for all the people as did the French bourgeoisie so hypocritically and successfully. Marx then asks: "Where, then, is the *positive* possibility of a German emancipation?" He then answers:

In the formation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering, . . . a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*. (186)

Marx thus saw in the German proletariat, still then a minority in a country under the domination of feudal relations of production, the class that has the potential for ending all class divisions in society, and therefore the class that in liberating itself will liberate all of society. For the proletariat to accomplish this successfully, it must convince the nonproletarian masses that it is struggling for their liberation as well. It is here that Marx becomes aware of the need for ideological struggle, of the need for the proletariat to educate all the masses, not just itself, on the nature of the historical process. For a few pages earlier he already had noted:

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. (182)

Marx then brings these two concepts together:

As philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of people the emancipation of the *Germans* into *human beings* will take place. . . . The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*. (187)

The fact that the working class is the immediate object of exploitation by the capitalist class gives it the potential of standing stably in opposition to capital in the developed capitalist countries. Marxist parties, when they are organized from outside the working class, do not

take root until they are stably bound to that class. The priority given to working-class issues is necessarily a reflection of this need to retain this stable bond. The historic role of the Marxist party, however, is to liberate all of society and that is why Lenin can assert that “the interests of social development are higher than the interests of the proletariat.” That is also why it must draw to it all classes and strata that are oppressed by capital.

### *Conclusion*

At the beginning of my comments I outlined the principal thrust of Rubin’s criticisms of Holz. The first area of criticism was lack of discussion by Holz of the past practices of Marxist-Leninist parties. Rubin no doubt has in mind what are often referred to as Stalinist deformations of democratic centralism and the distorted concept of vanguard role of the party. In his footnotes to chapter 4, Holz suggests that the sources for these practices require for separate study. Rubin argues that they result from the theory. I have attempted to show that they do not arise from the theory. What is more now important is that Marxist-Leninist parties (for example, the leadership of the Communist Party of Canada, the French Communist Party, the German Communist Party, the Portuguese Communist Party, the South African Communist Party, to mention a few) have condemned these deformations. I shall quote from the main political resolution adopted at the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Portugal, 4–6 December 1993:

The causes leading to the defeat of socialism in the USSR and in Eastern Europe can be found . . . in the “model” followed by the construction of socialism in the USSR, which was generally adopted by a mechanical transportation to other countries. . . . This “model” can be characterized by the replacement of the power of the people by a highly centralized political power increasingly bureaucratic and divorced from the people’s aspirations, opinions, and aims. There were serious limitations to political democracy with an increasingly repressive state with growing disregard for the law. . . . In the Party, bureaucratic centralism was established, estranging the workers and the masses; decisions were administratively imposed both in the Party and State, given the fact that the State and Party had become inextricably linked. Finally Marxism-Leninism was dogmatized and instrumentalized and imposed as State doctrine.

Rubin’s second area of criticism concerns his plea for ideological pluralism so that Marxists do not shut themselves off from creative



thought by non-Marxists. As Rubin himself argues, Marxist theory does not exclude the possibility of theoretical contributions by people who are not Marxists. If this had not at times been the practice, then the practice was wrong and had to be changed. Rubin's demand for a pluralistic organization with an injunction against the existence of a Marxist organization, however, would be a strange kind of pluralism. Only the Marxists could not organize for collective political activity and theoretical study. Marxists would act as Marxists only as individuals, in contradiction to the collective spirit of Marxism. Presumably, Rubin would not be opposed to Marxists working on theoretical questions together, but would this not amount to separation of theory from practice? Rubin's pluralistic organization would not even be able to maintain a socialist orientation, since it is an organization that is not committed to scientific socialism, but only one in which scientific socialism would be a current. With the Marxists in effect an unorganized "current" in an organization with no ideological commitment, the Marxist influence would very likely diminish and the organization would move further and further away from socialism. This is precisely the process we now see unfolding in the German PDS.

Rubin's third area of criticism of Holz is directed against the class character of a Marxist party. As I have tried to demonstrate, his criticisms on this question are based on a distorted view of the class character of a Marxist-Leninist party. In his discussion of the question, Rubin argues that to base a party on the working class is to ignore the need to include African Americans, Latinos, and all the nationally oppressed, the youth, and women. This argument ignores the class character of the essence of the oppression faced by this large part of the U.S. population. The oppression these groups face is not, of course, reducible to class questions, but the principal path to solving their problems is through class approaches. Non-Marxist progressives often focus their attention on combatting racist ideology, but racist ideology will remain as long as the ghettos remain. Marxists see the focus of the struggle against racism in the demand for jobs and affirmative action and deal with the question of racist ideology largely, though not exclusively, as part of this struggle.

Rubin's abandonment of the class content of scientific socialism does not even take us back to utopian socialism, which had a focus on the working class. Rubin has presented us with a program that weakens rather than strengthens the socialist movement in the United States.

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## **A CALL FOR A MARXIST FORUM**

**Our changing world demands communication, not only to provide knowledge about events but also to provide for discussion and analysis of the forces behind those events. A tremendous void has resulted from the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the dismantling of many Marxist-Leninist parties. Many who retain confidence in the future of socialism, Marxist-Leninist principles of historical and dialectical materialism, class struggle, and an internationalist worldview are left with a need for a mechanism through which we can interact as communists.**

**This need is felt on many levels, but particularly in the international arena. Media of the ruling class everywhere continue to confuse, divide, and isolate progressives from each other. While a plethora of broad left publications exists, no regular, systematic channels of communication are open among those who accept the fundamental ideas first enunciated by Marx, Engels, and Lenin and since developed through expanded theory and practice.**

**The assassination of Chris Hani in South Africa, the warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the escalation of economic and cultural pressures on workers of Mexico, Canada, and the United States due to the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the volatile political and economic climate in Russia are but a few of the matters that demand application of the scientific principles of dialectical materialism. We need a means of keeping each other informed of peoples' struggles within the United States and internationally, of sharing analyses, and extending discussions of ideological and political questions.**

**A group of Marxist-Leninists in Minnesota, including members of the Committees of Correspondence and the CPUSA (past and present), proposes formation of a**

**network, the Marxist Forum, as a means of communicating matters of local, regional, national, and international concern among those who continue to be inspired by the communist ideal.**

**We have begun to develop some initial ideas about how such a network might function, and we sketch them here to solicit response and further suggestions from others. The Marxist Forum could make available to its participants reports and documents from Marxist organizations anywhere in the world. It could provide a mechanism for participants to become involved by commenting on such materials and other subjects of current interest. It could solicit foreign and domestic commentary on discussions arising within the Forum. Methods of communication might include: routine mailing of listings of available materials; circulation of specific items on request (by mail or electronically where possible); outreach through computer networks.**

**If you agree that such a network will be useful to Marxists in our thinking and theoretical and practical activity, let us work together to make the Marxist Forum a reality. Please give us your ideas, suggest names of others who should be informed, make a financial contribution if you can, and join us.**

**Gerald Erickson, Janet Quaife, Hal Schwartz, on behalf of the ad hoc organizing committee.**

**If you wish to participate in the Marxist Forum send your name and address to Gerald Erickson/Marxist Forum, University of Minnesota, 9 Pleasant St. S.E., room 331, Minneapolis, MN 55455**

## Book Reviews

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*Woman from Spillertown: A Memoir of Agnes Burns Wieck.* By David Thoreau Wieck. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1992, 288 pages, cloth \$32.50

This is the story of Agnes Burns Wieck, a woman born and raised in the now-fading culture of the Illinois coal-mining industry. She was the daughter and wife of coal miners, an organizer of miners' wives, and an editorial writer for union publications.

By narrating the personal experiences of this woman, the author has presented an introduction to coal mining and union developments in the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and has vividly illustrated the indignities and poverty imposed on the miners by owners whose greed for profits made them indifferent to the miners' human needs.

The author, the son of Agnes Wieck, has by interweaving incidents of his own life made this book both a biography and an autobiography. Of special interest is his experience as a draft resister, a stand that resulted in years in prison.

Today, with the high-tech developments in mining and other industries, it is not easy to grasp the feeling of hurt suffered by the miners and their families, but Agnes knew it, understood it, and worked throughout her life to overcome it.

She was born 4 January 1892 in Sandoval, Illinois. Her family moved frequently, seeking better or more active coal mines until her father settled in Spillertown. When Agnes was only twelve her mother's death made her the housekeeper. She continued to attend school to the eleventh year, however, when she qualified for teaching. But Agnes, who from an early age ran to the mines with the wives and families of miners at the sound of the gong tolling disaster in order to watch the cages ascend with men—some alive, others dead—was not one to remain quiet, watching and waiting. At the age of twenty-two she

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1992)

decided that her career was not teaching, but organizing in the coal industry, mainly organizing women to partake with their men in the struggle for dependable unions. She felt that her first responsibility was to the wives and families of the miners with whom she lived and matured. Her hope was to raise the consciousness of the women so that they would understand their own potentialities and achieve their own independence in the world of women. There is no doubt that through this dream Agnes strove to find herself.

The character of Agnes is well described by the author: "constantly in motion, even while at rest, . . . nervous, . . . timid, . . . hypersensitive to pain, . . . a talker, . . . not a bit shy, . . . does not envy the rich, . . . angry at the poverty of the poor, . . . loathes all hypocrisy, . . . thinks God has a lot to answer for."

An Illinois Labor History Society plaque says of Agnes, "Eloquent, tireless, courageous and inspired, educator and rebel organizer of her people in Labor's Cause, the 'Mother Jones' of Illinois."

A comparison to Mother Jones is plausible, yet there are differences. Both were active in the coal industry, but Mother Jones worked among the men, organizing, picketing, fighting until her death at 99, then to be buried near her "boys."

Agnes did not go into the fields to organize. Though her interest in the mine industry never wavered, she concentrated on organizing women's union auxiliaries to involve women in participating with their men in working for better conditions, increased wages and benefits.

Agnes soon became involved in the Women's Trade Union League, gaining a scholarship to their labor-union school and then becoming a delegate to WTUL's conventions. The aim of the WTUL was to help women in industry gain union rights. These struggles opened a new field for Agnes and kept her in work with women in other industries. At the same time she wrote articles for coal-mine union publications. One of her main ambitions was to write and edit. But this ambition was never fully realized.

In January 1921 Agnes married Edward Wieck, a coal miner. He was self-educated, an extensive reader of good literature; he enjoyed music and hoped to write a history of the mine industry. He introduced Agnes to his interests in reading and music.

Ed's union organizing work often took him away from home, leaving Agnes to care for their son born two years after their marriage. These frequent absences caused some disruption in their marriage relations, but the marriage continued to the end of their lives.

Ed did much writing. His articles were published in *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Republic*, *American Mercury*, and union publications.

When his article "American Miners Association" was published by the Russell Sage Foundation, he was hired by the Foundation's history research department at a salary of \$3,000 a year. This gave the family a stable living. Ed worked there for fifteen years, until the department was discontinued. Since the Foundation was nonprofit, Ed received no pension, nor was he eligible for Social Security. The Foundation granted him a life allowance of \$1,500 a year. To supplement this he accepted a night watchman's position, which qualified him for Social Security. Illness hospitalized him for two and one-half years until his death on 24 October 1959.

After Ed's death Agnes's fighting spirit remained, but her declining health made it impossible for her to be part of the struggles of the day. She died 22 October 1966.

Agnes was a pioneer for women's rights in a slave industry. She faced male-dominated unions with strength and determination. Her accomplishments were many but never so much as she wished. Interruptions in life hindered her activity and she fretted over this. For Agnes there was always a goal ahead.

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*Marxist Approaches in Economic Anthropology*. Edited by Alice Littlefield and Hill Gates. Society for Economic Anthropology, Monographs in Economic Anthropology No. 9. Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1991, 232 pages, paper, \$20.00.

The eleven papers in this volume make an exceptionally stimulating collection of articles. One may not agree with all of the arguments made, but virtually every paper offers abundant food for thought. The editors have divided the book into three major parts: Petty Production, Kinship in Political Economy, and The State as Economic Actor.

In the section on petty production, Hill Gates compares petty capitalist production in today's China, where it exists alongside large-scale state enterprises, with its counterpart in late imperial China, where it existed alongside the tributary mode of production, and finds intriguing similarities in both eras. Marilyn Cohen looks at the peasant weavers of northern Ireland at the onset of the industrial revolution, noting that some were able to become petty capitalists, but in the end were unable to compete with factory spinning. Leigh Binford and Scott Cook,

dealing with Third World capitalism, seek to identify the basic elements of petty commodity production and relate it to the dominant mode of production and to specific historical conditions. Jane L. Collins summarizes the various ways unwaged work—housework and craftwork—has been viewed within the Marxist tradition, and Winnie Lem (whose paper is placed in the section on kinship) focuses on the way intensification of viticulture affects the work of women in Languedoc, southern France.

Several major points emerge from the papers in this section. All of them stress the heterogeneity of petty producers and of the peasantry from which so many derive. Particularly intriguing is the observation that petty production occurs as a subordinate mode of production in such a wide variety of economic settings, although it is never the dominant mode of production. They also point out the need to distinguish between the household (which in most cases is the unit of production) and the family. Most authors are critical of Chayanov, the Russian agronomist whose work on the peasant household economy, done in the 1920s, viewed the peasants as working not for profit but for their reproduction only.

The section on kinship includes, besides Lem's paper, a rather thin piece by Alice Kehoe on a women's work organization in Bolivia and a longer (and quite original) paper by John H. Moore on kinship and the division of labor among the Cheyenne, based largely on the census of 1880. He suggests that it is mainly the use of ego as a point of reference that distinguishes a kinship system from a work system.

In Part 3, *The State as Economic Actor*, David Nugent holds that modern Peru, like many Third World states, has formed structures of property and class that have hindered, rather than promoted, capitalism, and to analyze them in terms of economic categories taken from nineteenth-century capitalism, he says, is to dehistoricize capitalism. Timothy J. Finan and collaborators compare the Salazarist state with the post-1974 revolutionary state in Portugal as to how agricultural policies channel income toward different classes. Christine Gailey, in a paper on the politics of development in Tonga, where both capitalist and precapitalist (here, kinship) relations receive state support, notes that ruling classes may deploy "precapitalist" relations to facilitate wealth accumulation. This point is made also by Alice Littlefield, whose paper on Native American labor and U.S. public policy is, in my opinion, one of the best in the volume. While others have shown how U.S. Indian policy has changed in response to corporate demands for Indian lands, Littlefield shows that it is also related to changes in the demand for labor. Her discussion of the role of the Indian land-claims



commission I found especially instructive. In the light of these two papers, I am led to wonder if the structures that Nugent sees as hindering capitalism (petty property ownership, for instance) might not actually function to aid it, at least in the small region of Peru he deals with.

From the papers in this section, it is clear that the state is more likely to need an iron fist than an “invisible hand” to bring into being and maintain a capitalist “free-market” economy. Like the papers in the section on petty production, they also make clear the function of subordinate, petty modes of production in facilitating large-scale capitalism, a point which Gailey and Littlefield make explicit.

All the papers in the volume are grounded in ethnographic or historical data and for the most part they avoid the dense Marxist jargon and high level of abstraction that renders so much Marxist writing incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Some of the papers would be suitable for class assignment as a way to introduce explicitly Marxist approaches to students not previously exposed to them. All of them suggest many lines for fruitful research, which testifies to the continuing vitality of the Marxist approach.

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*The Pristine Culture of Capitalism.* By Ellen Meiksins Wood. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991, 200 pages, cloth \$59.95, paper \$16.95.

We have yet to see an economy whose driving mechanism is neither direct coercion by the state nor the compulsions of profit but democratic self-determination, which need no longer subordinate all human values to the wasteful and destructive imperatives of accumulation. That kind of advance in democracy would require a system of social relations as different from capitalism as capitalism was from feudalism. This is what used to be called socialism, and now that the worst deformations of the socialist ideal have receded into the historical past we can look forward to a renewal of its democratic project. (176)

In these concluding words to her *Pristine Culture of Capitalism* Ellen Meiksins Wood identifies the urgent project in which her book participates: a renewal of the struggle for an authentic socialism that is to be undertaken on the basis of a better understanding of what the

development of capitalism, and from it socialism, means historically and theoretically. In a period in which others have abandoned class analysis, the dialectical method, and a Marxist reading of history, Wood herself contributes to this renewal precisely by endeavouring to provide a more thoroughly Marxist understanding of the origins and growth of capitalism. From history accurately seen, our present situation and prospects will also be better understood. Wood's approach shows that the way to increased clarity and a new beginning lies not through the twisted paths of post-structuralist or post-Marxist theorizing but through a classical Marxism that makes a fresh effort to see both independently and through the eyes of Marx. We must admit that "deformations of the socialist ideal" have often obstructed the Marxist vision of things, but Wood's book shows that, with the lens wiped clean, the historical insight of Marxism retains its unique power to show us the past, the present, and the future.

Wood makes the case in this book that capitalism emerged in England in such a way that England would become and remain the most completely capitalist country in Europe and have its "predatory impulses" and "unbridled rapacity" realized in Thatcherism. England's economic problems in this century arise from the contradictions of capitalism and not from obsolescent institutions or lagging industry. In the way of her explanation lie the competing historical accounts of Martin Wiener (who suggested that "the *gentility* of British capitalism . . . hindered its development"), of J. C. D. Clark (who sees little social change in an England that remains forever *ancien régime* both ideologically and politically), of Alan Macfarlane (who sees no *transition* to capitalism in an England characterized from earliest times by "competitive individualism"), and of the New Left theorists-critics-historians Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson (who argue that British capitalism did not develop fully because "antiquated institutions and cultural attitudes" held it back).

Wood skillfully refutes Clark and Macfarlane through an appeal to the details of the historical picture. Nairn and Anderson (and Wiener, whose views at times resemble theirs) she answers by pointing to the unnecessary intrusion of a "bourgeois paradigm" into accounts of the origins of capitalism. It is wrong, she argues, to insist on the full emergence of the bourgeoisie as a condition for the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Capitalism announces its presence with the emergence of "a wholly new social dynamic of self-sustaining growth and accumulation based on the improvement of labour-productivity generated by the imperatives of competition" (7). This new way of life was first evident in the "improvement" of agriculture in England by

landlords previously contented to live on rent. To insist that, in any “Marxist” historical account, the urban bourgeoisie must be seen as the class that establishes capitalism is not only inaccurate for England but runs the risk of seeing “these new arrangements” as an “extrapolation from the traditional commercial practices of the merchant in classical antiquity or the medieval burgher.” Historians led astray by the bourgeois-only model may fail to keep in mind that investment to improve labor productivity must occur before there is capitalism: “the identification of ‘capitalism’ with ‘bourgeoisie’ has brought with it a tendency to regard the capitalist system, its characteristic activities, motivations and imperatives, as little more than an extension of . . . apparently ageless social forms” (7). “Marxist theory—indeed, in its distinctive essence” (8), Wood argues, sees that capitalism was the important new historical fact—not the “bourgeois revolution.” In England the political way for capitalism was quickly cleared; there were few survivals of other economic models; and, with the transition from an agrarian to an industrial capitalism that would find no opposition except in the trade-union and socialist movements, British capitalism developed relentlessly in a way that was not possible in the rest of Europe, and certainly not in France, where, despite the paradigmatic bourgeois revolution of 1789, feudal property relations persisted in many spheres of the economy.

Wood’s convincing historical account arrives as an essential corrective at a time when “the new triumphalism . . . proclaims the eternity of capitalism and indeed the end of history” (145). Although they differ from one another in significant respects, both Clark’s book (*English Society, 1688–1832*) and Macfarlane’s (*The Origins of English Individualism*) were written to answer the powerful readings of English history offered by the British Marxist historians. Nairn and Anderson, however, themselves write from within a New Left Marxism that seeks to repair defects in the original analyses of Marx and Engels. They have had a sturdy opponent in E. P. Thompson, whose article on this topic, “The Peculiarities of the English,” is well-known (*The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); but Wood is especially effective in showing that Nairn and Anderson have begun their modernization of Marx without any real need and have, in the process, in fact obstructed an understanding of English history.

Most appropriately, in view of the tendencies in historical interpretation this “historical essay” opposes, Wood dedicates her book to “the British Marxist historians—more specifically, to that body of outstanding scholars that emerged out of the British Communist Party

Historians Group" (ix). Wood continues the work of these pioneers—historians like A. L. Morton, Christopher Hill, Dona Torr, E. P. Thompson, V. G. Kiernan, Rodney Hilton, and Eric Hobsbawm—not only in her classical Marxism but in the grace and force of her prose. With a solid body of respected work already behind her, Ellen Meiksins Wood must be recognized as one of the most important Marxist thinkers of our time, a time when Marxism needs more than ever before to rediscover and reaffirm its interpretative and transformational powers.

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