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Projecting Marxism into Y2K

This issue of the journal begins with the remaining two papers presented at the conference “Projecting Marxism into Y2K,” sponsored by *Nature, Society, and Thought* and the Department of Sociology of the University of Nevada, Reno, in October 1999. All conference presenters were invited to provide copies of their papers; eighteen were published as special issues of *NST*, volume 11, number 4, and volume 12, number 1. A listing of these papers can be found in the indexes for these issues at our Web site <www.umn.edu/home/marqu002>. To obtain these two special conference issues, send payment of \$12 to University of Minnesota, Physics Building, 116 Church Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0112.

A Trek with Marx through the U.S. Factory, 1880–2000

Walt Contreras Sheasby

The specter of Marx has been materializing in unusual places, with even a writer for the *New Yorker* willing to grant his continued relevance in the New World, even in the New Economy. Of the return of Karl Marx, John Cassidy says, “Despite his errors, he was a man for whom our economic system held few surprises. His books will be worth reading as long as capitalism endures” (1997, 257). Others less impressed hope to dispel this gray apparition who drags behind him the heavy chains of the Labor Theory of Value. One radical critic says, “The dynamics of the workplace and market are largely functions of bargaining power and social control, categories essentially ignored by the labor theory of value” (Albert 1998, 91).

No finished and polished definition of the term can be found in Marx, and so Engels in 1891 cautioned followers: “If therefore we say today with economists like Ricardo that the value of a commodity is determined by the labour necessary to its production, we always imply the reservations and restrictions made by Marx” (quoted in Dobb 1945, 73).

Marx first picked up that rusty gear and tackle of the economists on a trek in mid-July and August 1845 through the industrial city of Manchester, England, with a new friend who had an interest in the mills there. It was shortly after Frederick Engels published his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and he took Marx to the center of the modern factory

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to see it all for himself (Carver 1983, 46). It was also an ideal place to study the less widely known English economists, particularly the Ricardian socialists, and the ideas then current on value, wages, and profits. The misery of the great depression of 1841–42 hung in the air over the mills, and a new crisis hit the markets that summer (Chambers 1968, 108f.). This was a fruitful trek, with several weeks spent walking through the factory districts mapped by Engels the year before and reading together at a desk under the bright stained-glass windows of the old Chetham Library, “where the weather is always fine,” as Engels recalled twenty-four years later (1988, 518).

Although present at the cradle of the industrial revolution in Europe, Marx was thinking by the 1860s of the future of its progeny in the New World:

A single machine, when it takes the place of co-operation or of manufacture, may itself serve as the basis of an industry of a handicraft character. . . . In the United States the restoration in this way of handicrafts based on machinery is frequent; and therefore, when this inevitable transition to the factory system takes place, the process of concentration will, compared with Europe and even with England, stride forward in seven-league boots. (1976–81, 1:589)

It was a remarkably prophetic view of the new nation, lately at war with itself over slave labor. It also typifies his break with the Jeremiahs of stagnation and collapse he had studied in Chetham Library. If Marx’s analytical spirit could walk with us today and share his views on U.S. capitalism past, present, and future, what would it say about trends and crises?

Capitalism, as Marx constantly reminds us, is a chaotic artifact, a frenetic self-organization of humankind in a historical epoch, not a natural organism. We should remain alert to the risk of reifying what is in reality a historical and social construct, and thus subject to radical change through deliberate collective action (Sheasby 1997, 45 ff.).

“Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, . . . follow them into the hidden

abode of production,” Marx says, “on whose threshold hangs the notice ‘No admittance except on business.’ Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare” (1976–81, 1:179f.).

Viewing capital as relations, not as a thing

Marx’s view of capital was unique in political economy; he considered the components of capital not as separate and distinct elements, but instead as processes of social relations, the intercourse of civil society. As such they are what Marx calls “reflex-categories,” defined in relation to each other since they have no existence apart from that. To understand capital, we bracket our impression of it as a *thing*, and consider it as an interrelationship among three coherent and internally related aspects: 1) Constant Capital, 2) Variable Capital, and 3) Surplus Value.

Before Marx, they were seen rather as energy and matter were considered in physics before Einstein made us see their relativity and interrelationship. The annual total of capital values in manufacturing is the sum of these components, and, for the expansion of capital, they must be in certain proportions, within definable upper and lower limits.

1. *Constant Capital* (hereafter CC), or *c*, is the economic value of all materials used, including materials, energy, inventories, plant, and depreciating equipment. CC equals the Net Fixed Capital (from *Fixed Reproducible Tangible Wealth in the U.S.*) plus Inventories (from the *Economic Report of the President*).

2. *Variable Capital* (hereafter VC), or *v*, is the economic value of socially necessary labor-power, which is equivalent to the total amount paid to workers. VC equals the payroll of all manufacturing employees, not just those on the production line (from *Fixed Reproducible Tangible Wealth in the U.S.*).

3. *Surplus Value* (hereafter SV), or *s*, is the economic value accumulated through workers creating more value than is paid out as wages. SV equals the Value Added (from the *Census of Manufactures*) minus Depreciation (from *Fixed Reproducible*

Tangible Wealth in the U.S.) minus the Payroll (from the *Census of Manufactures*).

Each of these components can be studied in relation to the others as ratios that express a rate by which to measure annual change (for an explanation of the derivation of the following ratios see Gillman 1957, 42–45).

1). The Rate of Surplus Value (hereafter RSV; also called *rate of exploitation*), or s' , is equal to s divided by v . If we inverted the ratio, it would express the ratio of labor income to capital income: v/s .

2). The Organic Composition of Capital (hereafter OCC), or q , is c divided by v (on a stock basis) and inverted it would be the labor coefficient of capital or v divided by c .

3). The Rate of Profit (hereafter RP), or r , is the ratio of SV divided by the OCC on a stock basis. So the RP is also given by the Mass of Surplus divided by CC, so that it can be represented in two identical rates:

$$r = s'/q$$

$$r = s/c$$

This means also that the Rate of Surplus Value (RSV) can be denoted in two ways:

$$s' = rq$$

$$s' = s/v$$

as well as the Mass of Surplus Value (SV):

$$s = rc$$

$$s = s'v$$

The Mass of Constant Capital (CC) also has a double form:

$$c = s/r$$

$$c = q/s'$$

and finally the Organic Composition of Capital (OCC) can be defined in two ways:

$$q = s/c$$

$$q = s'r$$

Both the RSV and the RP are measures of the degree to which the capitalist has gained in relation to costs, in the first case considering only labor cost and in the second case considering all costs. As Marx puts it, “The rate of surplus value exactly expresses the rate at which labour is exploited, while the rate of profit expresses the relative amount of living labour employed

by capital at a given rate of exploitation, or the proportion of the capital laid out in wages, the variable capital, to the total amount of capital advanced” (1988–94, 33:110).

Marx’s famous shorthand for the sum of values at the end of the production process, when the original capital has been enhanced (so that $C' = C + \Delta C$) is simply:

$$C' = c + v + s.$$

This formula expresses the sum total of capital values in the production process as a proportional cumulation of the three parts of capital.

Conditions, causes, and symptoms of crises

A fall in the RP is defined as either a stall in the RSV or a disproportionate rise in the OCC or both, or alternatively as a slump in the rise of the mass of SV or a relative spike in the CC component or both. If none of these conditions obtains, there is no possibility of crisis; if none accompanies decline in the RP, Marx’s theory is invalidated.

In asserting these conditions, Marx left no wiggle room; but this is different from saying that a crisis is *caused* by such changes. These changes are what is *meant* by crisis. They can never be absent from a crisis, although there may be other economic woes that are extraneous and external to the theory.

The actual cyclical change, however, will have very specific historical causes that must be examined empirically to explain the particular event. Neither the simple periodicity itself nor the conjunction of a change in the ratio of the capital components is acceptable as a causal explanation.

Moreover, the occasion of crisis is associated with other events that loom large but that are really contingent effects or merely symptoms of the underlying critical conditions.

Marx stressed the analysis of the specific and general aspects in a dialectical conception of crises: “The world trade crises must be regarded as the real contradiction and forcible adjustment of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy. The individual factors . . . must be traced on the one hand, and on the other hand it must be shown that its more abstract forms are recurring

and are contained in the more concrete forms” (1988–94, 32:140).

This seems consistent with Joseph Schumpeter’s point. Michael Harrington has pointed out, “Marx, as Schumpeter noted, carefully distinguished between the general institutional *conditions* permitting cyclical movements in the economy, the specific *causes* actually producing such a movement, and the *symptoms* accompanying this causation” (1975, 5). Marx’s formula for the RP abstracts from the specific causality and symptomology, but posits a general and indispensable condition, which can take many possible forms of crisis. As such it would have to underlie any specific causal theory of crises, of which Marxists have produced a variety.

Schumpeter warned, “It stands to reason that neglect of these distinctions must be a fertile source of errors in analysis and of futile controversy and that this methodological contribution is in itself sufficient to give to Marx high rank among the workers in this field” (1994, 478).

Capital in stocks versus flows

To compare Marx’s model and economic reports, we must state his data as annual rates, even though the “flow” or turnover of capital may not take place in a year. As Marx says, “The rate of profit is calculated on the total capital applied, but for a specific period of time, in practice a year” or as the annual “stock” (1976–81, 3:334). Some economists have complained, “At all times Marx shuffles freely between stocks and flows without warning” (Blaug 1997, 216). Both types of accounting methods and a significant clarification appeared in Joseph Gillman’s classic but rather forgotten statistical study of the profit rate (1957). His method of calculating the stock basis is accepted here.

The transformation problem

Some object that we cannot compare Marx’s analysis of *values* with actual production *prices*, and that is certainly a hazard at the microlevel of the commodity. As Marx cautioned, “It is necessary to bear in mind this modified significance of the cost price, and therefore to bear in mind too that if the cost price of a

commodity is equated with the value of the means of production used up in producing it, it is always possible to go wrong” (1976–81 3:265).

When volume three of *Capital* was published by Engels in 1894, it soon elicited criticism based on Marx’s caution, particularly by the Austrian economist Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, who took literally Marx’s concession, “The theory of value thus appears incompatible with the actual movement, incompatible with the actual phenomena of production, and it might seem that we must abandon all hope of understanding these phenomena” (252).

This problem of transforming values into prices, however, does not apply when we look at the totality of the production process, rather than at various competing capitals or commodities: “if the sum of the cost prices of all commodities in a country is put on one side and the sum of the profits or surplus values on the other, we can see that the calculation comes out right” (260). So for Marx, “the sum of prices of production for the commodities produced in society as a whole—taking the totality of all branches of production—is equal to the sum of their values” (259).

As Martin Bronfenbrenner says, “the so-called ‘transformation problem’ between values and prices vanishes into insignificance at the aggregate level” (1968, 207).

***The “deindustrialization” thesis:
Productivity and disemployment***

In the mid-1970s a number of writers and policy makers became concerned that the United States was losing its manufacturing base to rival capitalist nations, an idea known as the deindustrialization thesis (Bluestone and Harrison 1982).

The argument was set in the context of only three decades: 1950–1980. But a real sense of the dimensions emerges when we examine figures from 1929 to 1998. In Fig. 1 we see the logic of the evolution of manufacturing processes. Just as the growing productivity and progressive disemployment of farm labor fed the relative growth of manufacturing in the nineteenth century, so has the growing productivity of manufacturing led to more

employment of labor and investment capital in other sectors of industry and abroad.

Let us compare the allocation of labor with the growth of manufacturing product, both in absolute amounts and relative to the entire economy over the long term. If we look closely, it is clear that the percentage of employees in manufacturing has trended downward throughout the last 50 years, while the number has increased. In 1950 there were 15.2 million factory workers, reaching a 1979 high of 21 million, and inching down to 18.8 million by 1998. In the historical context of postwar capitalism, the number of workers in manufacturing remained relatively constant, compared to the steady decline as a percentage of all U.S. employees.

If we turn to the manufacturing GDP, we see it grew from \$140 billion in 1959 to \$1.4 trillion in 1997. But as a percentage of all GDP, manufacturing has declined from 28% in 1959 to 17% in 1998. The lower the percentage of factory workers, the less the product made relative to the economy's GDP. Rather

than a catastrophe of deindustrialization, this seems a normal trend in capitalist growth.

Higher worker productivity obviates the need for larger inputs of labor to achieve greater output, and greater output in turn necessitates a much vaster system of distribution and savings, thereby expanding total employment. This maturing process of the industrial metabolism has been going on for a long time, but has only become problematic in late capitalism.

Value as product and income

Variable capital and surplus value, however, can be seen not only as forms of capital, but also as together comprising what economists call the national income, which is equivalent to the national product. The accounting of the Gross National Product (GNP) can be done by measuring either (1) the flow of final products, or (2) the total costs on earnings of inputs producing output. “Because profit is a residual,” the economists tell us, “both approaches will yield exactly the same total GNP.” Here we look at GDP rather than GNP because we are concerned only with domestic factories (regardless of where the owner resides) rather than those U.S. factories that have been set up abroad as well as at home by U.S. residents. Both indices, it should be noted, “exclude *intermediate goods*—goods that are used to produce other goods” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 1992, 418).

In the complete national aggregate, these intermediate factors count in the total economy as Gross Private Domestic Investment, but do not appear in the ledger of the manufacturing sector since GDP is the sum of *values added* in the production process, abstracting from CC inputs contributed by previous labor to avoid any double-counting.

Mark Blaug says, “Following Marx, surplus value, s , is defined on a flow basis as the excess of gross receipts over fixed and variable costs. For the economy as a whole, this amounts to the excess of net national product over the wages bill. The gross national product = $c + v + s$, but the net national product = $v + s$ ” (1997, 216). For manufacturing, itself, however, this adjustment for the capital consumption allowance has no impact on manufacturing GNP or GDP ledgers. In reality, Marx’s $v + s$ as

income is the same as the GDP, and his sum of capital values in manufacturing represents the addition of CC to factory GDP, as seen in Fig. 2.

The labor theory of value

The origin of value in the production process is the first question that needs to be answered. As Heilbroner says, “Unwilling to attribute profits to the transfer of wealth from one class to another, bourgeois economists have struggled in vain to explain profits . . . as a *persistent, central, feature of the system of capitalism*” (1980, 114).

For most business-oriented economists, the term *profit* refers, in the first instance, to income left to the capitalist after the deduction of all costs (including wages, interest, and rent). In practice, economists rely on the “pretax profits” data supplied to the government by corporations. The operational profit rate is simply the ratio of reported profits to reported sales, although other denominators are sometimes used, with varying results.

For Marx, however, profit is a function of the very input of capital in the production process, even though its “realization” in

the circulation process is essential, although not assured. According to Marx, “The economic concept of value does not occur in antiquity. . . . The concept of value is entirely peculiar to the most modern economy, since it is the most abstract expression of capital itself and of the production resting on it” (1973, 776).

The labor theory of value states that the source of value added in the mass of commodities produced is the labor expended in producing them. To this Marx added the important corollary that direct labor therefore also conserves and transfers the result of past labor in the value of the commodities produced: “The value of commodities . . . is determined by the labour time embodied in them, irrespective of whether this labour time is embodied in the raw material, the machinery used up, or the labour newly added by the worker to the new material by means of the new machinery” (1988–94, 31:68).

Clearly then “a capitalist puts a part of his capital into machinery rather than into immediate labour . . . to make the remaining portion more productive” (1973, 819).

As Marx explains, “The worker adds fresh value to the material of labour by expending on it a given amount of additional labour, no matter what the specific content, purpose and technical character of that labour may be. On the other hand, the values of the means of production used up in the process are preserved, and present themselves afresh as constituent parts of the value of the product” (1976–81, 1:307).

This led Marx to what he called “the *law of relative surplus value*—that a greater part of the working day is appropriated by capital as a result of rises in productivity” (1988, 30:250).

While the concept of labor as a source of value was widely accepted before Marx, the role of technology was scarcely understood. Ricardo believed that mechanization would destroy jobs, the source of value, and ultimately plunge capitalism into crisis. He did not consider that mechanization might increase production to the point that it needed more workers.

Marx put modern technology at the center of his critique, projecting a massive accumulation of surplus value, “the progressive development of the social productivity of labour, which

is shown by the way that the growing use of machinery and fixed capital generally enables more raw and ancillary materials to be transformed into products in the same time by the same number of workers, i.e. with less labour" (1976–81, 3:318). In his view, "as soon as the factory system has attained a . . . definite degree of maturity, and in particular as soon as the technical basis peculiar to it, machinery, is itself produced by machinery, . . . this mode of production acquires an elasticity, a capacity for sudden extensions by leaps and bounds, which come up against no barriers but those presented by the availability of raw materials" (1:579). A century after Marx, this reflects reality much more.

Tendency of the rate of profit to fall

Marx at times takes as a truism the correlation of declining profits with capitalist development: "This law, and it is the most important law of political economy, is that the *rate of profit has a tendency to fall with the progress of capitalist production*" (1988–94, 33:104).

Robert Brenner has commented: "Marx was, of course, fiercely anti-Malthusian. The Malthusian character of his theory of the fall of the rate of profit is therefore highly incongruous, though logically unavoidable, given that it has the decline in profitability result from a decline in productivity" (1998, 11). Although this is a very common criticism of Marx, it fails to identify the crucial differences between classical economics and Marx's theory.

Decline in productivity and thus profitability was a "fact" taken for granted by virtually all major economists then; the source was the problematic issue:

So where does this tendency for the general rate of profit to fall come from? Before this question is answered, one may point out that it has caused a great deal of anxiety to bourgeois political economy. The whole of the Ricardian and Malthusian school is a cry of woe over the day of judgement this process would inevitably bring about, since capitalist production is the production of profit, hence loses its stimulus, the soul which animates it, with the fall

in this profit. Other economists have brought forward grounds of consolation, which are not less characteristic. But apart from theory there is also the practice, the crises from superabundance of capital or, what amounts to the same, the mad adventures capital enters upon in consequence of the lowering of [the] rate of profit. Hence crises . . . acknowledged as a necessary violent means for the cure of the plethora of capital, and the restoration of a sound rate of profit. (1988–94, 33:105)

What was the relationship between periodic crises and the rate of profit, and between technology and profits? Marx found it difficult to disagree with post-Ricardian economists who stated, “It is an incontrovertible FACT that, as capitalist production develops, the portion of capital invested in machinery and raw materials grows, and the portion laid out in wages declines. . . . For us, however, the main thing is: does this FACT explain the decline in the rate of profit? (A decline, incidentally, which is far smaller than it is said to be)” (33:287–88).

Moreover, one had to ask what were the conditions for a rise in the RP? Marx noted, “If the technological composition remains the same and a CHANGE in the value of constant capital takes place, its value will either fall or rise. If it falls, and only the same amount of living labour is employed as previously, . . . the same physical amount of raw material and means of labour continues to be required. But the SURPLUS LABOUR BEARS A GREATER PROPORTION TO THE WHOLE CAPITAL ADVANCED. The rate of profit rises” (33:306). In other words, the cheapening of the elements of constant capital resulted in more surplus value being accumulated in relation to the total capital advanced.

Marx had studied the second industrial revolution of 1835–1865, and his research led him to question the accepted truism of the falling rate of profit:

If we consider the enormous development in the productive powers of social labour over the last thirty years [1835–65] alone, compared with all earlier periods, and particularly if we consider the enormous mass of fixed capital involved in the overall process of production quite

apart from machinery proper, then instead of the problem that occupied previous economists, the problem of explaining the fall in the profit rate, we have the opposite problem of explaining why this fall is not greater or faster. Counteracting influences must be at work, checking and cancelling the effect of the general law and giving it simply the character of a tendency. (1976–81, 3:339)

Later economists identified Marx with the very tenets of classical political economy he criticized, treating his reformulation of the classical theory of value and the doctrine of the falling profit rate as negligible quibbling. In the words of Paul Samuelson, Marx was “a minor post-Ricardian” (1966, 368).

The mass of surplus value

According to Marx, a surplus value is “a value which forms an excess over the values that originally entered the labour process” (1988–94, 30:85). Unlike in precapitalist societies, expropriation does not take the form of feeding on the social surplus product created and held by subordinate classes, but rather of initiating production and generating surplus value directly.

This is only possible because labor itself exists in the form of a commodity, as labor power, whose virtue or use value is its ability to produce new value larger than its own exchange value, or what it is paid for its labor capacity.

According to Marx, this entails the extension “of the labour process as far as possible beyond the limits of the labour-time needed to reproduce the amount paid in wages, since it is just this *excess labour* that supplies him with *surplus-value*” (1976–81, 1:1011). He emphasized that, “it is very important to keep a strong hold on the idea that surplus value = surplus labour, and that the [rate] of surplus value is the ratio of surplus value to necessary labour” (1988–94, 30:178).

Its value can be expanded by lengthening the working day beyond the time needed for the worker to produce the countervalue of the wages; this is *absolute surplus value*. Or value can be expanded by increasing the productivity of labor so that the worker generates that countervalue of wages in a shorter portion of the working day; this is *relative surplus value*.

Variable capital and nominal wages

Labor power enters the production-process not only as a commodity but as a form of capital, as VC in the form of wages, called *variable* because its value as capital depends on its varying productivity, as opposed to materials and tools (CC), the value of which is added to the product only by depreciation and consumption. The value of CC could not increase during the production process, but could only be preserved by being transferred to the product by direct labor.

As the Mass of SV has risen, the annual investment in VC (the countervalue of subsistence) has also grown in absolute sums, as has the nominal average pay per worker, measured in Fig. 3 in current dollars (but graphed as a logarithm to smooth the inflation curve), and contrasting with the relatively modest growth in the number of workers. The nominal wage has certainly improved in the postwar period. However, what is the trend in real wages?

As shown in Fig. 4, real earnings for all private nonagricultural industries climbed steadily throughout the long postwar

boom as economists cheered this cornucopia of perpetual growth that supposedly defied Marx's predictions.

But then earnings suddenly peaked in 1972–73 and began a long twenty-five-year decline. Recessions in 1974–75, in 1980–82, and in 1990–91 have impacted workers' living standards, and, despite a recent recovery, in 1998 real earnings were below 1968. The maintenance of normal household family subsistence, as defined by the cultural level, has necessitated dual incomes and mounting credit debt, which are now accepted as normal.

Rate of surplus value

Throughout *Capital* Marx assumes that the RSV, which is also called the rate of exploitation, will remain the same even as other factors change, and he sets this arbitrary constant as equal to 1:1 in the ratio of the mass of surplus to variable capital

$$s = s/v = 1$$

because on our assumption half a day's labour is objectified in that quantity of labour-power, i.e. because the means of subsistence required every day for the

production of labour-power cost half a day's labour. . . .

The fact that half a day's labour is necessary to keep the worker alive during 24 hours does not in any way prevent him from working a whole day. (1976–81, 1:300)

As critic Mark Blaug puts it, “after satisfying himself that s [the RSV] could rise only within ‘certain impassable limits,’ he assumed it to be a constant” (1997, 237). Paul Samuelson was even more troubled: “There is no . . . solid ground to be found in the Marxian labor theory of value; a model based on equal rates of surplus value is like a made-up nursery tale, of no particular relevance to the ascertainable facts” (1966, 368). Blaug agreed: “When we discard this totally arbitrary assumption . . . is there anything left to Marxian economics?” (1997, 275).

The assumption was methodological, an approach used throughout science to hold one factor constant while studying other variables. As Marx says, “We also assume for the sake of comparison an unchanged rate of surplus value, say 100 per cent; any rate will do” (1976–81, 3:254). Elsewhere, he drops it, as, for instance: “The rate of profit could even rise, if a rise in the rate of surplus value was coupled with a significant reduction in the elements of constant capital” (1976–81, 3:337).

He saw this as unlikely over the long term: “We assume a general rate of surplus value of this kind, as a tendency, like all economic laws, and as a theoretical simplification; but in any case this is in practice an actual presupposition of the capitalist mode of production. . . . In theory, we assume that the laws of the capitalist mode of production develop in their pure form. In reality, this is only an approximation; but the approximation is all the more exact, the more the capitalist mode of production is developed” (1976–81, 3:275).

Actually, the practice of dividing the value of the product in equal shares may have originated in the medieval guilds. At least it is worth noting that in 1634 in Liege a master weaver, Antoine de Jelly, signed a contract with Nicolas Cornelio providing that he shall be paid “half of what he makes, the other half being the master's profit” (Mandel, 1968, 132).

Surplus value rate as a historical average

In criticizing what he took to be Marx's belief that wages were falling, Joseph Schumpeter argued that, "the relative share of wages and salaries in total income varies but little from year to year and is remarkably constant over time—it certainly does not reveal any tendency to fall" (1942, 35).

Whatever empirical data suggested it, Marx had in fact picked a ratio that has remained remarkably stable, averaging 1.1:1 over most of the twentieth century, as seen in Fig. 5.

In reality, as Marx recognized, the rate of surplus value is not an unchanging constant; however, its movements have orbited tightly around this ratio of 1:1 even as the Mass of SV has soared. However, there is fluctuation, and as relatively small as those changes seem from a perspective that surveys the entire century, they have startling consequences when examined more closely, as in Figs. 6 and 7.

The RP should not be seen as merely reflecting the RSV. In Fig. 6 we can see that the RP trend declined from 1965 to 1982 (a period of intense technological innovation), while the RSV

trended upward. This dispels any idea that the two ratios are always highly correlated.

Marx thought this divergence was normal and to be expected in times of strong productivity growth: “The profit rate does not fall because labour becomes less productive but rather because it becomes more productive. The rise in rate of surplus value and the fall in the rate of profits are simply particular forms that express the growing productivity of labour in capitalist terms” (1976–81, 3:347). The RSV, as an index of “exploitation,” however, is best seen as a measure of the “value-productivity” of labor, more or less equivalent to the standard definition of “the ratio of output to labor hours.” For Marx, the “technical-productivity” is a function of the constant capital put into motion by variable capital, or the masses of materials and tools articulated by workers. “The level of the social productivity of labour is expressed in the relative extent of the means of production that one worker, during a given time, with the same degree of intensity of labour-power, turns into products” (1976–81, 1:773).

With greater application of machinery and raw materials, the social or “technical-productivity” of labor may increase progressively without a corresponding jump in the rate of exploitation (RSV), despite a soaring mass of surplus value.

The periodic collapse of surplus value

Marx was fairly certain about the two possible conditions for a cyclical crisis of profitability:

The general rate of profit can only fall:

1) if the absolute magnitude of surplus value falls. The latter has, inversely, a tendency to rise in the course of capitalist production, for its growth is identical with the development of the productive power of labour, which is developed by capitalist production.

2) because the rate of variable capital to constant capital falls. (1988–94, 33:106)

We shall first take up the condition of a fall in the magnitude of surplus value. Overall, of course, if the RSV averages a little over 1:1, we would expect annual commensurate increases in the terms of this ratio. In Fig. 7 we look at the period 1900 to 1988,

charting the relationship between the two variables that make up this rate (the SV sum and the cost of VC)

The correlation of the two sums is evident, especially from 1900 to 1975; in the latter year both variables were at roughly \$200 billion; the two continued to match until 1981, when they were both close to \$400 billion.

The Mass of SV fluctuates as it grows. We would expect a sudden and sharp decline in SV during cyclical recessions. And we should then expect to see an upward bounce in the Mass of SV, particularly after a severe recession. This is, in fact, what the graph reveals. We see a cyclical stumbling in the accumulation of SV in the recession years of 1975 and 1982. The recovery and relatively robust growth of SV between the two recessions is evident in the bulge during the last half of the 1970s as SV approached \$400 billion. This swing upward is followed by a sudden sharp fallback in 1982, suggesting the effects of over-accumulation of capital made possible by a soaring mass of SV.

After the 1982 slump, business turned to a strategy of “lean production,” so we should not be surprised if payrolls have not kept pace with “productivity gains” in later years. We see an enormous takeoff of SV after the 1982 recession, leading up to the big bulge of the boom year, 1988. Nothing like this gain in SV at the expense of VC occurred in the previous eight decades. Later data will show whether this is a major shift in the trend line toward accelerated surplus growth at the expense of labor, or an anomalous bubble that deflates and returns to the historical trend.

Technical composition of capital

What about the relationship, the apparent disparity, between the modest growth in manufacturing employment and the great masses of resources consumed in the production process in modern times? If we look at the quantity of manufacturing inputs over most of the twentieth century, as in Fig. 8, we can see that factory employment has only grown by a factor of 3.36 times, while the use of materials has grown by a factor of 18 times. The relationship of the quantities of materials used in U.S. manufacturing to the numbers of workers employed—that is, the physical

coefficients of input—is called by Marx the *technical composition of capital*.

Classical political economy scarcely anticipated the dramatic changes in the capitalist mode of production. Marx emphasized the “powerful effectiveness” of science and technology in transforming this massive quantity of raw material into commodities.

But to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose “powerful effectiveness” . . . depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology. . . . Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself. (1973, 705)

Marx was projecting what he saw as an evident trend in the 1860s, concluding that “We showed . . . how gigantic forces can be pressed into service of production; and how the production

process can be transformed into a process of the technological application of scientific knowledge” (1976–81, 1:775).

Labor-saving innovation:

From technology growth to cornucopia?

It is often assumed that technological innovation primarily serves to cut back on the use of factory labor, and Marx is often interpreted as saying that new machinery reduces the demand for labor, increases its supply, and thus leads to a decline in wages and an increase in poverty. As H. J. Habakkuk put it,

This is the situation envisaged by Marx. According to him, labour-scarcity—the exhaustion of the reserve army of labour—would lead the capitalist to substitute machinery for labour, that is constant for variable capital; this would lead to a decline in the rate of profit, a fall in accumulation and in the demand for labour and a consequent replenishing of the supply of labour. (1962, 44)

Is labor-conservation the key motivation for technical innovation? In technical terms, the ratio of machinery and materials to labor power no doubt provides the clearest indicator of the social productivity of labor. Marx insists, however, that in terms of technical composition, the description of modern machinery as *labor-saving* is fundamentally mistaken and rooted in outmoded thinking. Modern machinery is not simply an enhancement of the labor process, but instead creates technical processes that no combination of workers or division of labor could achieve. As he says, “It is sometimes said about machinery, therefore, that it *saves labour*; however, with the help of machinery, human labour performs actions and creates things which without it would be absolutely impossible of accomplishment” (1973, 389). The clear implication is that the concept of *labor-saving* inventions is inappropriate to the power, speed, and scale of modern technology.

Marx’s idea that labor “no longer appears so much to be included within the production process” and that “rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to

the production process itself” (1973, 705) emerged again in socialist discussions only after his 1857 notebooks were widely published more than a century later.

The modern notion of the inevitability of capitalist leisure for the masses had many nineteenth-century forerunners, and skeptics also. As Marx wrote: “John Stuart Mill remarks: ‘It is questionable, if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day’s toil of any human being.’”

Marx responded, “He should have said, OF ANY TOILING HUMAN BEING. But on the basis of capitalist production the purpose of machinery is by no means to LIGHTEN OR SHORTEN THE DAY’S TOIL of the worker.” He added:

The purpose of machinery, speaking quite generally, is to lessen the value, therefore the price, of the commodity, to cheapen it, i.e. to shorten the labour time necessary for the production of a commodity, but by no means to shorten the labour time during which the worker is employed in producing this cheaper commodity. (1988–94, 30:318)

Marx argued that instead, development of productive capital means

reducing the labour time the worker needs for . . . the production of his wages; it is therefore a matter of shortening the part of the working day during which he works for himself . . . thereby lengthening the other part of the day, during which he works for capital for no return. (1988, 30:319)

It is clear that Marx’s expectation that the growth of technics would dwarf the growth of the labor force was confirmed in the twentieth century, but, as we shall see, the relation of CC and VC in value terms is not so straightforward.

Organic composition of capital

Undoubtedly the concept of the OCC has been difficult for students of Marx to understand correctly. Marx’s references to “living labour” and “dead labor,” terms which he took over from predecessors, may strike the novice as rather ghoulish. Marx

himself chuckled at the way the terms were treated: “Noted incidentally as a joke: the good Adam Muller, who takes all figurative ways of speaking as very mystical, has also heard of *living capital* in ordinary life as opposed to *dead capital*, and now rationalizes this theosophically” (1973, 513).

Marx used the concept of metabolism in describing the labor process and the role of materials and means of production. He believed that the labor process “is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the ever-lasting nature-imposed condition of human existence . . . common to all forms of society in which human beings live” (1976–81, 1:290). Furthermore, “in so far as labour is productive activity . . . it raises the means of production from the dead merely by entering into contact with them, infuses them with life so that they become factors of the labour process, and combines with them to form new products” (1976–81, 1:308). In commodity production, Marx refers to this combination of current and previous labor (in the form of plant, equipment, and materials) as the OCC.

Economizing of constant capital

Marx very clearly recognized that the OCC lagged considerably behind the growth in the technical composition, that is, the ratio of the mass of materials and fixed capital to the number of workers. He emphasized

the fact that, viewing the total capital as a whole, the value of the constant capital does not increase in the same proportion as its material volume. . . . In other words, the same development that raises the mass of constant capital in comparison with variable reduces the value of its elements, as a result of the higher productivity of labour. . . . In certain cases, the mass of the constant capital elements may increase while their total value remains the same or even falls. Also related to what has been said is the devaluation of existing capital (i.e. of its material elements) that goes hand in hand with the development of industry. . . .

We see here once again how the same factors that produce the tendency for the rate of profit to fall also moderate the realization of this tendency. (1976–81, 3:343)

Marx returned several times to consideration of the factors that could be responsible for the relative decline of the value of constant capital in comparison to the growth of the technical composition of capital and in comparison to the value of VC. Looking at the OCC overall, Marx felt, “To the extent that the costs of this portion of constant capital are reduced, the rate of profit is correspondingly increased, with a given magnitude of variable capital and a given rate of surplus value” (1976–81, 3:173). The general tendency, however, is that, without the intervention of the economizing counterweights, “with the development of productivity, the composition of capital becomes higher, there is a relative decline in the variable portion as against the constant” (1976–81, 3:357).

But the various factors enumerated by Marx act as counteracting influences on a general tendency for the OCC to rise over time. Periodically, however, a rise here is not compensated by an equal rise in the RSV. Marx says, “These various influences sometimes tend to exhibit themselves side by side, spatially; at other times one after another, temporally; and at certain points the conflict of contending agencies breaks through in crises. Crises are never more than momentary, violent solutions for the existing contradictions, violent eruptions that re-establish the disturbed balance for the time being” (1976–81, 3:357).

In the later phase of the economic crisis, the most severe reduction in the value of CC takes place, as bankruptcies, plant closures, and production cutbacks wipe out much of the invested capital. This factor is the most severe of the counteracting influences, and it only comes into play after the others have failed to restrain the growth of the OCC in relation to the RSV.

In an economic crisis, “what we have here is a far more intense actual destruction of means of production as the result of a stagnation in their function” (1976–81, 3:362). Although the sudden and drastic contraction of the economy seems to spell an end to profits, as the stock value of firms plummets and CC in

the form of technology and materials is abandoned, this devaluation contains the seeds for a renewal of the RP and economic recovery: “The periodical devaluation of the existing capital . . . is a means, immanent to the capitalist mode of production, for delaying the fall in the profit rate and accelerating the accumulation of capital value by the formation of new capital.” (1976–81, 3:358).

The great rift in the organic composition

In Fig. 9 we can see the dramatic changes in the organic composition of capital, with a generally rising pattern interrupted by sudden spikes preceding major depressions, followed by an eventual restoration of a lower OCC. The spike may be caused by the wave of mass layoffs that inaugurates the depression, upending the ratio of labor and capital, and sending the RP crashing.

What is striking, however, is the role of the back-to-back depressions of the thirties and World War II in lowering the OCC and thus restoring profit rates. There is little in Marx to

directly relate the effects of wartime spending and state regulation to this reduction, although many of the factors cited by Marx do come into play.

The pattern in Fig. 9 is suggestive of a long wave pattern, and it may be useful to consider those properties, graphing it in the form of a phase space and smoothing out its short-term fluctuations through a moving average.

In Fig. 10 there are two distinct loops at either end of the curve. The right loop begins in 1923–24, reaches its maximum in 1932, and returns to the center; the OCC continues to fall, clustering around its minimum point in 1953 and remaining very low through 1965, before beginning a new curve upward toward the center.

The upward slope of the OCC from 1890 to 1931 and again from 1947 to 1996, leaves little doubt that the OCC has a tendency to rise (despite all of the ongoing moderating influences of the economizing of CC), unless driven down by severe shocks like depression and war. The normal counteracting tendencies fail over time to dampen the rise of the OCC on the eve of

recession or the enthusiasm for CC investment in the period of recovery, with a consequent ratcheting-up of the OCC over the postwar era. Marx is clearly correct in his view that “a crisis is always the starting-point of a large volume of new investment” (1978, 2:264).

This calls into question Paul Sweezy’s 1942 interpretation of Marx’s crisis theory:

It would appear, therefore, that Marx was hardly justified even in terms of his own theoretical system, in associating a constant rate of surplus value simultaneously with a rising organic composition of capital. A rise in the organic composition must mean an increase in labor productivity. (1942, 102)

Actually, of course, no strict linkage exists between a rise in the OCC and a rise in the SV or RSV, and the charts show that in an economic crisis there is a simultaneous rise in the OCC and decline in the SV.

The fact that the twentieth century is ending with the OCC still in the lower region is testimony to the enduring effects of the war years in pulling down that ratio and creating high profits and relative prosperity during the long postwar boom. Arms production has been called both a luxury and a waste in that it does not reenter the cycle of production as either means of production or means of subsistence (see Kidron 1970, 55–64, and Harman 1984, 78–90). Certainly the fact that much of the constant capital provided to defense contractors was gratis—at public expense and without entering the firm’s ledger as a cost to capital—has much to do with the lowering of the average OCC of manufacturing as a whole.

With the current level of OCC, a major depression could only occur if the RSV fell dramatically, which seems unlikely. However, the OCC has been headed back up since the midsixties and will, if that upward trend continues, be past the midrange in two or three decades. A productivity slump then could well set the stage for more than the usual business-cycle decline in profits.

It should be apparent that it is the relation of the RSV to OCC, and not the isolated movement of one or the other, that

accounts for capitalist profitability. If accumulation is to continue, the RSV can only change within certain limits, and the OCC is also limited in its range of contraction and expansion.

We can capture this relationship as it has performed historically since 1927 to 1989 by graphing each ratio against the other and smoothing the curve by using a moving average. As with the previous graph, in Fig. 11 we see a curve in which either end loops back on itself as the minimal or maximal limits are reached.

As OCC increases, the RSV also rises up to a point in 1929 when further weighting of CC to VC has no benefit for the RSV, which then falls in 1934. This zenith precludes a long decline backwards in the OCC, and then a falling of the RSV. When both ratios fall to the nadir in the 1950s, there is a strong bounce upward in the RSV, which continues to climb as the OCC again increases. But the 1990s show a huge jump upward in productivity (as measured by the SV to VC) with barely any increase in the OCC, an exact parallel to the 1920s.

The form assumed in Fig. 11 is similar to a logistic or sigmoid curve, known to ecologists as a predator/prey model.

The area between roughly 1.40 and 1.50 indicates where saturation is reached and further growth of the RSV ceases; it is called the asymptote, and to ecologists it represents the limit of carrying capacity (Cambel 1993, 91–106). As a single historical event that may well be unique, the looping curve of capital accumulation is scarcely equivalent to the population dynamics replicated in untold numbers of series in the life sciences. Yet it may be an indicator of the limits of capital accumulation. If there is an underlying ecological relationship between the limits of growth to the RSV and the OCC, the implications are very significant.

The curve indicates that expanding investment in technology at the cost of disemploying labor can only increase the value-productivity (RSV) up to a certain point, beyond which nothing is gained by further investment.

In other words, the vision of a capitalist world in which robots do all the work (except for the task of entrepreneurship) is untenable; it is beyond the asymptote. On the other hand, a capitalist economy of maximum employment and minimum investment in technology may be equally illusory; it would represent an unstable equilibrium, with the dynamic of growth necessarily pushing the economy along the curve upward and out to the ultimate carrying capacity.

The problem that all attempts to reform capitalism share is that the system is predicated upon maximizing the RP, and neither a technological cornucopia nor a postindustrial ecotopia is consistent with that rule.

Cyclical expansion and contraction

Marx could not study the long-waves of profitability, but he provided a detailed analysis of what was known at the time as “trade cycles” or today as “business cycles,” that is, the “repeated self-perpetuating cycles, whose successive phases embrace years, and always culminate in a general crisis, which is the end of one cycle and the starting point of another. Until now the duration of these cycles has been ten or eleven years, but there is no reason to consider this duration as constant” (1976–81, 1:786).

Marx sifted through a voluminous amount of material to generalize the periodicity and synchronous timing of industrial crises. He wrote, “One measure for the accumulation of capital . . . is provided by the statistics of exports and imports. And there it is constantly apparent that for the period over which English industry moved in ten-year cycles [1815–70], the maximum for the final period of prosperity before the crisis reappeared as the minimum for the period of prosperity that followed next, only to rise then to a new and much higher maximum” (1976–81, 3:633).

Modeling the curve of these cycles, Marx pointed out, “The path characteristically described by modern industry . . . takes the form of a decennial cycle (interrupted by smaller oscillations) of periods of average activity, production at high pressure, crisis, and stagnation” (1976–81, 1:785).

In Fig. 12, showing the Marxian RP from 1979 to 1991, the five-year moving average reveals the shape of the curve, with the two phases of the crisis and the crash separated. The RP in this chart is derived by dividing the RSV by the OCC, as shown in the following two charts.

Looking at the five-year moving averages in Figs. 13 and 14, we can see that both components show a generally upward trend,

but with different waves. When a slump in the RSV interacts with a rise in the OCC (as in 1982) an economic recession hits; conversely, when a swelling of the RSV coincides with a downturn in the OCC (as in 1987–87) an economic boom occurs.

The ratio of reported profits to sales

In calculating the Manufacturing RP we have followed Marx in taking as inputs the forms that capital assumes in the production process. As Marx says, “The appropriate law for modern industry, with its decennial cycles and periodic phases which, as accumulation advances, are complicated by irregular oscillations following each other more and more quickly, is the law of the regulation of the demand and supply of labour by the alternate expansion and contraction of capital, i.e. by the level of capital’s valorization requirements at the relevant moment” (1976–81, 1:790).

In Fig. 15 the upper line shows the oscillations in the RP as calculated using capital values, without regard to the profits

reported by the firms, or the reported total of the prices of commodities sold on the market. The lower line shows the reported ratio of manufacturers' profits to their sales for each year. The correlation for the postwar period is evident, and we can be relatively confident that Marx's method generally parallels the results issued by firms, and this in turn adds weight to the analysis of the RSV and the OCC.

Future profit trends

In Fig. 16 we look at the long-term trend of the Marxian RP from 1880 to 1988, charting the RP using the familiar method of technical analysts of the stock market. This enables us to see that from 1920 to 1969 the RP moved in a long-term upward trend channel. It broke out downward as it completed a complex head-and-shoulders reversal pattern in the mid-70s and then began a downward trend. In the late 80s it broke out of this new downward trend-channel to the upside. Whether that upward trend

persists or suffers another reversal remains to be seen, but the volatility and underlying weakness of the RP since the mid-60s is apparent.

Conclusion

This trek with Marx through the U.S. factory has been a way of rethinking his approach to the labor theory of value as set forth in classical political economy and by the Ricardian socialists and others. Rethinking his model has enabled us to see more clearly the trends in U.S. manufacturing. Despite his fervent hopes for a collapse of capitalism and an unfolding of socialism in his lifetime, Marx focused his critical science on understanding the changes within the world, rather than simply hurling the curses of a Jeremiah.

In doing so, Marx rescued the concept of Surplus Value from its past confusion with the Rate of Profit, and he transformed the confusions of capital factors into the remarkably powerful concept of the Organic Composition of Capital, which he rightly saw as the determinate complex in the mysterious waltz of capitalist cycles. Marx's method of calculating the Rate of Profit, as shown in this paper, remains a vital tool of analysis.

In particular, Marx's approach shows the fallacy of both tendencies in popular reform movements today: one believing that capitalist technology can create a world of leisure and plenty without sacrificing the imperative of growing profits, and the other believing that capitalism can return to a time when a larger share of national income went to workers than bosses and technology was not the unrestrainable force it appears today. Marx put the emphasis squarely on a revolution in social relations rather than technology, and articulated a political strategy of revolution from below, rather than reforms dispensed from above (Sheasby 1999, 27–35)

Although only suggested hypothetically, the apparent ecological relationship between the Rate of Surplus Value and the OCC can be seen as an unstable dynamic equilibrium. It seems to be the metabolism driving the capitalist economy toward a systemic limit to both productivity gains and growth in technology

investment—a limit that, once reached, will throw the economy into an orbit in the reverse direction.

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Coalition Building in the Bay Area

Arnold Becchetti

In this paper I use the concept *coalition* in the sense of coming together and uniting, whether the coalescence is permanent or temporary, whether within one organizational form, or a coming together of two or more organizations.

The impulse to organize and form coalitions flows from the class struggle. The frame and the arena of struggle are determined primarily by the ruling class and the functioning of its system. Imperialism today is rushing headlong into a new phase characterized by merger mania, globalization, the drive to privatize almost everything (education, the prison system, etc.), and an all-out effort to destroy every gain the working class and the people have won in decades of struggle, as well as to weaken and destroy all resistance to its domination.

It is motivated by the drive for maximum profits and hence the drive for maximum economic and political power, and for control of information and communication by the police and the military. This is what constitutes the ultraright fascist danger. The main force is U.S. state-monopoly capitalism with its “new world order” dominated by the one-superpower concept. It is the main imperialist power pressing for the World Trade Organization to adopt measures allowing it to override national sovereignty when global corporations decide that questions of the environment and those relating to workers’ protection and well-being undermine free trade. This secret, unelected body then can decide to punish countries that refuse to abide by the destruction

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of these rights. This determines the nature and composition of the coalitions beginning to be built today.

Thus the development of movements, coalitions, and organizations on the local, state, national, and international level is the necessary and inevitable response by the people to global capitalism's functioning today. Effective resistance requires relationships among all levels, ranging from knowledge of each other and exchange of information to coordination and actual formation of higher bodies. The role of information is crucial in the face of globalization and the privatization drive. It is a necessary component of coalition building. The working class and the people, while they need to use the huge corporate media to the maximum where possible, need their own media, free of corporate domination.

The working class, as the producer of surplus value, without which capitalism could not exist, is the basic and indispensable element in coalitions today. The largest, strongest, best-organized force of the working class is the trade-union movement. Its key allies are in the first place the African American people, and a rapidly growing Mexican American and other Latino population. In California the burgeoning Asian population is an important element. All of these are mainly working class in composition. The important groups are women, youth, and seniors, as well as various other movements around the environment, housing, education, and other issues. These are the basis for all coalitions being built today, with the labor-community coalition being the most important.

This coalition building flows from global monopoly pressures feeding a growing class consciousness among workers and an increasingly anticorporate feeling among the U.S. population as a whole. This makes clear that coalition building is today a basic felt need for the working class and people generally.

It is clear, therefore, that global capitalism's drive for maximum profits, which underlies all its impulses, drives, and policies, will find responses in all places afflicted with its profit-hungry power—that is, throughout the world.

There are some basic requirements in building forms of unity for the working class and its allies. Overall, it is recognition of

facing a common problem and the need to work together to try to solve it. For workers, it is recognition that they can only resist effectively if united as workers into trade unions—a beginning level of class consciousness. For workers and all others exploited and oppressed by the system, it is building resistance in each area, be it housing, education, the environment, or police misconduct. Increasingly, it is recognition of the need for political struggle free from and against monopoly capital.

Attention to all the ways capital uses to try to divide the movement is also a key component in building unity. The fight against racism in all its forms, new and old, is primary. It was only when this was recognized that it was possible to build the CIO successfully. Other forms of division that require attention include immigrant bashing, national chauvinism, sexism, and religious discrimination. Central to all of this is fighting for full equality.

In the building of the CIO (the organization of workers in the basic industries of our country), cooperation with the communities was a critical factor in the successful organizing drive. Today's call by the AFL-CIO for labor-community coalitions recognizes the vital role such coalitions must play under present conditions. Based on the ferment from the rank and file, a new leadership has emerged that sees the need for organizing the unorganized; having a multiracial, multinational, male-female leadership; dealing with questions that affect the whole class; and building towards political independence with its "vote like a worker" slogan. This new leadership has the declared aim of electing 2,000 trade unionists to office in 2000, and building labor-community coalitions.

One organization that deals with a number of issues is People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO). It defines itself as a multiracial, multigenerational, working-class organization "working to take back power over our lives and our communities." Its committees focus on police misconduct, environmental issues, racism, and youth. The work around a ballot proposition known as Kids First! united PUEBLO under the leading role of its youth community with many groups, such as Asian youth, the Young Communist League, and labor. The result was the

passage of the proposition, which provides that seventy-two million dollars in city funds be set aside over the next twelve years for the needs of youth, by a large majority.

Another example is the work of Local 10 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. The ILWU played a leading role in building a coalition, including the Alameda County building trades, to expand and run the Port of Oakland's "union built and union run" program. At the same time, this coalition demanded that minority youth, who suffer the greatest unemployment and related problems, be included in the process, with job training and apprenticeship in the unions. Drawing in the mainly Black, Latino, and Asian communities of West Oakland, Fruitvale, Chinatown, and East Oakland, this struggle culminated in city and Port of Oakland authorities agreeing to the demand.

Honorees at the recent banquet of the Northern California Friends of the *People's Weekly World* gave concrete examples of building labor-community coalitions and the gains made as a result, as well as projecting coalition struggles in the immediate period ahead. They also spoke of the role of information and communication.

Maudelle Shirek, the African-American dean of the Berkeley City Council and vice mayor of Berkeley, was the first honoree to speak. She is the highly regarded "conscience of the Council" for her tireless work in the interest of the working people. In herself she exemplifies the organizing, uniting, coalition-building impulse emanating from the labor movement. She also served on the Executive Committee of SEIU Local 535 and on the Commission on Aging, the NAACP Fair Housing Committee, and the YMCA New Lights Senior Center, where she still volunteers.

San Jose City Councilmember Cindy Chavez, another honoree at the banquet, was a staff member of the South Bay Labor Council. She was elected to the San Jose City Council with support of labor and allied forces. Her talk revealed the key role of labor in building coalitions for working families' agenda. Labor was at the center of establishing a coalition of forces, including even some from the business community where appropriate. The core role of labor is shown by the fact that Chavez meets regularly with the labor council to go over an agenda that

can muster broad support for passing ordinances, such as the livable-wage ordinance and a neutrality agreement by the hotel industry in union organizing drives.

Another honoree, Ruth Holbrook, the president of the Sacramento Central Labor Council, spoke of the role of the Sacramento Valley Progressive Agenda, a coalition of labor, peace and justice groups, and others, in working to organize for the protest in Seattle against the World Trade Organization meeting on 29 November to 3 December, especially against the move to introduce measures that would override laws defending the environment and the rights of workers. They are also working for a livable-wage ordinance in Sacramento and for public authority to form the basis for organizing home-care workers.

In conclusion, I have tried to deal with factors affecting coalition-building today, citing some examples from Oakland and the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

People United for a Better Oakland
Oakland, California

Marxism and Secular Humanism: An Excavation and Reappraisal

Edwin A. Roberts

Introduction

The special issue of *Nature, Society and Thought (NST)*, “Religion and Freethought” (volume 9, no. 2 [1996]), is a commendable contribution to a dialogue long overdue within progressive intellectual circles. As a longtime active member of the skeptical and secular humanist community, on the one hand, and at the same time a proponent of dialectics and historical materialism on the other, I have often been frustrated by the lack of engagement between the two traditions. In my experience, a general disrespect exists among secularists for Marxism, which often is dismissed as a dogmatic or outmoded belief system similar to religion.¹ I have also witnessed a general disinterest on the part of Marxists for secularism, which often is seen as providing nothing new or interesting to their own perspectives. In many ways both of these attitudes are the result of misunderstandings about what these two traditions actually stand for, and I believe that a more active dialogue between the two schools is necessary.²

As a first step in this direction, the contributions in the *NST* special issue are quite encouraging. Two important articles are Norm R. Allen Jr.’s critical intervention into the important topic of religion and Black intellectuals and Lotz and Gold’s discussion of religion and the new physics (1996). As an African American, I appreciate Allen’s comments on Stephen Carter and

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Louis Farrakhan, which are insightful and long overdue in this context. Also commendable is his sharp analysis of the vacuity and confusion in the theology espoused by many Black intellectuals. Lotz and Gold's review essay on the new "God-seeking" in cosmology and physics is important because it deals with an issue of pressing concern to many skeptics and humanists—irrationalism within science itself. Their essay helps to show that such irrationalism cannot be fought simply by reference to extreme doubt or pure empiricism. Lotz and Gold make a good case for the claim that only a critical methodology like dialectics can enlighten us on how contradictory patterns of stability and disequilibrium can coexist in nature without encouraging irrationalist speculation.

The most important essay in the collection is "The Challenge of Explanation" by Fred Whitehead (1996). It is stimulating, informed, and thoughtful on many levels, and sets a tone indicative of the direction I believe this debate should take. As an attempt to establish a firm groundwork for a Marxist engagement with the issue of religion and freethought, however, his discussion is lacking or incomplete, I believe, in crucial areas.

I propose to continue this discussion by addressing some of the important weaknesses, points of contention, and possible areas of convergence existing between Marxism and secular humanism. In what follows, I shall excavate much valuable but largely forgotten or overlooked material concerning this issue, and reappraise the chances of developing a better understanding among adherents of both schools.

Four areas need greater investigation in order to advance our understanding of the relationship between Marxism and secular humanism. The first is the critical analysis of scientific explanations of religious phenomena. The second is a more thorough evaluation of specifically Marxist studies and critiques of religion. The third concerns the clarification of the role atheism plays in understanding the ontological, epistemological, and historical status of religion. The fourth is the reevaluation of the history of humanist and Marxist encounters, with a focus on the reasons why a convergence between these two essentially progressive intellectual trends has, to this point, proved so illusive.

The problem of explanation—redirected

Whitehead attempts in his essay to address the paradox of how Marxists can be so successful in advancing a scientific theory of society and history and yet have so much difficulty in developing a similar theory of religion. The subtext of this question is the notion that this problem relates to a general inability to overcome religion as a practice within a scientific (Enlightenment), civilization (Whitehead 1996, 135–6). Although I do not think it necessarily follows that if one can explain a phenomenon, one can overcome it, I think that, even with the added factors of need, desire, and the will to do so, it is impossible to overcome a thing that has been poorly explained or misunderstood.

Given this premise, it is important for any scientific outlook such as Marxism, which seeks not only to understand events, but to resolve social and historical contradictions within them, to confront and overcome anomalies such as the one to which Whitehead points. I would also stipulate, however, that such an analysis cannot be limited to religion, but must consist of a unified theory to explain the persistence of all forms of irrational, pseudoscientific, and antiscientific thinking and belief. Here I find both the examples cited by Whitehead inadequate. He cites Guthrie and Schumaker's studies as possible places where Marxists might begin to build a more complex understanding of religion, yet both works are too narrowly focused on an essentially psychological concept of religion. The idea that religion is essentially related either to anthropomorphism (that is, projection of personal need or drive to supernatural belief) or dissociation is too individually and therapeutically oriented to be of much use in a Marxist theory of religion, as I think Whitehead realizes (147).

As a more fruitful alternative for a Marxist engagement with a contemporary secular humanist theory of religion, I suggest Paul Kurtz's magisterial *Transcendental Temptation* (1991). Kurtz, an emeritus professor of philosophy at SUNY/Buffalo, is a leading figure in the contemporary humanist movement. His book, which attempts a unified critique of both religion and the paranormal, deals with an impressive range of topics from both a

historical and philosophical perspective. It includes critiques of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as such phenomena as spiritualism, extrasensory perception, reincarnation, astrology, and UFOs.

Kurtz's thesis is that a human propensity for delusion exists, manifested in a twofold process in which conjurors and phoney prophets first seek to delude an already gullible public into accepting their (false) claims to have tapped into the powers of some otherworldly realm. Then, Kurtz argues, on another level, these claims are effective because humans desire to accept forms of "magical thinking" that promise transcendence from ordinary reality (Kurtz 1991, 23–5). The effect of this process is to undermine people's ability to develop and use critical reasoning skills. Thus, he maintains, the struggle against the transcendental temptation is crucial in a society based on reason and independent judgment (xii–xiii).

In support of his thesis, Kurtz provides some fascinating evidence drawn from both historical and religious sources indicating that, given modern knowledge, the prophets of the three great world religions—Jesus, Moses, and Muhammad—all behaved (or were said to have behaved), in a manner akin to magicians, or what we today would recognize as flimflam artists or showmen (130–5, 177–8, 211–15). This, together with the highly irrational and even demagogic nature of their messages, Kurtz argues, must have exerted a powerful appeal on their followers (168, 193, 217). Kurtz sees this power to fool, combined with the ability and willingness of many to be fooled, as dangerous and in need of criticism, not only in religion, but in pseudoscientific beliefs such as ESP and UFO-abduction stories.

Kurtz's work in this area is outstanding as a historical and logical refutation of religious and paranormal beliefs. Nevertheless, I see within it room for improvement in a specifically Marxist direction. Kurtz believes that the transcendental temptation can be confronted by educating people in a combination of skepticism, the scientific method, and what he calls "critical intelligence." Commendable as this is, his understanding of what it entails is not concrete enough. We cannot assume that by increasing quantitatively people's thinking skills and abilities we

change the qualitative content and sources of their information. Real critical intelligence needs direction and purpose; it is not just a tool, but a weapon. Often even those who know how to use it refuse to do so, because they do not understand the ends to which they are being asked to employ it.

On the question of the scientific stance itself, we need to ask what we think science reveals about the world. Influenced by pragmatism, Kurtz's presentation of the scientific method vacillates between historicist theories, such as Thomas Kuhn's concept of scientific paradigms, and various positivist conceptions of verifiability and falsifiability, like those of Hume and Karl Popper. Each, he claims, shows the advantage of a scientific approach (Kurtz 1991, 45–7). This claim ignores the fact that these theories are not only contradictory, but exist in conscious opposition to each other. Fundamentally, based on the epistemic core of their claims, if Kuhn is correct, then Popper is wrong. One of them is therefore presenting an ideology of science just as corrupting of our understanding of reality as any other false belief. These types of conflicts are regularly seized upon by irrationalists as proof of the indeterminacy of scientific theory, and thus should be avoided in favor of concrete and specific methodological principles.

Recent Marxist theory provides an example, I believe, of a conception of the scientific method that surpasses the defects inherent in both the historicist or positivist views of science. The theory is called "dialectical critical realism," and is developed by the British Marxist philosopher Roy Bhaskar. It is not necessary for the purposes of this essay to summarize the entire theory, which is highly complex.³ What is relevant is to extract one of its central tenants, a concept that Bhaskar calls "transcendental realism." I believe this concept not only can help to illuminate the nature of Kurtz's transcendental temptation, but also can point to solutions not conceived of in Kurtz's own analysis.

Bhaskar argues that it is actually a necessary part of reality that we use our intelligence in an attempt to overcome (transcend) it. He claims this is so because even our most limited attempts to comprehend events reveal how transfactual tendencies exist within relatively enduring structures (1989, 91–92).

Hence, no matter how normal or stable things appear, we realize, once we reflect on them, that they do change, and are in fact changing all the time. Yet all of our understanding is predicated on the reality of events being as we currently perceive them. It is therefore in the overcoming of the contradictions between what we have been conditioned to know (ideology), and what our thinking reveals about the limits of what we know (criticism), that true understanding and hence positive action (making history), become possible (184–88).

This type of dialectical perspective reveals that two types of mystification operate in human thought. One believes too much of what it perceives, and reflects too little on what it believes (irrationalism). The other believes too little about what it perceives, and conceives too narrowly based on what is believable (positivism). What is missing in both perspectives is a clear understanding of the dialectic between the acceptance of a false belief and the reality that encourages this belief.

Kurtz's transcendental temptation is too narrowly defined. People have always sought to transcend to a new reality; the problem is in not understanding that this new reality must be rooted in the concrete potential of people to reshape their actual lives in the world. When our imagination or understanding is limited by perspectives that teach us that such transcendence is impossible or is itself an irrational impulse (the function of all dominant ideologies), it encourages the seeking of transcendence in ever more fantastic and otherworldly ways. It is only a critical methodology focused on not just understanding reality, but on changing it, that will prove effective in dealing with this paradox.

Another area dealt with by Kurtz in which Marxists might be able to improve on his insights into the nature of religion concerns the status of the critique of religious belief as a form of truth or means of understanding the world. Kurtz claims that his stance as a humanist is influenced by Socrates, Marx, Dewey, William James, and Sidney Hook (Kurtz 1991, 6). With the exception of James, these figures are united in their definitive atheism. Yet the character of their atheism differs considerably. Dewey even argues that we can refute the content of religious

beliefs while keeping alive the term “God,” as a symbol of cultural solidarity (Dewey 1934). Given such dynamics, the question remains: in moving from a transcendental idealism (religion) to a transcendental realism (Marxism/humanism), must one develop an active atheistic consciousness? Or will a more rational approach to belief necessarily follow from learning an accurate sociohistorical account of the nature of religion? These issues will be addressed in the next two sections.

Confrontations between Marxism and religion

One of the missing elements in Whitehead’s discussion is an analysis of the wider Marxist tradition of studying religion, beyond the work of Marx and Engels. The critical study of religion has played a large role within all tendencies in Marxist theory almost from the beginning. For example, one of the most widely read and influential works of classical Marxism was Karl Kautsky’s 1908 *Foundations of Christianity* (1953). A useful and ambitious overview of this subject is David McLellan’s *Marxism and Religion* (1987). Focused on Christianity, McLellan’s work is an attempt to summarize and assess nearly every major Marxist theory of religion from Marx to liberation theology. The book presents informative factual summaries of the works of particular figures and schools of thought, but suffers from some major analytic weaknesses. In an attempt to build links between Marxism and Christianity, McLellan ventures a number of questionable claims aimed at downgrading the qualitative elements of Marxism’s historical and theoretical critique of religion. Such claims cannot stand up to critical scrutiny.

McLellan shows that Marxists’ studies of religion have generally taken two forms: descriptive, in which religion is studied as a variable within a dominant mode of production; and evaluative, in which religion is judged to be a form of alienation, to be overcome by the emergence of a new form of society that has itself overcome the roots of religious alienation (McLellan 1987, 166). In assessing these positions, McLellan claims that Marxism’s evaluative critique of religion is highly questionable, while the descriptive studies of most Marxists, when critical of religion, are tentative at best, and at worst out of date. As a

practicing Catholic, McLellan clearly objects to the view that religion is an illusory phenomenon rooted in human alienation, and thus destined to pass away in the transition to an unalienated society. Against this view, he maintains that no adequate political or social theory can exclude a role for religion in its view of the future of humanity. This is because, according to McLellan, "in one way or another religion has been a deep and enduring aspect of human activity" (5).

To this argument one could respond that there have existed many enduring elements of human activity, including negative ones, such as cruelty, murder, and self-delusion. This does not mean we should either accept them as natural, or resign ourselves to them as everlasting aspects of the human condition. For example, if it were possible to show that a specific mode of social or political life is more conducive to the spreading of a practice such as cruelty, then it would be perfectly legitimate to argue that the negation of that form of society, or politics, might also negate the intensity and or duration of that practice. This is the logical essence of the Marxist conjecture about the possible disappearance of religion in an unalienated society, and McLellan's claim does not refute it.

Most of McLellan's criticisms are directed at the descriptive element of Marxist theories of religion. Still, even here he argues again that Marxists have ignored the positive role of religion in human history specifically as a shaper of human communities. On this subject, he recommends that Marxists might learn more about the nature of religion if they adopted the perspectives of classical sociologists, such as Durkheim or Weber. Both saw religion as a necessary aspect of human consciousness, either because it helps promote social solidarity (Durkheim) or because it rationalizes modes of social legitimacy (Weber) (McLellan 1987, 162). However, the defense McLellan provides for this claim is weak and evasive in that he attempts to argue that both the Durkheimian and Weberian theories of religion are compatible with historical materialism while providing evidence that this may not be necessary. For example, in weighing the merits of Marxist historical studies of religion, he admits that the empirical evidence is quite good, and points to two famous Marxist studies

of Calvinism and Methodism that give “considerable support to the general Marxist thesis about the nature and function of religion historically and politically” (McLellan 1987, 167–68). In fact, McLellan’s only strong indictment of Marxists is that they have had difficulty in explaining millennialist Christianity (168). Yet given the unique nature and minority status of such beliefs, this hardly counts as a general indictment of Marxism’s descriptive account of religion.

The real failure of McLellan’s approach to this subject is revealed in one of his concluding remarks. Marxism needs religion, as a supplement, he argues, because while Marxism is addressed to the victors and winners of history, movements like Christianity focus “on the defeated, the maimed and even the dead” (171). Although itself questionable, this claim seems to confirm the essence of one of Marx’s most famous remarks. For an outlook whose main purpose is to console the dead and defeated of history is clearly revealed to be *the opium of the people*. McLellan might respond that if his attempts to build links between Marxism and religion are questionable, what then is revealed by focusing on the confrontation between the two? The answer is that if one is concerned with the logical accuracy and historical integrity of their theories, then Marxism should be able to forge much more fruitful connections with secular humanists than with proponents of any type of theism.

The missing element in McLellan’s study is an analysis of the confrontation between Marxists and theologians over the content of their respective ontological and epistemological claims. In fact, this element seems to be missing from all contemporary debates on this subject. There was a time, however, when such confrontations were more prominent; the 1930s was such a period. An example taken from that decade shows how productive such confrontations can be and why they ought to be reexamined in any attempt to build understanding between Marxism and secular humanism.

The Modern Monthly, a prominent progressive interdisciplinary journal of the time, published in 1935 a series of debates on “Marxism and Religion.” The debates featured the critic V. F. Calverton and the philosopher Sidney Hook,

representing Marxism, against the theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and R. L. Calhoun, defending religion. The fact that this debate pitted one of the most influential theologians of this century (Niebuhr) against one of the most noted U.S. Marxists of the time (Hook) makes it noteworthy in any discussion of the topic.⁴ Even more important, both sides made contributions that remain relevant to this day toward our understanding of what separates these two perspectives.

Niebuhr and Calhoun employ three arguments in defense of their position: first, that Marxism cannot be seen as separate from (and therefore superior to), religion, because its own faith and dogmas reveal it to be itself a religious doctrine. Second, they argue that Marxism and religion need not be opposed, because they have common ground on several defining issues, and thus can help each other. Third, there are areas where religion is clearly superior to Marxism as an explanation of the human condition, and therefore Marxists should seek the help of theologians in addressing these areas (Niebuhr 1935; Calhoun 1935).

In beginning their arguments, both men are quick to point out that the religion they are defending is not what Calhoun called “institutional or organized religion,” but a “prophetic religion” (Calhoun 1935, 24). Niebuhr defines prophetic religion as an attitude toward reality rooted in social purpose and pious reverence (1935, 714). To this definition Calhoun adds, “this is done so that the world conforms with God’s will” (1935, 25). Anticipating those who would label this a defense of theological dogmatism, Calhoun argues that “dependence on God’s will is no more dogmatic than a scientist acting in respect to the laws of gravity.” How this can be so is not clear, since one is comparing an unanalyzable abstraction (God’s will), with a perceptible analyzable force of nature. Yet however dubious Calhoun’s analogy, it was indicative of the level at which both men approached the subject matter.⁵

In defending his principal claims against Marxism, Niebuhr argues that Marxism is really a religious rather than a scientific system, because its philosophy (dialectical materialism) provides guarantees that allow Marxists to believe that the world has

meaning and life a purpose (1935, 713). At the same time, he claims that Marxism is inferior to religion in being utopian, because it supports the idea of perfectibility on earth, which for Niebuhr, “ignores the fallen imperfect nature of man” (714). Calhoun, while making in essence the same arguments, claims that Marxism’s principal weakness is its naturalistic perspective, “which does not allow it to balance human effort with respect for God’s plan” (1935, 24). He gives as a primary example of this the failure among Marxists to accept absolutist moral and ethical standards. Thus, he explains, “Marxists are willing to accept such things as brutality in pursuit of their ends, because they recognize no absolute sanctions against such behavior” (27). That Calhoun (a professor of historical theology at Yale), could ignore the history of religion in using its absolutist moral principles to justify violence, murder, and torture in pursuit of its ends is intellectual blindness quite representative, unfortunately, of both his and Niebuhr’s contributions.

Calverton and Hook, although taking different approaches to the issue, both display such weaknesses in their arguments. Calverton’s approach is historical, while Hook makes a logical critique. They converge on two points: first, that Niebuhr and Calhoun define both religion and Marxism in a conceptually inadequate way; and second, that nothing they argue affects in any way the integrity and superiority of Marxism as a method, philosophy, or science of society (Calverton 1935; Hook 1935). On the first point, Calverton quotes the humanist philosopher Corliss Lamont, who points out that Niebuhr’s definition of religion is so loose and unintelligible that it could not only apply to Marxism, “but to football, trade unionism and even poetry societies” (Calverton 1934, 716). As to the second point, Hook maintains that the Marxism these men speak of is a dogmatic and emasculated doctrine, inconsistent with Marx’s own life and works. Dialectical materialism, according to Hook, is not a philosophy that provides guarantees to the direction of history, but a method that guides concrete social action (Hook 1935, 20–21). In making a similar point, Calverton adds that even dogmatic Marxists “who defend the inevitability of communism and the infallibility of the party,” have been able to make sound

scientific judgments on other matters based on Marxist theory. "The same," he continues, "cannot be said for religious dogmatists of any persuasion" (1935, 716).

In the main, Calverton argues that Marxist theory is in no need of religion to advance itself. Defending this position, he outlines an original theory of religion based on historical-materialist principles that he had developed at length elsewhere.⁶ Rejecting the idea that religion and Marxism are compatible projects, Calverton claims that time has stamped religion, in form and content, with the defense of reaction, which only intensifies in periods of class stratification and scientific advance. Whatever exceptions to this there might be, Calverton explains, "have always faced the wrath of the majority within the religious community and been suppressed" (1935, 720).

Hook also argues that religion and Marxism are at variance on a number of critical fronts, and that religion's own war against attempts to understand nature, society, and humanity through the empirical, historical, and experimental standards of science are irreconcilable with Marxism (1935, 30).⁷ For the most part, Hook's essay concentrates on exploring three areas where Marxism and religion are in conflict—philosophy, ethics, and politics. Without going over this analysis in its entirety, we may identify two of Hook's points as important examples of the power of his case and thus worth repeating.

First, Hook argues that Marxism does indeed have faith in its values and principles, but he adds, faith does not equal religious faith. "The ways and means of realizing a thing can give us a right to believe our judgments are probably true." This, he pointed out, is an act of faith, but not in itself a religious act, "because it need not involve cosmic certainty or the idea that one's dogma is superior to experience or common sense" (Hook 1935, 31). The important point here is the need to avoid the common fallacy of equating a religious interpretation of a human experience with its actual meaning. That humans hope, dream, and believe in what has not yet come to pass does not mean they either accept or need accept that a supernatural force or ideal can bring these things to fruition.

On the question of ethics, and the supposed superiority of religious morality, Hook declares that “piety and absolute reverence for one’s moral standards more often than not leads to indifference and conservatism” (32). Opposed to this, he defends basing human behavior on conditional-relational situations, calling for intelligent reflection on how and why standards can and should be changed. “Frozen dogmatic moral principles,” says Hook, “do not open our minds toward helping us have *courage* in the face of what is unattainable, nor to have the *intelligence* to know how to change what we can change.” Hook’s argument is important because it shows the strength of the critical naturalist outlook advocated by Marxism in just those areas where religious apologists have always claimed superiority—in defending belief in human potential and in guiding moral judgement.

Hook makes one of his finest points in defining what role Marxism would view for religion in a world where its dogmas have been definitively refuted and its power checked. He argues that Marxists should *not* seek the eradication of religion, but only its reduction to a private matter. There it could not be used to halt or endanger the democratization of social, political, or economic life, and importantly it could not impede the movement toward the widest possible education in critical thinking (34). This argument is not unique; it was also the official position of the pre-1914 Second International. Still, Hook’s defense of it is an important reminder and clarification of the nature of Marxism’s own secularism.

One of the most fertile elements of this debate is its exposure of the appalling nature of religious apologetics as a mode of intellectual engagement. Niebuhr and Calhoun (while making essentially the same points), show skill and intelligence, but their claims for religion are imbued with fallacious reasoning; dependent on question begging, logic twisting, and vulgar mystifications; and based more on wish fulfillment than the advance of any cognitively accessible truth claims. Both men show that they are capable of criticizing the world in realistic terms, but any claims they make along these lines have only the vaguest connection to religious doctrines or practices. When they do clarify this connection, as in their reliance on the dogma of the

imperfection of man, it shows that they cannot envision religious criticism as having any qualitative effect on the world. We may conclude that religious dogma, given its conceptual and historical limitations, cannot be seen as helpful in advancing the revolutionary, scientific, or humanistic criticism of reality advocated by Marxism. This is why Marxism remains in principle committed to the criticism and overcoming of religion.

Marxism and the question of atheism

As a secular outlook, Marxism has approached the question of disbelief in at least two distinctive ways. There are those who argue that Marxism must take the stance of aggressive and vigorous atheism and attempt to stamp out all traces of religious influence. This stance is most identified with Soviet Marxism, with its authority going back to Lenin and his polemics against god-building philosophers and reactionary clericalists (McLellan 1987, 95–98). At the other extreme, there is the claim that Marxism has no need for an active atheism, since as a civilization advances all traditional modes of expression become enveloped into the practical needs of that civilization. Thus, under capitalism religion becomes more and more a veil for exchange relations, and hence a more or less unconscious atheism encompasses our lives. This latter position represents the views expressed by Marx himself about the future of religion in the first volume of *Capital* (1967, 171).

It may seem that these two positions negate each other, but on a more complex level one can argue that an active critique of theism complements an understanding that the power of theistic claims is in a natural state of decline, regardless of the level of opposition these claims face.

The complexities and contradictions of Western culture over the past three hundred years provide ample evidence that much of what Marx thought about religion has come to pass. The question is what has become of our ability to comprehend events when we live in a culture that has effectively negated religious belief, even as it obscures this fact by encouraging religious practices.

An important attempt to help to understand this dynamic is a largely overlooked work by the late Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral* (1983). The title, echoing a poem by Heinrich Heine, refers to the widely argued claim that since the seventeenth century, Western societies and those shaped by them have been ruled by the logic of a political atheism. *God*, as unifier and legitimizer of power and authority, has been killed, and according to Harrington, piously buried by his still reverent, but now agnostic, followers (1983, 3–5). Among the effects of our not understanding what Harrington calls “God’s Christian burial” are a crisis of motivated noncoerced obedience, a compulsory hedonism, and the emergence of totalitarianism as a substitute for religious certainty and solidarity (8). As theologians labor to build a new faith without an actual ontological God, they leave behind to address the great questions of existence only those able to comprehend the world as an inverted reality: what was once certain (God) is now uncertain, and what was once irrelevant (the world) is now central.

The core of Harrington’s study is a survey of the entire history of Western thought, including philosophy, political theory, psychology, sociology, history, and theology, from Kant to Habermas. This survey is both learned and eloquent, and although one might quibble with interpretations here and there, his central theme—that the history of all modern Western thought addresses, in one way or another, the death of the political God—is well supported. His conclusion is that only the emergence of a new universalist political morality unifying both nonbelievers and believers can settle the politics at God’s funeral. Harrington’s candidate for this new morality is a renewed, Marxist-influenced, democratic socialism (210).

Another version of this thesis is given, from a different point of view, by the neo-Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. In a review of the state of modern theology, MacIntyre argues that it is dangerous for religious thinkers to assume that atheism is some minority creed that can be safely ignored as an eccentricity. Instead, he argues, it is the express basis for most people’s lives—although, he adds, this is not a simple thing to understand. “The problem’s difficulty,” says MacIntyre, “lies in a

combination of atheism in the practice and life of the vast majority, with the profession of either superstition or theism by the same majority” (MacIntyre 1971, 26). The real issue is not in exposing and denouncing this atheism, which few are aware of, or can comprehend, but in trying “to find out why the creed of the English is that there is no God and that it is wise to pray to him from time to time.” Whatever this implies, it is not a theological question.

If we take MacIntyre’s question, and replace the word *English* with the term *modernist*, we can identify the fundamental contradiction that Marxists should be attempting to address in understanding the role of atheism in contemporary civilization. This is not just a question of analyzing sloppy thinking or willful blindness; it is more an issue of what Jürgen Habermas has termed “communicative irrationality.” This involves the deliberate distortion of rational modes of understanding in favor of an obscurantism that enables us to unify our acceptance of the system in which we live with the rejection of the values it seems to support (Habermas 1989, 227–28). Through this type of distortion, many are able to see themselves as spiritual, heaven-centered beings while acting in a very earthly, material-centered way. (This is especially evident within the nondenominational Protestant clergy of the United States).

The roots of our understanding of this dynamic and bourgeois civilization’s need for it lie in Marx and Engels’s critique of the state of German philosophy in the 1840s. They argue (contrary to the young Hegelians) that the rational criticism of a mystification or delusion is not enough to overcome it. This is so because, just as certain concepts arise as a result of their being conducive to supporting certain modes of social development, entirely different sets of concepts are necessary to hold those relations in place. When the antinomies of existence begin to expose the weaknesses of these concepts, ultimate contradictions in this process force them to become more and more removed from actual social realities. The irony of this process is that as concepts begin to obscure our comprehension of underlying realities, they become more effective in holding social relations in place, thus

impeding our ability to change them without conscious struggle (Marx and Engels 1976).

Understanding this helps to clarify the meaning behind Marx's statement that religion is "the opium of the people." Religion, Marx was arguing, becomes so effective in combating the symptoms of real suffering in bourgeois society such as alienation, anomie, and helplessness that it convinces its followers that no actual cure for the real underlying causes of their suffering is necessary, or in some cases, even possible. Modifying this perspective somewhat, I would argue that knowing this, one should not focus directly on the underlying causes of mystifications, as if they were apparent to all seeing eyes. Instead, one should deal directly with the power of abstractions to capture and shape our lives. Those mystified usually see themselves as thinking quite clearly, because their vision and the mystification have become unified in their minds. This unity must be undone, but one cannot simply point in the right direction and say, "you are cured!" To overcome a false vision, one must understand and negate it.

To paraphrase Marx, the struggle against illusions requires the critique of heaven *within* (not instead of) the critique of the earth. Therefore, if ours is an atheistic reality within a mystified theistic shell, it is necessary for Marxists to become involved in using their tools to advance criticism and evaluation of the nature and history of this mystification. In order to accomplish this, it will be essential to combine the analysis of religion as a social phenomenon with a critique of the content of theistic beliefs as historical and philosophical truth claims. This is the essence of the dual nature of Marxism's relation to atheism.⁸

Marxism and the freethought tradition

Freethought has been one the most attractive areas of convergence for radical and secular thinkers in U.S. history. Among the giants of this tradition who were also major figures of the Left are Thomas Paine, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Clarence Darrow and (too often overlooked), Robert Ingersoll.⁹ Although their freethought took many forms, from deism to atheism, today this tradition is venerated and studied almost

exclusively by secularists. For our purposes, there are two reasons for mentioning the relations between the progressivism of these individuals and their commitment to freethought. First, they were all outstanding public intellectuals, whose criticisms of religious dogmas are well known. The ability to be a successful public dissenter in such a sensitive area is something well worth respect and study. Second, none of them was associated with socialist or Marxist thinking in any significant way. A possible reason for this is that the great freethinkers in general were very individualistic in orientation, and thus identified with the outer reaches of liberalism. Their own difficult breaks with pious upbringings made them very weary of the mass or systematic belief systems that they often associated with religion.

An important negative aspect of the individualism of the great freethinkers is that its legacy has left many modern exponents of freethought too susceptible to the association of Marxism with dogmatic and discredited offshoots that resemble religions in form and content, such as Stalinism. In addition, many humanists, in rejecting Marxism, have embraced instead a narrow empiricism and vulgar positivism as the only philosophical systems compatible with a scientific outlook. These systems encourage modes of thinking so antithetical to Marxism's own methods that misunderstanding is almost inevitable. All this notwithstanding, I would argue that the results of these great misunderstandings can be overcome by a more healthy dialogue between the two traditions.

The actual record of attempted convergences of Marxism and secular humanism, however, has not been encouraging. For example, two of the most influential and well-known American humanists of this century—Corliss Lamont and Sidney Hook—had very tenuous relationships with Marxism. Although these men traveled down very divergent paths, they had much in common; both were students of John Dewey, for example, and both became exponents of pragmatic naturalism. Neither can be said to have advanced the connection between Marxism and their pragmatist-influenced humanism in any lasting manner. Yet their cases tell us much about what has gone wrong in the many encounters between the two traditions thus far.

Lamont wrote on humanism from a point of view in line with the main currents of Anglo-American thought. At the same time, he called himself a socialist, as defined by Soviet standards, and made common cause financially and intellectually with Marxists, although not necessarily with Marxism (Lamont 1974, xii). In fact, Lamont shows little respect for integral aspects of Marxist theory, such as dialectical logic, which he often attacked as incoherent. Lamont seems never to have understood the unity of elements within Marxist thought. For example, in a critique of the Marxist philosopher Howard Selsam, Lamont claims that while Marxist economic and social theory had made unique and important contributions to modern thought, we may dismiss dialectics as offering nothing of originality ontologically or epistemologically (86). This ignores the question of whether Marxist dialectics is primarily involved in such areas, and, more importantly, it misunderstands that Marxism has only been able to make unique contributions in other areas with the aid of the dialectical methodology by which it arrives at its conclusions.

An example of why this method is important can be taken from Lamont's own writings on the subject of religion and Marxism. In the late 1930s, Lamont engaged in an interesting exchange with the British Marxist scientist Joseph Needham over the way to attract religious people to socialism. At one point in his discussion, Lamont argues that the matter is complicated by a problem of language. The difficulty lies in Marxism's insistence on using the term *materialist* to describe its worldview. Lamont calls this term objectionable to religious-minded persons because "in the English speaking world the term materialism is associated with the crass worship of material objects" (Lamont 1937, 497). As a solution, he suggests that Marxists use the more pleasant sounding "socialist humanism" to describe their outlook.

This may seem like a harmless quibble, but it is indicative of a very *undialectical* approach to this problem. We cannot raise consciousness by deception. There is a qualitative difference between what is connoted by the term *materialist* and the term *humanist*, and thus they are not interchangeable. This is not the main point, however, and the problem of language that Lamont

identifies is much more complex than his suggestion implies. A central contradiction of bourgeois society is exposed here: in a society ruled by the fetishism of commodities, many still seek consolation in a spiritualist ideology that renounces the very ideals essential to the nature of that society.

The real confusion in this discussion lies with those who would reject the idea of worshiping objects, but who are then willing to do nothing to change the reality that underlies this worship, except in the comforting spirituality of their own minds. This contradiction embodies the very dialectical logic of the unity of opposites that Lamont dismisses as useless for furthering our understanding. As a result of his methodological blindness, Lamont ventures a cure for a problem he has not yet properly diagnosed.

In terms of his practical political commitments, Lamont did represent one of the most advanced attempts by a secular humanist thinker at a convergence with Marxism. Nonetheless, his disregard of the methodological integrity of Marxist theory was, I believe, counterproductive in not allowing him to advance the philosophical unity of the two traditions. Hook's case is even more problematic. In the period of his most significant philosophical output, from the early 1930s to the mid 1940s, Hook made original and suggestive contributions to both Marxism and humanism. Yet his originality and usefulness in both areas seemed to collapse as he became preoccupied with renouncing his former political and philosophical commitments to Marxism.¹⁰ Nevertheless, leaving aside Hook's famous attempt to connect Marxism with Deweyian pragmatism, if we look at his work from this period, his analysis of religion remains interesting.

In a series of essays in the early 1940s, Hook sought to refute the idea promoted by a growing number of intellectuals that the great crises of the modern world (war, poverty, totalitarianism), called for a renewal of religious conviction. Hook calls this "a failure of nerve" on the part of otherwise intelligent persons to defend modern knowledge. He refutes the idea that religious dogma advances ethical, philosophical, or scientific concepts in any positive manner, by showing that the same religious

doctrines have been used with equal certainty the world over to defend fascism, democracy, or theocratic authoritarianism (Hook 1961, 82–83). As to the actual integrity of religion itself, Hook argues that by the most exacting logical standards, the existence of God is a hypothesis of exceptionally low probability. In addition he shows that most of the leading theologians of our time, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, are virtual atheists defending a generally fallacious concept of religious truth that reduces the idea of God to a moral imperative or a psychological need (133). Hook calls for a renewed commitment to scientific knowledge, critical intelligence, and democratic socialism as the only means of dealing with the dilemmas of our age (101–2).

In his later years, however, Hook abandoned such insights in favor of a forty-year career as an apologist for the Cold War and U.S. imperialism. In the decade before his death in 1989, Hook was making common cause with such proponents of political reaction as Ronald Reagan and William F. Buckley Jr.—men whose religious and political views Hook (still a secular humanist) should have viewed as absurd and dangerous. Hook did make occasional asides against the religious Right, and continued to call himself a social democrat, but his writings in this period lack the vigor, persistence, and originality of his works when his humanist commitments were linked with Marxism.¹¹

Conclusion

It is against this record of lost engagements, misunderstandings, and promises unfulfilled that both Marxists and secular humanists should continue to work. Our historical period is increasingly becoming one of heightened political reaction and rampant irrationalism, with the growth of Kurtz's "transcendental temptation" daily evident in all our popular media. What is needed is the emergence of significant public intellectuals who can combine the most sophisticated elements of Marxist and humanist theory with a persuasive and popular appeal that replicates the success of the best figures of the freethought tradition. The overview presented here is intended to provide the necessary arguments to show why this should be so. That such a convergence has not yet become prominent remains a major gap in our

social, philosophical, and political life, but with the revival of discussions in this area perhaps we need not think of this convergence as being very far off.

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NOTES

1. It is interesting, given this opinion, to point out that two of the most respected figures in contemporary skepticism and humanism, the late astronomer Carl Sagan and the biologist Stephen Jay Gould, both have expressed positive attitudes toward Marxism. However, Sagan's position was more implicit, as in his naming of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932) as a pivotal book in shaping his politics. See Sagan 1995, 414–15. Gould, on the other hand, has made quiet explicit defenses of Marxism, including defenses of Engels's stature as a scientific thinker and of the usefulness of dialectical categories in scientific analysis. See Gould 1977, 210–11 and 1987, 153–54.

2. It should be pointed out that misunderstanding cannot account for all opposition between secular humanists and Marxists, for many humanists approach secularism from a libertarian perspective that is incompatible with Marxism.

3. Bhaskar's method has evolved over the years from a simple defense of scientific realism, to a growing convergence with Marxism, to a full embrace of the dialectical tradition, of which he argues Marxism is the most advanced representative. In its simplest form, dialectical critical realism argues that scientific knowledge is not dependent on the accumulation of facts that either verify or falsify hypotheses. Nor is it simply based on the successful justification of recognized paradigms; instead, it is the successful overcoming of socially imposed limits on understanding through the mastery of the reality of the nonsocial world that makes knowledge scientific. Critical realist science is associated with Marxism because it is ontologically *transformational*, rather than reificationist (as in positivism), or voluntarist (as in historicism), and epistemologically *relationalist*, rather than individualist (empiricism), or collectivist (idealism). Bhaskar is a difficult technical philosopher, and this summary, taken from his magnum opus, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (1993), cannot do justice to this mentally exhausting work. Andrew Collier has made a valiant attempt at simplifying this project (1994).

4. Hook's reputation as a Marxist thinker has been obscured by his long career as a Cold War crusader. The chief contemporary defender of the importance of the young Marxist Hook is Christopher Phelps, with a full-scale reevaluation (1997). For a more critical, but still sympathetic view, see Alan Wald 1987. Wald is especially insightful in exploring the lack of candor and intellectual rigor that went into Hook's break with Marxism.

5. An excellent critique of Niebuhr's theology, focusing on his theory of religious truth, is found in Walter Kaufmann's *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (1958). Kaufmann argues that rather than a fulfillment, Niebuhr's prophetic religion is the outright antithesis of the ethic of Jesus in being aggressive and unprudential (298). He concludes that Niebuhr's theology is a contrived, erudite rationalization in which his convictions come first and his scholarship second (303). Thus, for Niebuhr, religion becomes amazingly flexible in being able to adapt to whatever shifting (secular) position he happens to be defending.

6. Calverton's theory of religion is presented in full in his 1934 *Passing of the Gods*. This work is an ambitious example in the field of Marxist studies of religion. Though, empirically the book shows the limits of its time, it combines a sociological and psychological theory of religion with a political critique of the practices of religious groups that is still of interest.

7. A useful summary of the opposition religion has advanced against scientific progress is Bertrand Russell's *Religion and Science* (1934). In the introduction to a recent reissue of this work, Michael Ruse reminds readers that positions such as Russell's violent opposition to religion, should be distinguished from those who would merely separate religion and science as different realms of knowledge (Ruse 1997). I would argue that Marxism takes neither position, but seeks to overcome religion by scientifically studying the roots of religious consciousness, while at the same time addressing their manifestations in contemporary society. This can only be done by taking the ontological and ethical questions religion claims to answer seriously, a point many positivists like Russell seem to ignore (see for example, chapter 9 in *Religion and Science*).

8. Interestingly, one of the leading contemporary atheist thinkers, the philosopher Kai Nielson, is also a Marxist. However, his work in both fields seems separate and it cannot be said he has advanced any specifically Marxist theory of atheism. This perhaps might be due to his commitment to analytic philosophy. Compare, for example, his 1990 *Ethics Without God* with his 1988 *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*.

9. Robert Ingersoll (1833–1899) remains one of the great forgotten figures of the American past. Known as a powerful voice against religious dogma, he was also a champion of racial justice, women's equality, and civil liberties. A good selection of his nearly intoxicating eloquence is found in a volume edited by Roger E. Greeley (1990).

10. Hook's posthumous collection of essays, *Convictions* (1990), is dominated by antileft polemics against affirmative action, multiculturalism, and radical critiques of U.S. history. Yet, Hook's own stated "convictions" in favor of social democracy and secular humanism are (notably) nearly imperceptible.

11. Those interested in Hook's drift to the right, as well as his comradely relations with the icons of modern reaction, can read his own defense of these actions in his autobiography, *Out of Step* (1987). In many ways, Hook condemns himself. For example, in a section where he defends his votes for Ronald Reagan, Hook claims that he had no trouble with this (as a socialist),

because, with no real expertise in economic theory, he had no specific critique of Reaganomics (590)! Such galling disingenuousness seems hardly worth the effort.

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Another View of Chomsky

Michael Parenti

In the April 1999 *Monthly Review* (50, no. 11:40–47), Robert McChesney gives what amounts to an encomium to Noam Chomsky. McChesney credits the MIT professor with (a) leading the battle for democracy against neoliberalism, (b) demonstrating “the absurdity of equating capitalism with democracy” (44), and (c) being the first to expose the media’s complicity with the ruling class. I would suggest that in these several areas credit for leading the way goes to the generations of Marxist writers and other progressive thinkers who fought the good fight well before Chomsky made his substantial and much appreciated contributions.

More important is the question of Chomsky’s politics. McChesney says that Chomsky can be “characterized as an anarchist or, perhaps more accurately, a libertarian socialist” (43). “Libertarian socialist” is a sweeping designation, safely covering both sides of the street. Of course, the ambiguity is not McChesney’s but Chomsky’s. As far as I know, Chomsky has never offered a clear explication of his anarcho-libertarian-socialist ideology. That is to say, he has never explained to us how it would manifest itself in organized political struggle or actual social construction.

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McChesney says that Noam Chomsky has been a persistent “opponent and critic of Communist and Leninist political states and parties” (43). I would add that, as a “critic,” Chomsky has yet to offer a systematic critique of existing Communist parties and states. (Not that many others have.) Here is a sampling of Chomsky’s views on Communism and Leninism:

In an interview in *Perception* (March/April 1996), Chomsky tells us: “The rise of corporations was in fact a manifestation of the same phenomena that led to Fascism and Bolshevism, which sprang out of the same totalitarian soil.” Like Orwell and most bourgeois opinion makers and academics, Chomsky treats Communism and fascism as totalitarian twins, offering no class analysis of either, except to assert that they are both rooted in some unspecified way to today’s corporate domination.

In *Z Magazine* (October 1995), four years after the Soviet Union had been overthrown, Chomsky warns us of “left intellectuals” who try to “rise to power on the backs of mass popular movements” and “then beat the people into submission. . . . You start off as basically a Leninist who is going to be part of the Red bureaucracy. You see later that power doesn’t lie that way, and you very quickly become an ideologist of the Right. . . . We’re seeing it right now in the Soviet Union [sic]. The same guys who were communist thugs two years back, are now running banks and [are] enthusiastic free marketeers and praising America.”

In its choice of words and ahistorical crudity, this statement is rather breathtaking. The Leninist “communist thugs” did not “very quickly” switch to the right after rising to power. For more than seventy years, they struggled in the face of momentous Western capitalist and Nazi onslaughts to keep the Soviet system alive. To be sure, in the USSR’s waning days, many like Boris Yeltsin crossed over to capitalism’s ranks, but other Reds continued to resist free-market incursions at great cost to themselves, many meeting their deaths during Yeltsin’s violent repression of the Russian parliament in 1993.

In the same *Perception* interview cited above, Chomsky offers another embarrassingly ill-informed comment about Leninism: “Western and also Third World intellectuals were attracted to the Bolshevik counterrevolution [sic] because

Leninism is, after all, a doctrine that says that the radical intelligentsia have a right to take state power and to run their countries by force, and that is an idea which is rather appealing to intellectuals.” Here Chomsky fashions a cartoon image of ruthless intellectuals to go along with his cartoon image of ruthless Leninists. They do not want the power to end hunger, they merely hunger for power.

In his book *Powers and Prospects* (1996, 83), Chomsky begins to sound like Ronald Reagan when he announces that Communism “was a monstrosity,” and “the collapse of tyranny” in Eastern Europe and Russia is “an occasion for rejoicing for anyone who values freedom and human dignity.” Tell that to the hungry pensioners and child prostitutes in Gorky Park. I treasure freedom and human dignity as much as anyone, yet I find no occasion for rejoicing. The post-Communist societies do not represent a net gain for such values. If anything, what we are witnessing is a colossal victory for gangster capitalism in the former Soviet Union, the strengthening of the most retrograde forms of global capitalism and economic inequality around the world, a heartless and unrestrained increase in imperialistic aggression, and a serious setback for revolutionary liberation struggles everywhere.

We should keep in mind that Chomsky’s political underdevelopment is shared by many on the left whose critical views of “corporate America” represent their full ideological grasp of the political world. Be he an anarcho-libertarian or libertarian-socialist or anarcho-syndicalist-socialist or just an anarchist, Chomsky appeals to many of the young and not so young. For he can evade all the hard questions about organized struggle, the search for a revolutionary path, the need to develop and sustain a mass resistance, the necessity of developing armed socialist state power that can defend itself against the capitalist counterrevolutionary onslaught, and all the attendant problems, abuses, mistakes, victories, defeats, and crimes of Communist revolutionary countries and their allies.

What we used to say about the Trotskyites can apply to the Chomskyites: they support every revolution except those that succeed. (Cuba might be the exception. Chomsky usually leaves

that country unmentioned in his sideswipes at existing or once-existing Communist countries.) Most often, organized working-class struggles and vanguard parties are written off by many on the left (including Chomsky) as “Stalinist,” a favorite, obsessional pejorative made all the more useful by remaining forever undefined; or “Leninist,” which is Chomsky’s code word for Communist governments and movements that have actually gained state power and fought against the west to stay in power. Through all this label-slinging, no recognition is given to the horrendous battering such countries and movements endure from the Western imperialists. No thought is given to the enormously distorting impact of capitalist counterrevolutionary power upon the development of existing and once-existing Communist governments, nor the evils of international capitalism that the Communists and their allies were able to hold back, evils that are becoming more and more apparent to us today.

Bereft of a dialectical grasp of class power and class struggle, Chomsky and others have no critical defense against the ideological anti-Communism that inundates the Western world, especially the United States. This is why, when talking about the corporations, Chomsky can sound as good as Ralph Nader, and when talking about existing Communist movements and society, he can sound as bad as any right-wing pundit.

In sum, I cannot join McChesney in heaping unqualified praise upon Noam Chomsky’s views. When Chomsky departs from his well-paved road of anticorporate exposé and holds forth on Communism and Leninism, he shoots from the hip with disappointingly facile and sometimes incomprehensible pronouncements. We should expect something better from our “leading icon of the Left.”

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Michael Parenti’s most recent books are *Dirty Truths*, *Blackshirts and Reds* and *America Besieged*, all published by City Lights, San Francisco.

MARXIST FORUM

Nature, Society, and Thought initiated with vol. 6, no. 1 a special section called “Marxist Forum” to publish programmatic materials from political parties throughout the world that are inspired by the communist idea. This section makes available to our readers (insofar as space restrictions permit) a representative cross section of approaches by these parties and their members to contemporary problems, domestic and international. Our hope is to stimulate thought and discussion of the issues raised by these documents, and we invite comments and responses from readers.

An Appeal for Protest against Biohazard in Tokyo and “Science without Conscience”

Shingo Shibata

Background

In a previous paper entitled “Toward Prevention of Biohazards: For Human Rights in the Age of Emerging New Pathogens and Biotechnology” (1997a), I explained the background of the issues considered in this paper. They might be outlined as follows: The origin and history of the Japanese National Institute of Health (JNIH), originally established in 1947, and its successor, the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID), renamed in 1997.

The theoretical background of the civil rights campaign against the choice of site for the JINH-NIID. Located at a small site in one of the most populated residential areas in Tokyo, the JNIH-NIID deals with various kinds of dangerous pathogens, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and a large quantity of organic solvents and radioisotopes, as well as tens of thousands of laboratory animals. The site is adjacent to many dwellings and housing complexes, two welfare facilities for handicapped persons; Waseda University with tens of thousands of students; a major hospital; and the legally designated sites for refugees in case of emergency, major earthquakes, or fires.

The JNIH made public its plan to move to this site in July 1986. Since January 1987, together with my colleagues and friends, I have continued to raise many questions and related issues about the safety and location of the JNIH with its directors

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and have requested them to reply. To our surprise, they did not reply. Moreover, the JNIH took a strong position against us—residents, handicapped people, and Waseda University—virtually telling us to “shut up!” Meanwhile, the mayor and the city assembly of Shinjuku-ku, a ward with a population of about 270,000, have continued to urge the JNIH to refrain from constructing the laboratory. In spite of all these protests and appeals, in December 1988, the JNIH dared to mobilize the riot police and to begin its construction backed by force.

In response, I, together with two hundred colleagues, residents, and thirty Waseda University professors, brought a lawsuit against the JNIH, seeking to have its construction transferred out of our residential area and its experiments in this area halted.

At the Tokyo District Court, the JNIH contended that it was “completely safe” because its biosafety conditions were in compliance with the regulations recommended by the World Health Organization’s *Laboratory Biosafety Manual* (1983, 1993). We completely refuted such arguments and proved that the JNIH was dangerous to the residents, handicapped persons, and students and staff of Waseda University, as well as the public. Since our suit began, almost ten years have passed. Our arguments have convinced the public of the justice of our cause. As a result, the mayor and the City Assembly of Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, have continued to ask the JNIH halt its experiments. Even the Minister of the Environment Agency told the Diet that he did not think that the location of the JNIH was “appropriate.”

In 1995–1996 the misdeeds of the JNIH were under fire from the public and mass media (Shibata 1997a). One such misdeed was the infection of many hemophiliacs with HIV through JNIH-approved blood products. Nevertheless, its director general, Shudo Yamazaki, openly declared that he would never apologize to the victims and nation for these misdeeds. In the face of the public denunciation, however, the Ministry of Health and Welfare could not but rename “the JNIH” as “the NIID” on 1 April 1997.

In 1997 we proposed that the court invite a British microbiologist of international repute, Dr. C. H. Collins, the coordinating editor of the WHO biosafety manual and another WHO

publication (1997), to submit his inspection report to the court. As a result, the NIID could not but reluctantly accept our proposal, with the condition that it invite two U.S. scientists, V. R. Oviatt and Dr. J. Y. Richmond. Mr. Oviatt was the Head of the Environmental Health and Safety Division at the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, and is retired in Scotland. Dr. Richmond is Director, Office of Health and Safety, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in Atlanta. In order to make the inspection fair and balanced, Dr. Collins recommended to us that his colleague, Dr. David A. Kennedy, be another member of the British inspection team. Dr. Kennedy was a principal technology officer at the Medical Devices Agency, Department of Health, in the United Kingdom, from 1968 to 1996, as well as a WHO advisor on medical devices. He is Visiting Fellow at the Cranfield Biomedical Centre, Cranfield University, U.K.

The NIID insisted that Drs. Collins and Kennedy be allowed to enter the laboratory on only one day, 18 June 1997, that the number of our interpreters be restricted to one, and that the facilities available for the inspection by Drs. Collins and Kennedy would also be restricted. The NIID went further, forbidding the tape recording of all oral explanations given during the inspection, as well as any photography on the site. Essentially, the NIID wanted to conduct its own inspection, rejecting that of Drs. Collins and Kennedy. Thus, the NIID dictated nearly all the conditions of the inspection, rudely rejecting what should have been a free inspection by Drs. Collins and Kennedy. *Nevertheless, under such restrictions, the international inspection by the two groups of scientists took place on 18 June 1997.*

The deadline for the plaintiffs and the defendant to submit each report of their invited inspectors to the court was 29 August 1997. On 28 August, we submitted to the court the report by Drs. Collins and Kennedy (hereafter, C/K) along with its Japanese translation (Collins and Kennedy 1997). The NIID received them from the court the next day. But it was twelve days later than the deadline, on 10 September, that the NIID submitted to the court the report by Oviatt and Richmond (hereafter O/R) and its Japanese translation (Oviatt and Richmond 1997a).

This suggested that there was a possibility for the leading staff of the NIID to have faxed the C/K report to Oviatt and Richmond so that they would have the opportunity of modifying their original report to counteract statements in the C/K report.

It was also strange that the O/R report was undated. In my opinion, O/R may have omitted the date intentionally.

Our civil rights campaign against the JNIH-NIID site has been widely reported in Japan. There have been over one thousand articles reported in the mass media as well as over three hundred articles published in many leading journals. There have been more than ten books, apart from my own three books, that warned the public of the danger of the relocated JNIH-NIID. Almost all of them were critical of the JNIH-NIID, while very few favored it. Moreover, leading overseas scientific journals, including *Nature* and *Science*, paid appropriate attention to our campaign (Hesse 1992; Heim 1992; Swinbanks 1992; Shibata 1993; Normile 1998; Collins and Kennedy 1998). It can therefore be said that the hazardous location issue of the JNIH-NIID has been brought before the world court of the scientific community and public opinion.

***Accusation of NIID's forgery; denunciation
of the conspiracy of the two U.S. inspectors***

Several months after the deadline—that is, in March 1998—we had an opportunity to compare the signatures of Oviatt and Richmond with those in the O/R report. They seemed to be quite different.

You are asked to examine the signatures on the opposite page. The signatures O-1 and R-1 are copies of the signatures in the letters of Oviatt (8 November 1995) and of Richmond (9 November 1995), each of which was addressed to Dr. Shudo Yamazaki, Director General of the NIID. We had the copies of these letters made from the originals that were submitted to the court as the defendant's documentary evidences No. 43 and No. 45.

In contrast, the signatures O-2 and R-2 are copies of the signatures from their report.

I think that the signatures O-1 and R-1 must be genuine, because they are each from letters of Oviatt and Richmond. But it did not seem even to the eyes of untrained observers that each of signatures O-1 and O-2, as well as each of signatures R-1 and R-2, was signed by the same person. The signatures are copies of the signatures in the letters of Oviatt (8 November 1995) and of Richmond (9 November 1995), each of which was addressed to Dr. Shudo Yamazaki, Director General of the NIID. We had the copies of these letters made from the originals that were submitted to the court as the defendant's documentary evidences No. 43 and No. 45.

Therefore, we asked a leading expert on handwriting analysis to give us an expert opinion on the signatures. He was Mr. Kazuyoshi Ichikawa, a former chief researcher of handwriting analysis at the Institute of Police Science attached to the National Police Agency and then a lecturer of forensic medicine at the Nippon University. *He carefully examined the signatures in question and reported that they were surely forged by another person.*

On this basis, on 19 June 1998, *we accused some leading staff of the NIID of the crime of forgery of an important legal*

document before the Tokyo Prosecutors' Office. At this stage, the Japanese mass media generally did not give much coverage to the case. Only after the police have arrested an accused or the prosecutors' office has brought an accusation against the accused does the mass media give big coverage to such an accusation.

But in this case, the daily *Tokyo Shimbun* (20 June 1998) gave major coverage to our accusation. According to the newspaper article, the NIID reportedly refused to answer questions raised by its reporter. A few months later, the 7 September 1998 issue of *AERA*, one of *Asahi Shimbun's* most prestigious weeklies in Japan, published a detailed report under the title "The NIID forged the signatures of two U.S. scientists."

On 2 July 1998, the Tokyo Prosecutors' Office officially accepted our accusation. As the crime was committed behind closed doors at the NIID, we could not identify the name(s) of the criminal(s), but we suggested that Dr. Shudo Yamazaki, Director General of the NIID and/or Dr. Takeshi Kurata, Director of the Department of Pathology of the NIID, were surely involved in the crime.

There is no doubt that such a forgery should be considered not only as one of the most serious crimes committed against the court by a governmental scientific institute, but also as one of the most shameful crimes against all scientists here and abroad. *It should be regarded not only as one of the most infamous scandals in the Japanese history of jurisprudence and science but of the world as well.*

Immediately after the disclosure of the crime of forgery committed by the NIID, we sent a fax message of inquiry about the signatures to both Mr. Oviatt and Dr. Richmond. We only asked them whether or not the signatures in question were their own. They never replied.

A few weeks later, we called Oviatt and Richmond and asked their opinion on the forgery. *To our amazement, they replied without flinching that they had, in fact, allowed the leading staff of the NIID to sign their names.* Oviatt said that he was writing to the Tokyo District Court (TDC) to testify that he certainly had allowed the NIID to sign his name. Richmond also said that the

same report, this time with their “genuine signatures and new dates,” would be submitted to the TDC.

On the 2 October 1998, having been forced to respond to our accusation, the NIID could not but submit to the TDC a copy of the “new” report of its inspection, this time with what it called “true” signatures of O/R, together with copies of Oviatt’s letter of 30 June and of Richmond’s letter of 1 July 1998, both of which were addressed to Dr. Kurata. *By virtue of these submissions, O/R confessed that the crime of forgery had been committed by Kurata with their approval.*

As to the newly submitted report, the signatures in question seemed to be “true,” but it was strange that, again, neither of the two signatures was dated. (Oviatt is retired in Scotland, while Richmond lives in Georgia, in the United States.) I have already suggested the reason why the previous and undated version of the O/R report was submitted to the TDC 12 days later than the deadline.

Richmond, in his above letter, called their report “the report dated June 18, 1997.” Such a date is nothing but a fiction, because it is the date that the inspections by the two different groups of the inspectors—that is, the British group on behalf of us, the plaintiffs as well as the U.S. one on behalf of the NIID, the defendant—took place at the laboratories of the NIID. The fact that there were still no dates of the signatures in the new version of the O/R report suggested that it was impossible for O/R to date the report. This fact again cast doubt on the so-called “true” signatures of O/R.

In the forged version of the report, Richmond titled himself as “Director, Office of Health and Safety, WHO Collaborating Centre for Applied Biosafety Programmes and Training[,] Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.” But in the new version, he deleted these titles. This means that he intentionally assumed that the official and prestigious title used in the forged version would deceive the TDC, the plaintiffs, the public, and the scientific community here and abroad. Nevertheless, he neither gave the reasons for nor apologized for his deception about the title to the TDC and others.

The letter of Oviatt deserves to be cited: “This letter affirms that I asked and authorized you to *reproduce my signature* and *affix* it to the report” (emphasis added).

The letter of Richmond also deserves to be cited: “I gave you *permission to ‘sign my name’ to the final* report. . . . I understand at the time that there was a need to file the report *in a timely manner* and that there was not *time to get our signatures*” (emphasis added).

It is noteworthy that the word “final” report suggests that there was a prior report, and that *the final one was completed by Kurata. It was finally printed using an NIID printer.* So it appears that Oviatt honestly wrote that he asked Kurata to “affix” his reproduced signature to the final report.

In a similar way, Richmond also confessed, “there was not *time to get our signatures.*” If the final one was completed and printed by O/R themselves, they would have never written in such a way, “there was not *time to get our signatures.*”

So the letters of O/R themselves confessed that the *final* text was completed and printed by the NIID, and that Kurata, who had to “*get our (O/R) signatures,*” asked *permission* to “*reproduce my (Oviatt’s) signature*” or to “*sign my (Richmond’s) name*” from O/R, and that *then*, O/R gave him “*permission.*” In this case, there is no doubt that *Kurata initiated the request “to get their signatures.”* Responding to the request, then, O/R gave him the “*permission.*” If not, O/R should have never used the word “*permission.*”

Richmond confirmed, “there was a need to file the report *in a timely manner*” and “there was *not time* to get our signatures.” Nevertheless, the O/R report was submitted to the TDC twelve days later than the deadline, that is, not in a timely manner. O/R did not explain why, how, and when “there was not time.” I have already explained how the wantonly secretive behavior was conspiratorially aided by O/R after the NIID had received the C/K report, which was filed in a timely manner. Why didn’t O/R and the NIID explain why “there was not time to get O/R signatures” to the TDC and the public?

I believe it is clear how O/R were completely and miserably caught in their own trap. Is there any value to scientific and

documentary evidence in such an undated report containing the so-called “true” signatures of O/R, accompanied with so unreasonably argued letters written by such self-styled coauthors?

Two principles of modern civil society: Juridical considerations on the case of forgery by the NIID and two U.S. inspectors

Several well-known important juridical principles are accepted in modern civil society. The U.S. Declaration of Independence asserts that we are endowed with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as well as the right and duty of revolution (Shibata 1977, 1987, and 1997b). In connection with the subject of this paper, here I would like to draw attention to *two other important juridical principles of our society* in regard to world-wide accepted practice for the proper identification and submission of legal documentation. One is *the correct identification of the individual*. Another is *the proper dating of documentation by the individual submitter*.

As for the first principle, there should be no need to explain its juridical implication. Modern civil society is based on mutual respect for the dignity and identity of individual parties in any legal proceeding. Without such a principle, modern civil jurisprudence in society could not exist. But how is it possible for any person to express his or her own dignity and identify oneself an individual personality to another person? How is it possible in the legal process for each person to recognize and/or identify another person as an individual personality? As I understand it, it is possible *only with and/or through signature of his/her own name* upon any documentation submitted to a court as part of any legal procedure.

As for the second principle, as a matter of fact, Americans, Europeans, Japanese, and many other people always date any documents and letters when they sign their names on them, especially if these writings are to serve a legal purpose. Why? The reason is that by doing so, they want and/or are asked to confirm the legal validity of their signatures for the purposes of establishing their legal rights, duties, and responsibilities. Therefore, it would be no exaggeration to say that *any undated signature is*

legally invalid in modern civil society. Indeed, there is, in the modern world, very little official or legal documentation upon which signature(s) of the submitting parties/party remain(s) undated. In fact, modern civil society is nothing but *a society controlled and registered with references to and indications of time.* Therefore, from a legal point of view, to intentionally omit either of these two principles undermines the universally accepted documentary content essential to the conduct of proper legal procedure in our modern civil society.

Accordingly, *an act of forgery of signature(s)* on any official or private document as well as *an act of its use* in the legal process should be considered as a serious crime and punished severely by the criminal law. In Japan, the act of forgery of private documentation and an act of its use are indictable offenses, carrying a maximum five years imprisonment according to Articles 160 and 161 of the Criminal Law.

To my knowledge, however, there are very few juridical studies on the implications of forged signatures and dating as these pertain to the accepted juridical principles of the modern civil society. I submit that this scarcity exists due to the overwhelmingly accepted practice of signing and dating documentation involved in the legal process.

In light of these principles, what are the juridical implications of the forgery acts on the part of Dr. Kurata, Mr. Oviatt, and Dr. Richmond?

Of course, Kurata would justify his behavior by simply insisting that he is not guilty of the forgery because he was “permitted” to “reproduce their signatures” by O/R, while O/R would reply that they also should not be denounced for the conspiracy either because they, too, had “permitted” Kurata to “reproduce their signatures.”

In reply to such arguments, I would like to remind them of the principles explained above—that in our modern civil society, it is only an independent citizen who is qualified to sign *his or her own name.* No citizen is allowed to sign the name of another person without following proper legal procedure.

Furthermore, I believe it is essential to have answers to the following questions:

Why did not Oviatt ask Kurata to “sign the name of Kurata on behalf of Mr. Oviatt”? *Doing so represents the common sense and morals of any citizen, including scientists, who follows proper legal procedure in any modern civil society.* Nevertheless, Oviatt, *ignoring common procedure*, authorized Kurata to “reproduce my signature.” Why did O/R allow Kurata to sign “Vinson R. Oviatt and Jonathan Y. Richmond,” not “Takeshi Kurata on behalf of Oviatt and Richmond”? By letting Kurata sign the signatures “Vinson R. Oviatt and Jonathan Y. Richmond,” O/R submitted the conspiratorially produced report to the court in order to pretend that it was a “genuine” report written only by O/R.

Even if O/R had allowed Kurata to reproduce their signatures, that does not justify the latter signing “Vinson R. Oviatt and Jonathan Y. Richmond,” because it is clear that Kurata is not Oviatt and Richmond. Whether O/R permitted it or not, it was a crime of forgery for Kurata to sign the signatures of O/R, because by doing so, he intentionally deceived the court, the plaintiffs, lawyers, scientists, and the public into taking the bogus report as a genuine one.

Thus, the TDC had been deceived into accepting the bogus report as genuine documentary evidence. We ourselves had been deceived into believing that it was a genuine one. So, we made many copies of it and distributed them among scientists and editors of scientific journals, here and abroad, asking for their comments. Therefore, not only we, but also many scientists here and abroad, including Drs. Collins and Kennedy, have been deceived into reading it as a genuine one.

To refute the arguments of Kurata and C/R, it would be enough to offer the following example:

Suppose a buyer A bought a valuable thing from C and paid for it with a check with a forged signature of his friend B with the approval of B, and in such a way that A and B together committed the crime of fraud against C. One year later, C found the signature forged and the check voided, and accused A of a crime of fraud before a prosecutors’ office.

As a result, only after having been forced by the accusation, A asked B to give him a check with “true” signature of B but

without a date, and then A submitted the check to C, along with a letter from B which says: "At that time I gave A permission to reproduce my signature" because "there was not time for A to get my signature." And, without any apology, A asks C to accept the check, shouting to C and the concerned prosecutor, "You are wrong. I am not guilty of the crime of forgery!" Do you think that C should accept such a check?

I am sure that nobody would support A's argument. Anybody would certainly contend that A and B must be accused of the crimes of fraud and conspiracy which were committed against C.

Is there any difference between the crime committed by A and B and the crime of forgery committed by Kurata aided by O/R? Nobody would dare to say that A and B as well as Kurata and O/R are not guilty of the crime. Furthermore, anybody would surely say that *the crime committed by Kurata and O/R is more serious and dangerous to the public and humankind as a whole* than the one committed by A and B. The reasons are as follows:

In this case, "A" is not only an institution of the government of Japan, but also the governmental laboratory which deals with emerging new pathogens and unknown genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the danger and risk of which can only be recognized through an infection among residents and the public. Kurata, as the institute's Director of the Department of Pathology, committed the crime of forgery of the institute's safety and environmental impact inspection report in order to deceive the TDC, the plaintiffs, the public, and the scientific community.

"B" represents the two U.S. scientists. To repeat the above description, one of them was the prestigious Head of the Environmental Health & Safety Division at the NIH, Bethesda, and the other assumed the official and prestigious title as "Director, Office of Health and Safety, WHO Collaborating Centre for Applied Biosafety Programmes and Training [,] Centres for Disease Control and Prevention." They conspired with Kurata against "C," that is, the TDC, the plaintiffs, the public, and the scientific community in Japan, pretending "NIID poses no biosafety threat to the outside surrounding community as a

consequence of its work with infectious diseases” in one of the most populated residential areas in the very center of Tokyo. Of course, the O/R report did not submit any scientific proof for such a pretension (Collins and Kennedy 1997a, Shibata 1997b).

Implications of the forgery for morals, science of safety, public health, and human rights

As to the conspiracy of O/R, it is incredible that the two U.S. scientists, who were asked by the court to submit an experts’ report on the inspection of the so-called “safety” condition in and around the NIID, allowed the inspected laboratory to “reproduce their signatures.” It is nothing but a shameful corruption among scientists in the light of morals, science of safety, public health, and human rights in our civil society.

It is again unbelievable that such well-reputed scientists as Mr. Oviatt and Dr. Richmond could be implicated in these forgeries. Such behavior seriously harms the reputation of the U.S. scientific community.

The conspiracy of Mr. Oviatt and Dr. Richmond, in conjunction with the NIID, leads one to wonder whether further phenomena of such shameful behavior exists elsewhere among U.S. and Japanese laboratory scientists involved in the fields of infectious diseases, biotechnology, and science of safety.

The poor arguments in the letters of O/R reminded me of the term “colonial science.” This term was used to characterize the attitude of U.S. scientists to atomic survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by a U.S. science historian (Lindee 1994). Lindee, now Professor of History of Science at the University of Pennsylvania, studied the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) as one of the Occupational Agencies of the U.S. Army. She also studied the Japanese National Institute of Health (JNIH), the Hiroshima and Nagasaki branches of which were set up in the same rooms in the same buildings as the ABCC. The JNIH intimately cooperated with the ABCC in loyally following the U.S. Army’s nontreatment policy toward survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ABCC was a typical example of “colonial science” institute. It was helped by the JNIH, the institute of

“persons of a relatively inferior caliber” (Lindee 1994), in dealing with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors as human guinea pigs. The ABCC tried to collect information about the aftereffect of the atomic radiation on these survivors in order to contribute further toward the development of nuclear weaponry (Shibata 1996).

Do not the O/R reports with the forged signatures and the so-called “true” signatures of O/R, together with their two letters, smell like “colonial science”? Does not the submission of forged documentation display contempt for our judges, residents, the public, and the scientific community while simultaneously revealing O/R’s racist attitude of “colonial science”? How can these scientists so arrogantly and unlawfully justify their crimes of forgery and conspiracy before our court, public, and scientific community?

Why did Dr. Kurata, as one of the leading staff of the NIID, commit such a grave crime of forgery?

In this respect, it is necessary to understand the origin and history of the JNIIH-NIID. It was established on 21 May 1947 by the order of the U.S. Occupation Forces. It was staffed with many medical scientists who cooperated with the biological warfare (BW) crime committed by the Japanese Imperial Army during the period of its invasion of Asian and Pacific countries. All directors general and almost all vice-directors general of the JNIIH, during the period from its establishment to the beginning of the 1980s, were BW scientists. Thus, the JNIIH inherited the legacy of the BW forgery corps of medical scientists. The principle of their forgery morals has always been that “the end justifies the means” (Williams and Wallace 1989; Shibata 1990, and 1997a; Gold 1996; Harris 1994 and 1995—the critique in Harris 1995 of the human experiments committed by the JNIIH deserves to be noted).

To cite from Lindee, the JNIIH remained “an emphatic Occupation agency” throughout the Occupation. Not only that. The JNIIH continued to provide services to the ABCC from 1947 through 1975, and together they intimately cooperated to infringe on the human rights of atomic survivors (Shibata 1996).

Another of the hidden aims of the U.S. Occupation Forces, which ordered the establishment of the JNIH, was to have it cooperate with the U.S. Army's 406th Medical Laboratory, an Asian unit of the U.S. Army's center of BW research institutes at Fort Detrick, Frederick, Maryland. Unit 406 supervised and controlled the JNIH from its establishment through the middle of the 1960s. Many cooperative research projects between the JNIH and the U.S. Army's institutes can be documented from its establishment until the end of the 1980s. As a matter of fact, Dr. Kurata himself was reportedly financed by one of these U.S. Army's institutes (Shibata 1997a).

In 1997, in face of wide public denunciation of its many misdeeds, the JNIH could not but change its tarnished name to the NIID. But the unscientific, unethical, and inhumane tradition of the BW scientists in the JNIH was not reformed, but simply and directly inherited by the leading staff, including Dr. Kurata, of the renamed NIID.

The NIID and Dr. Kurata have never apologized to the TDC and the public for their crime of forgery. Not only that. In spite of public denunciation, the NIID, in appreciation of the misdeeds of Dr. Kurata, arrogantly promoted him to the post of its Vice-Director General on 1 April 1999! He is expected to become its Director-General in a few years! Such is typical of the morals, the science of safety, and the bioethics of the NIID.

As a proverb says, "Birds of a feather flock together." Thus it would be no exaggeration to say that O/R were purposely invited by their colleagues in Japan to deliberately reveal their "colonial science" before the eyes of our court, public, and scientists who, alternatively and passionately, speak out for "independent science." In this respect, the conspiracy of O/R and the NIID was no accident. It deserves to be carefully studied as a textbook on "colonial science" and as a blatant case of how science and scientists can both become corrupted.

What would occur if our court should happen to favor the report conspiratorially produced by the NIID and O/R and to ignore the scientific warning expressed by the Collins/Kennedy report? Although it seems to be unlikely, it would predictably encourage every development adverse not only to the new

regulations on the locations of laboratories of pathogens (WHO 1997) with which we can agree, but also the expected promotion of the public health and improvement of biosafety in the NIID. It would also disastrously encourage almost all other laboratories of pathogens and GMOs to ignore legislative regulations against the potential misconducts of these laboratories. Finally, it would seriously undermine efforts to maintain strong environmental protection in the age of emerging new pathogens and biotechnology. We should never allow our courts to make these terrible mistakes.

In the case of such an adverse ruling, we cannot deny that there is a possibility that an outbreak of infectious disease with an unknown new emerging pathogen and GMOs may occur. Should this terrible event take place among residents around the NIID at the very center of Tokyo and other laboratories, it is not alarmist to predict that such an outbreak could possibly immediately cross borders and spread to all the corners of the world. As previously experienced in the case of the HIV, E. coli O-157, and so on, such scenarios have already occurred. Is there a more serious threat to humankind in our age of newly emerging pathogens?

As we saw in the BW crimes of Japanese medical scientists and the cover-up of the crimes by their U.S. colleagues (Williams and Wallace 1989; Shibata 1990 and 1996; Harris 1994 and 1995), *science without conscience is nothing but the corruption and destruction of science itself. We have just witnessed the phantom of their second generation in the JNIIH-NIID and O/R.* It is a grave warning for all people and the public who are concerned about the future of humankind in our age.

We have to redouble our energy to promote the science of safety and biosafety, as well as morals, bioethics, public health, and human rights in our age. Your kind help and expression of deep concern would be greatly appreciated.

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1356; E-mail: <sshibata @mb.infoweb.ne.jp>. More detailed information about the JNIIH-NIID and our civil rights campaign against it is be available through our website <<http://village.infoweb.ne.jp/~yoken/>>.

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BOOKS AND IDEAS

by *Herbert Aptheker*

Washington and Latin American dictatorships

In the closing decades of the twentieth century, Washington played a decisive role in bringing into power and then supporting murderous right-wing governments in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Panama. In connection with the arrest of Pinochet of Chile, public disclosure of this terrible reality has reached the point where even the *New York Times* has published some of the ghastly details, as in its issues of 11 August and 30 September 1999.

Those details include reports from the CIA to Washington: “The military (in Chile) is rounding up large numbers of people, including students and leftists of all descriptions . . . 300 students were killed when they refused to surrender. The bloodshed goes on.” The *Times* account (July 1) states that five thousand people were killed when Allende was seized and murdered; “thousands more died or were tortured at the hands of the military during General Pinochet’s rule.” This account adds that “the Chilean College of Medicine reported that at least 200,000 people had been tortured by Government forces” during his rule.

The report also notes that the highest Washington officials—Kissinger is mentioned—knew what was going on with the connivance of those officials.

As in Chile, so in Paraguay. During one period of a prisoner’s interrogation, “the police telephoned his (the victim’s) wife so she would hear his screams under torture!” (*New York Times*, 11 August 1999). There has now been “unearthed a mountain of records detailing repression among United States-backed

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military regimes throughout South America during the cold war.” In one country, Paraguay, were documents showing the “arrest, interrogation and disappearance of thousands of political prisoners” by this regime supported by the United States.

The newly released documents show that South American dictatorships backed by the United States carried out the “extermination of thousands of political opponents.” The officials of these South American dictatorships were trained at the School of the Americas located in Panama. Military regimes, the *Times* belatedly observes, “used the club of anti-Communism to snuff out calls for democracy or labor rights.” This *Times* report notes continued resistance from present South American governments to release fully relevant documents. Indeed, the present director of archives in Paraguay stated that the documents so far released “have been sanitized.” Present South American governments have warned relatives of victims “not to challenge the move.” Even presently “the F.B.I. defended the sharing of information” with these torture-regimes and: “A State Department spokesman declined to comment on the record of U. S. cooperation with the South American dictatorships, saying it was ‘ancient history.’”

When (some) of the Nazi murderers tried at Nuremberg were executed, there was no defense claim of “ancient history.” That came later, when it was Washington’s desire to employ the accomplices of those murderers. Then the atrocities of the Nazis became “ancient history,” and the surviving perpetrators became valued allies of the “free world.”

The history is not “ancient” at all, and those who fashioned that history are now distinguished elder statesmen like Henry Kissinger. What a cesspool of Wall Street’s servants awaits revolutionary cleansing!

Center for Constitutional Rights

The fall 1999 report of the Center for Constitutional Rights is available. This hundred-page document details the recent efforts of the Center to enforce the “constitutional rights” enunciated in the documents penned by our revolutionary founders. Any readers of this department who do not know the Center’s work are

denying themselves an important source not only of precious knowledge but also of great encouragement. Here is a splendid force serving the cause of human dignity. The Center's address: 666 Broadway, 7th floor, New York, NY 10012; phone: (212) 614-6484.

The Church and the Nazis

Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII by John Cornwell (New York: Viking, 1999, 430 pp., \$29.95) is a book of enormous consequence. Its publication provoked a discussion consuming a full page in the *New York Times*, 3 November 1999. The weight of the *Times* story is to stimulate doubt about the volume. Significantly, its final paragraph quotes at length Father Peter Gumpel (his photo dominates much of the page), the Church's official biographer of Pius XII and supporter of the effort to accord him the status of sainthood. Naturally, the Reverend Gumpel concludes that "the man merits to be beatified."

Who is the man with such merit?

John Cornwell, the author of *Hitler's Pope*, is Senior Research Fellow at Jesus College in England. He began the research for this book "convinced that if his full story were told, Pius XII's pontificate would be vindicated." He reports that he was given access to the papers of the late pope, for he "reassured those who had charge of the appropriate archives that I was on the side of my subject." But after years of research, he writes, "I found myself in a state I can only describe as moral shock." He discovered that by 1933 this pope "had drawn the Catholic Church into complicity with the darkest forces of the era" and that he "betrayed an undeniable antipathy toward the Jews."

Cornwell does not fail to show that this pope's reactionary and anti-Semitic character was in accord with the history of the Church. Paul IV, in the sixteenth century, for example, "instituted the ghetto and the wearing of the yellow badge" (26). Cornwell makes explicit that "Catholic prejudices bolstered aspects of Nazi anti-Semitism" (28). He brings forth the foul history of the Church in instances such as the Dreyfus case: a Jesuit monthly commented at that time, "The Jew was created by God to act the traitor everywhere" (45).

Pacelli, as Cardinal Secretary of State, “favored a quiescent, docile Church and collaborated with the Nazi Party” in opposition to the Catholic Center Party, which represented the final obstacle to Hitler’s usurpation of ultimate power (47).

Cornwell himself is profoundly hostile to the Socialist and Communist opposition to Hitler—thus he refers to the Socialist leadership in Munich challenging Hitler as an “unelected ragtag of workers’ councils.” He calls the government there, which held power briefly, as a “ragtag of workers’ councils” that was “both ludicrous and doomed” (74). Cardinal Pacelli actively supported the White Brigades. In general, he led the Church’s reactionary efforts paving the way for Hitler; his actions helped “to deliver the powerful institution of the Catholic Church in Germany into the hands of Hitler” (85).

The profound racism of Pacelli as cardinal and pope is demonstrated in both world wars (95). He hailed Mussolini as “a man sent by Providence” (114). The author demonstrates that the Nazis never won a majority in the period prior to Hitler’s seizure of power. Indeed, in the last relatively free election (1932), the Nazis’ vote declined by two million, and party membership dropped significantly (131). Hitler’s seizure of absolute power was helped by Pacelli’s favoring that outcome.

Thereafter, the Church acted “in complicity with a racist and anti-Semitic government” (154). Cardinal Pacelli did not protest Hitler’s atrocities, even including the murder of some of his Catholic opponents (166). The pope of the war years, and to his death, was “Hitler’s Pope”; he was “not only an ideal pope for the Nazis’ Final Solution, but a hypocrite” (297).

The book includes significant material on the interference by Washington in Italy’s postwar politics. The United States and the Vatican contributed decisively to the failure of the Left in postwar Italy to come to power

The pope’s final years—marked by mental lapses and illusions—are called “a catastrophe” (342). Cornwell concludes that the evidence shows Pius XII to have been “a deeply flawed human being from whom Catholics, and our relations with other religions, can best profit by expressing our sincere regret” (384).

The effort to exonerate this pope now being vigorously conducted (as shown in the *New York Times* of 3 November 1999) is powerful and must be combatted by all favoring simple decency, not to speak of democratic progress.

A lovely memoir

A good antidote to the filth of Pius XII is the lovely book by Mindy Thompson Fullilove, *The House of Joshua: Meditations on Family and Place* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, 160 pp., \$20). This African American psychiatrist—so far devoting her young life to helping the sick of Harlem—has produced a lovely book, with deep insights. Thus: “These days, the United States is neither a melting pot nor a tossed salad but rather the crossroads of the world. Everybody from everywhere is here. Though the variety can be bewildering it also has a breathtaking charm” (27).

The author’s father (whom I knew) was a potent fighter for Black liberation; she writes beautifully of him: “If heaven happened to be racist or sexist or exploitative, my dad would surely take it on. I cannot think of Dad scolding God without feeling sorry for the Almighty” (28). She writes lovingly of her mother (a white person), who never failed to throw herself against barriers. An example: “A sales clerk would fail to see that she and I were together. My mother would say, ‘This is my daughter.’ She would smile proudly and squeeze my hand” (43).

With two such parents, the author comes out healthy and a battler. And she chooses a husband who is a battler like her parents, including being deep in Mississippi. Some of the book’s finest pages describe his work in that copy of hell (91ff).

Her choice to pursue healing has a splendid credo that begins, “I believe in the sanctity of the human spirit,” and ends, “I believe that medical care must be delivered in places that are open, respectful, and welcoming of all who need healing” (88).

Yes, after reading the account of “Hitler’s Pope,” it is refreshing to read Mindy Thompson Fullilove. Her book is as sweet as is her name—and her person.

Book Reviews

Redbook: Stalin and the Jews: The Tragic History of the Jewish Antifascist Committee and the Soviet Jews (Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden: die tragische Geschichte des Jüdischen Antifaschistischen Komitees und der sowjetischen Juden). By Arno Lustiger. Berlin: Aufbau, 1998. 430 pages, 49.90 DM. In German.

[This review was originally published in *Unsere Zeit*, 12 February 1999, 15.]

On a stay in Moscow in the autumn of 1981, I stood in the well-known graveyard at the Monastery of the Virgin before the grave of Solomon Losovsky. I knew his name from the protocols of the Congresses of the Communist Internationals, in which he participated as the leader of the Red International of Labor Unions. I was completely surprised by the hint from my young Muscovite companion that this world-famous leading Communist had been sentenced to death in 1952 and executed. In spite of the fact that he had been rehabilitated by 1955, I could discover nothing more specific about the circumstances leading to the murder of this 74-year-old Party and Soviet functionary, who was organizing with the Bolsheviks by 1905. The rehabilitation remained just as secret as the trial conducted against him and his fellow defendants from the Jewish Antifascist Committee (JAFC). The protocol of that trial was only first published in 1994 in Moscow.

Arno Lustiger occupies himself with this trial in his *Redbook: Stalin and the Jews*. Indeed, this book is far more than a trial report. It provides information about the history of the Jewish

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population of Russia and the Soviet Union, depicting the consequences for their living conditions of historical events and ideological positions, as well as the often contradictory, changing relationships among the Soviet government, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and the Jewish portion of the population.

The author, a survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, has made it his task to counter legends according to which the Jews allowed themselves to be led without resistance to the fascist slaughtering block. In several publications he has detailed the active resistance of the Jews, such as their contribution to the international brigades in Spain. When he reports on and works out the Jewish share in the struggle of the Soviet peoples against fascism, he also includes here the reasons why, after 1948, the publication of a so-called Black Book about the Jewish people's share in the struggle of the Soviet peoples was unwelcome in the USSR. In 1994, Lustiger published this Black Book on the basis of a manuscript left behind by Ilya Ehrenburg.

To be frank: Lustiger is no friend of the October Revolution and the Soviet government. Therefore, arguments are possible about certain evaluations, and one must directly contradict some others, such as when he maintains that Stalin began the Cold War in his speech at the Voters Congress on 7 February 1946. Nonetheless, Lustiger is also no adherent of the position equating Stalin with Hitler. He works out the essential differences, taking a stance against historians like Ernst Nolte and the authors of the anti-Communist *Black Book of Communism* [see following review in this issue of *Nature, Society, and Thought*]. For him, the difference presents itself thus:

Hitler openly proclaimed anti-Semitism. Stalin never dared to detach himself completely from the international tradition of Socialism and Communism. . . . Only by renaming Jews, as well as Soviet citizens loyal to the regime and therefore opponents of the Jewish state in Palestine, as "Zionists" could he persecute them with ideological conformity. . . . Contrary to the all-consuming racial mania of Hitler that saw in humans of Jewish blood an enemy that had to be destroyed, Stalin's desire was to

extirpate Jewish nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Stalin wanted to wipe out Jewish culture and the national consciousness of the Jews, Hitler the Jews as a people. . . . Had Stalin been a second Hitler, the struggle of the JAFIC would have been for Stalin's side an absurdity. Indeed, the historical truth . . . was something else. Notwithstanding the tragedy of the annihilation of the committee's members, . . . their struggle alongside the Soviet regime against Hitler was a bitter necessity to which there was, not only for Soviet Jews, no alternative. After we have pursued . . . in detail the persecutions and crimes . . . against Soviet Jews, it is essential to remember the millions of Soviet soldiers who fell in the struggle against Hitler's Germany. . . . Without their sacrifice the world would have been lost; they saved us from the rule of murderous Nazism.

The formation of the JAFIC and its accomplishments

The Jewish Antifascist Committee came into being in December 1941, endeavoring to develop solidarity with the fighting Soviet people among the Jews of the whole world, who were threatened with annihilation by Hitler fascism. Similar antifascist committees with comparable tasks were the pan-Slavic, the youth, the women's, and the scientists' committees. The Jewish committee proved itself as the most effective. In the United States and other countries, it collected forty-five million dollars in private contributions to the Red Army. Through its work more than seven hundred articles promoting the recognition of the Soviet Union were published. Two members of the committee were able to establish contact during a trip of some seven months with untold thousands of U.S. citizens, appealing for solidarity with the Soviet ally, which bore the major burden of the struggle against Hitler.

The genocide committed against hundreds of thousands of Jews immediately at the beginning of the attack on the Soviet Union expedited a national bond in that portion of Soviet citizens of Jewish heritage, who had hardly yet considered themselves Jews, rather than part of the Russian people. Since anti-Jewish sentiments also appeared in wartime, with anti-Semitic

undercurrents coming to the fore in such views, and since Jewish citizens preponderantly fled into the hinterland, it fell to the committee to display as much material as possible about the active contribution of Jews in the struggle against fascism. For all that, around 500,000 Jews fought in the Red Army, and some 30,000 with partisans. Because within the old borders before 1939 the Jewish population numbered around three million, and because those additional Jews in the western areas nearly completely fell victim to the fascists, the Jewish proportion of combatants was hardly surpassed by any other population group. Innumerable soldiers and officers received high commendations, and Jewish officers commanded divisions and armies.

The Jewish writers Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassily Grossmann were probably the best known war correspondents. Under their leadership, materials about the active contribution of Jewish Soviet soldiers were collected. They also participated decisively in the gathering of material about the fascist genocide of Soviet Jews for the Black Book that was supposed to appear in several languages in the Soviet Union as well as in the United States, with the cooperation of U.S. authors and for which Albert Einstein wrote a foreword. In 1944, more than five hundred pages were sent to the United States via the Soviet Foreign Ministry. The Soviet edition never appeared. While Stalin in his last years did not grow tired of propagating the special accomplishment of the Russian people and of celebrating uncritically the heroes of Russia's czarist history, exposure of the Jewish contribution to the Soviet Union remained unwelcome.

Out of accomplishments came reasons for indictment

The then-desired cooperation with U.S. antifascists during the war, as well as contact with Zionist personalities, became an onus for leading figures of the JAFC after the onset of the Cold War. They were charged with promoting Jewish nationalism, with being the bearers of an anti-Soviet cosmopolitanism. Jewish influence in culture and science was drastically curtailed, as Lustiger proves with many facts.

Even though the Soviet Union had asserted its support in the United Nations for the establishment of the state of Israel and

was first to recognize it, and even though, as an ally of the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had delivered weapons to the Israeli army, the germinating hopes for a positive domestic position on Soviet-Jewish culture were disappointed. Since the political expectations in the Israeli state also did not bear fruition, anti-Zionist propaganda grew stronger, and the charge of Zionism was insinuated even against those Jews who had supported Soviet governmental policies. In 1948, the JAFIC was disbanded. At the end of the year, the arrests began. Those initially arrested included Molotov's wife, candidate for the Central Committee of the CPSU, who was sentenced to five years imprisonment for anti-Soviet activity.

To the particular reproaches against the leading people of the JAFIC belonged a suggestion—put to Stalin in 1944—to create in addition to the Far-Eastern Jewish autonomous region of Birobidzhan a Jewish settlement area on the Crimean peninsula. Jewish farmer settlements had already been established there in the 1930s, which also developed with the aid of foreign Jewish organizations. That suggestion was rejected; yet in the trial it was insinuated that the accused had desired to transform the Crimea into a Zionist state separate from the Soviet Union and that they had made a pact with the United States.

All these reproaches were denied by the accused during the proceedings before the military court in 1952. Like all other committees, the JAFIC had acted under the direction of the Central Committee and the government. Even during trips to foreign countries, every contact was reported. As a member of the Central Committee, in his function as deputy foreign minister and a representative leader of the Information Bureau, formed at the war's onset, Losovsky had overseen the activities of all antifascist committees, important instruments of Soviet foreign policy. That judgment was firmly established as fact even before the trial began. The presiding judge even had doubts about the fabricated accusation. His suggestions for a new hearing of witnesses was rejected, however, and he delivered the sentence demanded: the death penalty for the twelve.

Among the executed were longtime party members, world-famous literary figures, and also two women who had done only

technical work for the committee. Not executed was the sole female member of the Academy of Sciences, Lisa Stern, bearer of the Stalin Prize. She was sentenced to three years imprisonment and five years exile. After her rehabilitation, she was the only one who could report on the fate of those others accused, a fate about which the other members were never once informed.

The trial against the members of the JAFK was the last great terror trial during Stalin's life. The trial planned and propagandized against doctors, primarily Jewish, never took place because of the death of Stalin. These doctors were to have been accused of alleged murder plots against Stalin and other functionaries.

Between promotion and anti-Semitism

In the Soviet Union, a state of many ethnic groups, the Jews formed the sixth largest nationality, with three million in 1939. In contrast to other peoples, they had no territory of their own. From the beginning, the question of their national perspective (also in the workers' movement) was answered in a variety of ways. Russia's first socialist organization, the Bund (General Jewish Workers Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia), was formed by Jewish workers. They demanded nevertheless national autonomy, since they were exposed not only to social, but also to nationalistic and racist persecution during the reign of the czar. Bolsheviks and Mensheviks rejected a special national organization; they persisted in the principle of a class organization completely unifying all nationalities.

Lustiger makes clear that those in the Bund who aligned themselves, for the most part, with the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution were no Zionists, since they stood up for the rights of Jewish workers in Russia and not for their emigration to Palestine. And he also demonstrates that there were different positions, determined by class, within Zionist organizations.

Communists of Jewish heritage, who were active as leading forces in the Leninist Party, had detached themselves in the main from Jewish culture and lifestyle, feeling themselves to be Russians. Lenin stood decidedly against anti-Semitism; indeed, he differentiated among the Jews, like all other peoples, according to their class affiliation.

The question whether one was supposed to promote the formation and development of a Jewish nation in the framework of the confederation of equally entitled Soviet peoples or support the assimilation of the Jews into the Russian people had different answers and was debated among Jews themselves. Thus, there was in the 1920s a widespread promotion of Yiddish language and culture with its own theater, literature, and schools. But this development came to a sudden end immediately before the outbreak of the war. The use of Jewish solidarity and will to resist, which arose out of the extermination policy of the fascists in the common struggle against Hitler, collided in postwar years with Stalin's promotion of the claim that the achievements of the Russian people established the leading position of the Russian nation.

Lustiger demonstrates this anti-Semitism—never openly expressed, but latently working in the consciousness—with many shocking details. He refers to the great proportion of Jews in trials against Communists in the early 1950s in the former people's democracies.

The *Redbook* stimulates us Communists to reconsider some of our history. Those national problems, like many other questions we saw as resolved in a society without capitalists, were in no way resolved. Many conceptual and behavioral aspects of that old society will still accompany a new society for a long time to come. To conceal these contradictions means to deepen them and to release new ones. The struggle against nationalism and every form of racism must, therefore, remain an unmistakable aspect of Communist policy today and in the future.

Addendum: "The Accused"

[The following, included in Judick's review, was taken from a declaration of the Party Oversight Commission for the Central Committee of the CPSU, published in *Izvestiya* 12 (1989). Quoted in *Schauprozesse unter Stalin*, Dietz, 1989.]

From May until July of 1952, the Military Academy of the Supreme Court of the USSR proceeded against a group of people who had a connection with the work of the Jewish Antifascist Committee. In this case, fifteen people were accused:

Losovsky, Solomon Abramovich: born 1878, member of CPSU since 1901. Leader of Soviet Information Bureau and professor of international relations at the Party School of CPSU.

Fefer, Isaac Solomonovich: born 1890, member of CPSU since 1915. Poet and secretary of JAFC.

Yussefovich, Yossif Sigismundovich: born 1890, member of CPSU since 1917. Scientific collaborator at the Institute for the History of Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

Shimeliovich, Boris Abramovich: born 1892, member of CPSU since 1920, chief physician.

Kwitko, Leiba Moisseyevich: born 1890, member of the CPSU since 1941, poet.

Markish, Perez Davidowich: born 1895, member of CPSU since 1942, poet, secretary of Review Commission of Writers' League of USSR.

Bergelson, David Raifovich: born 1884, poet.

Hofstein, David Naumovich: born 1889, member of CPSU since 1940, poet.

Suskin, Venyamin Lvovich: born 1889, artistic leader of Moscow State Jewish Theater.

Talmi, Leon Yakovievich: born 1893, journalist and translator for Soviet Information Bureau.

Watenberg, Ilya Semyonovich: born 1887, overseeing editor of state publishing house for foreign language, belletristic literature.

Teumin, Emilia Issakovna: born 1905, member of CPSU since 1927, editor in the international department of Soviet Information Bureau.

Watenburg-Ostrovskaya, Tschaika Semyonowna: born 1901, translator in JAFC.

Stern, Lina Solomonovna: born 1878, member of CPSU since 1938, member of Academy of Sciences, and director of Institute of Physiology.

Bregman, Solomon Leontyevich: born 1895, member of CPSU since 1912, deputy of the Minister of State Inspection of the RSFSR.

From 1948 to 1952, many other people of Jewish nationality—party and state functionaries, scientists, poets,

journalists, and employees of state institutions and industrial works (110 in all)—were charged with having committed espionage and actively having been anti-Soviet and nationalistic; they were arrested and made accountable in accordance with criminal law. . . . They all are today rehabilitated. . . . By decree of the Military Academy of the Supreme Court of the USSR (22 November 1955), the verdict against S. A. Losovsky, I. Fefer, and the others (who were convicted in the case against the Jewish Antifascist Committee, 18 July 1952) was rescinded in light of new evidence, and the proceedings were discontinued because of lack of evidence of a crime.

Günter Judick

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The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression. Edited by Stéphane Courtois et al. Translated by Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999. 858 pp. Originally published as *Livre noir du communisme*, Paris 1997.

[The following review is of the German edition, *Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus*, Berlin 1998.]

The antitotalitarian consensus that dominates the Federal Republic may express itself in the fact that a coworker of Joseph Goebbels could remain Chancellor, but a reverer of Ernst Thälmann could not remain a mailman.

—Hermann L. Gemliza

The Black Book of Communism contains contributions by eleven authors, mostly erstwhile Maoists, adherents of Pol Pot, and other former ultraleftists. “The ex-revolutionaries have

become useful like the elements of the former GDR-elite” (W. Walther, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 22 Oct. 1998). The book was translated into German in 1998 and was “enriched” by the contributions of two ex-clerics from the GDR.

The book’s main thesis reads thus: our century’s fundamental crime was not the Holocaust, but rather the existence of Communism. Through the manipulation of numbers—only twenty-five million human lives fell victim to Hitler, one hundred million to Communism worldwide—the impression is created that Communism is four times worse than fascism and that the Holocaust was not a uniquely evil crime. Courtois stated in an interview, “In my opinion, there is nothing exceptional about the Nazi genocide against the Jews” (*Die Zeit*, 21 Nov. 1997). Racial murder and class murder are said to be similar crimes. The cause for this crime is totalitarianism, resulting from one basic ideological-political orientation. Thus, Stalin is not the problem (as is the usual interpretation), but rather the ideology of Marxism itself, which is criminal from its inception. As a consequence, one must have nothing more to do with any form of Marxism, Communism, or socialism. And, so that this can be satisfactorily “given a foundation,” all Marxists have to be the same in the *Schwarzbuch*: Stalin and Allende, Pol Pot and Honecker, Mandela and Castro.

Behind this type of argumentation operates a by now rather old ideological-political stereotype of postrevolutionary bourgeois thinking. Accordingly, all of modernity’s basic defects derive from one system of ideas emerging from the Enlightenment with promises of freedom and utopias (those “grand narratives” of postmodernity), since these promises necessarily turn into totalitarianism. This point of view was expressed by Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1966), then by the so-called New Philosophers of France; now it is the basic theme of philosophical-political postmodernity.

Courtois starts from the book of his foster father, François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion* (1999). That work fits in the tradition of the conservative critique of revolution by Burke, Sybel, etc., which was taken over by certain liberal (for example, Alfred Weber) and conservative Catholic historians of political

theory. Accordingly, there are in Europe two such theoretical political streams: one starts from England and is oriented to consensus, compromise, and reforms; the other derives from Rousseau and the Jacobins, with Marxism fitting into this second stream. Corresponding to the thesis “Red equals Brown,” a small change in the basic theme must indeed ensue: If in the above concepts it was the intellectuality of the Enlightenment that was being accused, then Courtois must turn against not only “sociohistorical scientism”—that is, against Marxism, but also against “biological” scientism—that is, against Nazi racial theory (Courtois, *Schwarzbuch*, 793ff., 820). Except, as remains to be demonstrated, Courtois himself argues in the thought-system of anti-Semitism.

What was the reaction to this book? In France, there were fierce debates in *Le Monde*, on television, and even in parliament. The Left in France has vehemently countered the attempts to delegitimize it by the clumsy device of equating fascism and Communism, with a relativizing of Auschwitz as the intended goal. The book was applauded without hesitation by the neo-Nazi, racist party of Le Pen.

The Right in Germany, naturally, hails Courtois’s book, but some leftists do so also. I do not mean those former Maoists, who, like Christian Semler and Ulrike Ackermann in the *Tageszeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, write as if they had become in the meantime accomplices of the so-called New Right here. No, even some of the so-called cosmopolitan Leftists aver publicly that one can somehow, with this concoction of essays, dissociate oneself from the debate over the topic of Auschwitz.¹ “In France, in Italy, and here at home, one cannot find a serious scientist who does not at least reproach the book for grave failings on the whole and charlatanry in the details—and the last aspect especially has to do with the contributions by Courtois” (Walther, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 22 Oct. 1998). Important reviews, such as those by Brumlik and Walther, and then afterwards a series of articles in *Freitag* and *Konkret* have taken the book to task with sharp criticism.

Two of the authors, Werth and Margolis, distanced themselves from certain ideological aspects of the book, above all

from the relativizing of the Holocaust and partially as well from the manipulation of statistics—in particular, those conducted by Courtois. Their attempts to get out of this venture were thwarted by the publisher's threat of high penalties for breach of contract. Indeed, this distancing should not be misunderstood. Gert Meyer draws attention to this point in his contribution to the forthcoming book from Papyrossa Publishers in Cologne: "The fundamental conception of the editor Stéphane Courtois is shared by Nicolaus Werth: the history of 'Communism' is a rectilinear and continual one of crime." Meyer enumerates in detail how this shows itself in Werth's work and how it is faulty: "Werth does not systematically inquire into the question of the possible cause for this chain of repressions, of the historical, divergent roots of violence. Finally, 'Communism,' which is essentially conceived by him as a unitary, closed, static principle, stands for him constantly behind the Russian tragedy" (Klotz 1999; quotation is from unpublished manuscript).

Last year a critique of this shabby project appeared containing contributions by seventeen authors: *Red Holocaust? Critique of the Black Book of Communism*, edited by Jens Mecklenburg and Wolfgang Wippermann. PapyRossa will also publish this year a critique of this politically pornographic Parisian concoction under the title of *Schlimmer als die Nazis? (Worse than the Nazis?)* (Klotz 1999).

The book's success from Paris to Germany is due to the fact that it relativizes Auschwitz with its thesis that the Communists are even worse than the Nazis. This "unburdens" [for Germans] the discussion of their own past. Goldhagen's book about Hitler's willing executioners and the exhibition of the Wehrmacht's crimes (1996) could not be exploited for this purpose and led to fierce debates. It must also be taken into account, naturally, that there was and is in our country a decades-long "prescribed anti-Communism," which has been accepted from the fascist Right up to even the PDS in the recent past. The Communists are thus credited with all evil in the world.

There are several reasons why such a book has appeared at the present time. In contrast to the thesis that Communism is dead, some signs point to the fact that there can be found among

sections of the intelligentsia a certain trend to return to Marxism. In addition, one cannot turn a blind eye to the abundant problems of capitalist economies (today especially evident in Latin America, where—not only in Chiapas—they have led to forms of spontaneous protest). One must free oneself from a view narrowly focused on Europe alone. The voting behavior, even in the central nations of Europe, also allows a certain swing in the expectation of masses to be recognized. Independent of how one judges the contemporary social democratic governments of France, Italy, England, and the Federal Republic, there are indications of a desire to turn away from the course of decades-long conservative redistribution from below to above.

Thus, insofar as possible, a barrier has to be set up against every stirring of the socialist or at least anticapitalist type, to demonize all possibilities of corresponding alliances—hence the agitation against the allegedly prescribed antifascism. It is the defense of capitalism that necessitates such a *Schwarzbuch*. And, likewise in this connection, it is then fitting to hold a mirror up to the face of this system, to refer to the fifty million people in its sphere of control that die yearly of avoidable diseases and hunger—in one year as many as in the course of the five years of the Second World War; in two years as many as, according to Courtois's statistical fantasy, during the seventy years in the entire sphere of socialist power.

The question is posed how we socialists and Communists ought to handle the *Schwarzbuch*. Naturally, it is necessary to reveal its character, to expose and criticize its failings in terms of content and method. The first fact is that not a single attempt is made in the *Schwarzbuch* to clarify its fundamental concepts, nor, in particular, to define the concept of *totalitarianism*. It is indeed no accident that the term is used in a variety of ways. Thus, this concept had been largely withdrawn from circulation during the 1970s, while today it openly spreads. Hannah Arendt expressly rejected the characterization of the GDR as totalitarian. In her opinion, totalitarianism came to a close with the demise of Hitler and also Stalin (1966). Such facts indicate the unscientific nature of the concept. It is a kind of projectile in political arguments, insofar as such a projectile is needed. In view of the

existence of at least three types of “totalitarianism,” one must ask with which type are Courtois and company working.

The totalitarian myth serves, however, as the measure, as the third type, that is supposed to make possible the equating of fascism and socialism. What should one think about this? Courtois said on the occasion of a discussion in Munich: German fascism was—not counting the murder of the Jews—only “semitotalitarian”; Communism, however, is actually the more dangerous totalitarianism (*Schwarzbuch*, 31).

The concept of totalitarianism, therefore, simply does not work. There is indeed an inner contradiction in the concept: How should the thesis “Red equals Brown” then fit the one that claims Red is four times worse than Brown? Or: If Red were equal to Brown, why did the knights of industry, bankers, and their politically conservative adherents select Hitler and not Thälmann for the “rescuer” of capitalism in 1933?

The basic thesis is therefore untenable. Thus, the statistical manipulation—together with the denial of all real, historical, biographical, etc., differences from Chile to Kampuchea—is supposed to hide this concept’s nakedness. Whoever dares, however, to contradict this treatment will be reproached. To persist in the uniqueness of the crime of Auschwitz and to stress an antifascist orientation is to establish oneself in the best case as an unconscious accomplice of Communism and its basic crimes. Just as the Jews, just as the state of Israel behaved this way, so does “the international Jewish community keep alive the memory of the genocide” (Courtois, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 16 June 1998). Courtois complains that until now one had a firm criterion for inhumanity: Nazism and the murder of the Jews (*Süd-deutsche Zeitung*, 19 June 1998). There we have already almost arrived once again at the Nazi thesis of “Jewish Bolshevism”!

What makes this concept old is its ideological derivation and its antirationalism. Partially new is the connection to Ernst Nolte’s historically revisionist theses.² For the *Schwarzbuch* creates the impression, especially in Courtois’s texts, that Nazism must be seen as a defense against the Bolshevik threat—that is Nolte’s thesis of “European civil war,” in which

Communism was the original threat, against which Nazism came into existence as the reaction (1987). (Nolte's latest book portrays Italian fascism as the instrument of rescuing "liberalism," by which he means capitalism!) For Furet, Courtois's foster father, that is also valid: "Fascism arose out of the anti-Communist reaction" (1999).

The ideological method must be criticized. It makes possible the exclusion of social reality, its development, social forces and struggles, their power relations, etc.—in short, real history. That leads to serious essential scientific errors. In place of sociohistorical analyses, the work for the most part offers words, stemming from sensationalist journalism, which are effective to the masses—words that on closer investigation prove nebulous, but that, thanks to their emotional weight, are well suited for demagogical play. That holds for such repeated unclear words as *freedom* and *liberal*, but also for the word *totalitarianism*.

Where it would be necessary to prove facts, analogies are employed—a typical, erroneous procedure of late bourgeois work: Jacobins and the SA both used terror; thus, they are both the same. If the master beats the slave to death or the latter his abusive slaveholder, then the two are the same: Spartacus equals Crassus. By its very nature, this argument means circumventing the causal question—a fundamental mistake in a work that claims to be scientific.

Of course, there are also a number of adulterations, and for some time now the totalitarianism swindle has used some of them. It is known to every working historian who can be taken even somewhat seriously that the thesis that Weimar went under due to the antithesis of Red and Brown does not hold: It was the bourgeois "elites" who financed Hitler, propelled him into power, and appointed him. It is simply false that capital in fascism was kept under the thumb of the Nazi party; the actual Nazi business leaders were all members of big capital. It is false to equate fascism's racist image of humanity, which was based on the "natural" inequality of humans, with Marxism's humanistic one, which begins with the equality of all with a human countenance. Or let us take the myth of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. How is it

that no one has thought to comment on Hitler's concordat with the Vatican—in 1934 as the opening roundelay of imperialist treaties concluded with Nazi Germany—or all the many treaties, pacts, etc., of Hitler with England, France, Poland? Who has ever spoken about the Hitler-Pius Pact?

The statistics given in the book are another story altogether. Let us allow, by way of exception, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to have its say. On 4 September 1998 a criticism of the *Schwarzbuch* appeared in this central organ of big capital, namely, that a comparison of methods employed by the Nazis with those used by the Communists would “attest to the thesis of the singularity of the Holocaust. For no Jew, and in some occupied regions no Gypsy, should remain alive” (Waclaw Dlugoborski, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*). According to Dlugoborski, while Soviet authorities spared those who worked together with them, as they did those already inducted into the army, in the case of the Nazis, even those Jews who served with the Nazi police and spy service fell victim to the Holocaust. One must reject methods that use only seeming similarity of circumstances as a measure.

And then Dlugoborski begins to speak in numbers—I bring them up here because the discussion about them has already lasted for decades and goes far beyond the question of the *Schwarzbuch*. “At the time of the war's outbreak, experts had assumed as yet 2.5, occasionally 3.5, even 5.5, or in fact 15 million prisoners.” These numbers may now be corrected on the basis of documentary evidence. On the authority of that evidence, there were in 1941 1.5 million inmates in the Gulags. In addition to these might come another half a million in work colonies.

Disputed is also the number of those who died in the camps: for the time span from 1935 to 1954, one now estimates up to 1.1 million (earlier one had assumed 7 and 10 million) dead, and the old estimates of the number of victims of the persecution of the kulaks in the 1930s turn out similarly divergent.

Also, the number of deportees from eastern Poland and the Baltic between 1939 and 1941 was revised downward:

for eastern Poland from almost two million to 600,000 maximum. The projected sixty million dead in the Soviet Union alone, about whom Stéphane Courtois speaks in the introduction to the *Schwarzbuch*, will not at all be reached. Courtois merely repeats the dubiously high estimates from the time before 1989. It is astonishing that he neither gives attention to the latest research data nor pays heed to the decision of Nicolaus Werth, the author of a chapter in the *Schwarzbuch* on the Soviet Union, to forego any comparison of a total balance.

Dlugoborski's article contains more objections to the *Schwarzbuch*, criticizing Nicolaus Werth, who, for example, is reproached for sidestepping the question of how things developed after 1953; Hannah Arendt, as already mentioned, rejected the use of the word *totalitarianism* as the label for the socialist states of this period. I have mentioned the contribution by Gert Meyer in Klotz 1999. His work shows that it is not entirely true that the *Schwarzbuch* contains only 400 pages of political pornography, while 550 pages—those by Werth, Margolis, and some others—are serious scientific endeavors.

As for us, we should in no case get into a kind of miscalculation strategy: the Nazis did this, and we did that. It is not our business to excuse—by means of the crimes of the Nazis—crimes that occurred under socialist/Communist control. We have to consider these questions from our circumstances. We have to clarify these questions because of those victims who were not guilty. We should not allow ourselves to be satisfied with the thesis that all this was necessary, given the unquestionable threat to the existence of socialism—namely, Nazi fascism in power.

It is a historical truth that in great historical actions the innocent always become victims. One may explain much with that, but with a look at segments of our own history quantity indubitably changes into quality, and one can no longer comfort oneself with the cited theses. It must also be borne in mind that we will not be able to enlist the sympathies of young people for our ideas if we do not convincingly explain not only what happened then and why it happened, but also what we believe must happen so

that, as far as it is within our power, repetition of deeds that cast heavy shadows on our ideals is no longer possible.

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NOTES

1. The assertion, which is made in several important books of the publishing firm *Konkret Literatur*, that Communists also deny the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the right of Israel to exist, must be rejected. When from the Communist side attention is drawn to the fact that hostility toward the workers' movement in general and toward Communists in particular is a defining characteristic of every kind of fascism, and that this is not true of anti-Semitism (which first appeared in Hitler's ideology around the middle of the 1920s), this is not a renunciation of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Fascism is always directed against the workers' movement, but it is not always anti-Semitic. Propaganda attempts to becloud just that point, to place anti-Semitism as the nature of fascism in order to be able to distract from the antisocialist, procapitalist nature of fascism.

As for the question of Israel: Fatah's position for a united Palestine in which Jews, Christians, and Arabs live peacefully together is continually countered by the claim that one cannot demand from Jews who barely escaped annihilation and who feel safe in the protection of the state of Israel that they give up their own state in the face of these experiences. Indeed, we have stressed the right of the state of Israel to exist, just as much as we have supported a separate state for Palestinians.

2. Translator's note: On the thesis of fascism as the bulwark against Communism, see Nolte 1983.

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Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times. By Robert W. McChesney. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1999. 448 pp., cloth \$32.95.

The media analyst and historian Robert W. McChesney continues to provide activists with strong antidotes for the poisonous penetration of world cultures and psyches that is being perpetrated by mass communications empires. His latest book, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*, is packed with compelling data and history. It lays out his ideas for what a democratic society could and should be. And it offers persuasive programs for immediate and long-range action.

At a recent workshop session of the Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice on the theme "By What Right? Contesting Corporate Authority," one senior citizen enthusiastically brandished the McChesney book and urged his colleagues to make prompt use of it to expose the goals and methods of the media giants. It is a daunting undertaking. They have hidden the very history of how public mass communications evolved into a corporate commercial profit-making venture.

In one of his earlier books, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for Control of U.S.*

Broadcasting, 1928–35 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), Robert McChesney rescued that lost history, documenting the long struggle to keep control of radio and television in the hands of the public rather than to turn it into a cash cow for the media corporations.

Alas, the battle was lost, as we know too well, and today the system's "relentless, ubiquitous commercialism" (108) dominates our lives, enriching corporate owners and impoverishing minds. Fueled by its accumulated capital, and legitimized by the powerful apparatus of government, it has moved with immense success to a global level, penetrating untapped overseas and third world markets, buying up ad agencies, extending the marvels of the twenty-four-hour shopping channel, shaping opinion in "less developed countries" via so-called public relations firms, and encompassing the whole process with space satellite supremacy.

McChesney is well acquainted with the complexities of the emerging global media system, and recognizes how at times it can be a progressive force. But overwhelmingly and by its very nature it is politically conservative. How could it be otherwise? "The media giants are significant beneficiaries of the current global social structure, and any upheaval in property or social relations, particularly to the extent it reduced the power of business and lessened inequality, would possibly—no, probably—jeopardize their positions" (100).

Yes, there is the Internet, with its potential for unleashing progressive and radical voices, and McChesney does not overlook this. "Will the Internet set us free?" he asks. It is doubtful. "Vibrant, exciting," it will continue to play a central role in organizing and educational activities. But "the dominant forces in cyberspace are producing the exact type of depoliticized culture that some Internet utopians claimed the technology would slay" (183).

It is not possible to analyse a society's mode of mass communication without examining the structure of the society itself. McChesney confronts this necessity when he takes up public broadcasting: "there are distinct limits on how egalitarian and democratic any capitalist society will allow itself to be" (243). But while he shows an understanding of the facts of life about

political and economic forces, he hopes for too much, in my view, from the efficacy of dialogue and public space and informed political debate, and from “one person, one vote.”

Although his message is not new, it is compellingly put. Most of us have already seen and felt and cringed under the numbing distortions of commercial media, but McChesney helps us understand why it is this way, how the insidious degradation works its magic on our senses, and how—on a broader scale—its dazzling portrayal of the capitalist market economy diminishes and even destroys values and cultures and aspirations in the defenseless poorer nations of the world.

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ABSTRACTS

Walt Contreras Sheasby, “A Trek with Marx through the U.S. Factory, 1880–2000”—The author interprets Marx’s analysis of capitalist economic growth and crisis and applies it to the record of U.S. manufacturing in the period since Marx’s death. This analysis was and remains a work-in-progress. The interpretation here selects from the theses explored by Marx those that lead to a theory explaining issues much in debate today: trends in the reported rate of profit, the apparent limits to the formation of technological capital, and postindustrial disemployment. While discarding what Marx called simple ideas of catastrophe, the author argues that Marxist theory indeed foresaw the possibility of fundamental crises.

Arnold Becchetti, “Coalition Building in the Bay Area”—People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO) is a Bay Area coalition that defines itself as multiracial, multigenerational, and working-class. Using this organization as an example, the author discusses the theory of coalition-building around contemporary issues.

Edwin A. Roberts, “Marxism and Secular Humanism: An Excavation and Reappraisal”—This article addresses the issues raised by the attempt to build a better understanding of the relationship between Marxism and secular humanism. Although both outlooks are guided by their commitment to analyzing human life in a scientific and rationalist manner, there has been little dialogue between their exponents. One area is of the greatest interest to both theories—the study of religion. Four ideas in this area are surveyed: the problem of explaining religious belief scientifically, the history of Marxist studies of religion, the question of atheism in theory and practice, and the failures of previous attempted convergences between Marxism and the freethought tradition.

Nature, Society, and Thought, vol. 12, no. 2 (1999)

Shingo Shibata, “An Appeal for Protest against Biohazard in Tokyo and ‘Science without Conscience’”—A lawsuit has been brought to prevent the relocation of the Japanese Institute of Infectious Diseases to one of the most populated residential areas in Tokyo. The institute deals with various dangerous pathogens, genetically modified organisms, and other hazardous materials. The author, a noted philosopher of peace, details the falsification of documents in the suit and discusses implications of this falsification for the issues of morals, science of safety, public health, and human rights.

ABREGES

Walt Contreras Sheasby, «Un voyage avec Marx à travers l’usine américaine, 1880-2000» – L’auteur interprète l’analyse faite par Marx de la croissance et de la crise de l’économie capitaliste, et l’applique aux statistiques de production aux Etats-Unis depuis la mort de Marx. Cette analyse était, et reste, un ouvrage en cours de développement. Ici, l’interprétation sélectionne parmi les hypothèses explorées par Marx celles qui mènent à une théorie expliquant des thèmes très controversés aujourd’hui : les tendances du taux de profit communiqué, les limites apparentes de la constitution du capital technologique, et le chômage postindustriel. Tout en renonçant à ce que Marx a appelé les idées simples de la catastrophe, l’auteur démontre que la théorie marxiste a prévu l’éventualité de crises fondamentales.

Arnold Becchetti, «La Mise en place de coalition au Bay Area» – La Coalition de la Bay Area (la banlieue de San Francisco en Californie), portant le nom Le Peuple Unifié pour un Meilleur Oakland (PUEBLO), est une coalition qui se définit elle-même en tant que multiraciale, intergénérationnelle, et issue de la classe ouvrière. En prenant cette organisation comme exemple, l’auteur examine la théorie de formation de coalitions autour de questions contemporaines.

Edwin A. Roberts, «Le Marxisme et l’humanisme laïque : une fouille et une réévaluation» – Cet article traite les questions soulevées par la tentative de construire une meilleure

compréhension des rapports entre le marxisme et l'humanisme laïque. Malgré le fait que les deux points de vue sont guidés par leur volonté d'analyser la vie humaine d'une façon scientifique et rationaliste, il y a peu de dialogue entre leurs représentants. Dans chacune des deux théories, un domaine trouve un grand intérêt : l'étude de la religion. Dans ce domaine, quatre idées sont passées en revue : le problème d'expliquer scientifiquement la croyance religieuse, l'histoire des études marxistes de la religion, la question de l'athéisme dans la théorie et la pratique, et l'échec des précédentes tentatives de convergence entre le marxisme et la tradition de la libre pensée.

Shingo Shibata, «Un appel à la protestation contre le risque biologique à Tokyo et «la science sans conscience» – On a intenté un procès pour empêcher l'implantation de l'Institut japonais des Maladies Contagieuses dans un des quartiers résidentiels les plus peuplés de Tokyo. L'institut étudie divers agents pathogènes dangereux, des organismes génétiquement modifiés et d'autres matières dangereuses. L'auteur est un philosophe de la paix reconnu. Il révèle en détail la falsification des documents pendant le procès, et examine les implications de cette falsification pour les questions de moralité, de science de sûreté, de santé publique, et de droits de l'homme.