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**NST**

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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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VOL. 14, NO. 3 (JULY 2001) Sent to press September 13, 2002

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Cover design by Prockat

VOLUME 13, NUMBER 4

OCTOBER 2000

*NST: NATURE, SOCIETY, AND THOUGHT* (ISSN 0890-6130). Published quarterly in January, April, July, and October by MEP Publications, University of Minnesota, Physics Building, 116 Church Street S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455-0112. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, Minnesota. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *NST: Nature, Society, and Thought*, University of Minnesota, Physics Building, 116 Church St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455-0112.

*Subscriptions.* U.S.A./Great Britain, one year, individuals \$15/£14, institutions \$28/£23; two years, individuals \$28/£26, institutions \$56/£45.50. Other countries, add \$5 for postage for each year. Single copies: individuals \$5/£3.50, institutions \$10/£6.

Subscription and editorial address: *NST*, University of Minnesota, Physics Building, 116 Church Street S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455-0112 (tel. 612-922-7993).

Contents are indexed in *Sociological Abstracts* and *Alternative Press Index*. A complete index of all articles ever published in *Nature, Society, and Thought* is given on <[www.umn.edu/home/marqu002](http://www.umn.edu/home/marqu002)>.

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# **Publishing Marx and Engels after 1989: The Fate of the *MEGA***

**Jürgen Rojahn**

## ***Introduction***

After the events in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the fall of 1989, it became clear that the days of the ruling party of the GDR, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), were numbered. At that time nobody expected the unification of the two German states to take place as soon as it did. However, at the end of 1989 it could be foreseen that things in the GDR would change fundamentally. Particularly, it was more than doubtful whether the SED party institute, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (IML) in Berlin, would continue to exist for much longer. Of course the possible disbanding of the IML as such was something one could get over. But those interested in the *MEGA* could not ignore the fact that, with regard to this project, the disbanding of the Berlin institute could have fatal consequences. The IML in Berlin had published the *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: Gesamtausgabe* (or *MEGA*)<sup>1</sup> in cooperation with the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow. However, the main part of the work had been done—and financed—by the Berlin institute. It was pretty clear that the Moscow institute would not be able—and probably would not even be willing—to continue the work on the *MEGA* alone.

The International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam received the first Mayday calls from Berlin in late

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2000)

December 1989. Soon afterward, both the Berlin and Moscow IML formally asked the IISH to enter into talks on how discontinuation of the *MEGA* could be prevented. A similar request was addressed to the Karl Marx House of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Trier, in what was then West Germany. Both the IISH and the Karl Marx House agreed at once. The first talks took place in Amsterdam in the second half of January 1990.

One may ask why the two IML turned specifically to the IISH and the Karl Marx House, and why the latter agreed to help so quickly. To explain the reasons I have to say a few words about scholarly editions such as the *MEGA*, the history of the Marx-Engels archives, and the attitude of the IISH and the Karl Marx House towards the *MEGA* during the preceding years.

### *Why collect?*

Collected works of certain writers have been published in Europe since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, together with the development of arts and literature, a reading public emerged. As most scholars know from their own experience, when some time has passed by, it is rather difficult to get hold of the books and articles of a given author. Usually they were published here and there, books are out of print, journals can be found only in some libraries, in some cases only very few copies have been preserved, some works may have been published anonymously, and so on. Thus, editions of collected [or selected—Ed.] works have been merely a means to make the most important works of a given author available to a broad public. As far as Marx and Engels are concerned, plans for the publication of a collection of their works already emerged during their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

Some writers have been considered to be of such importance that, rather than only a collected [or selected—Ed.] works, the collection of their complete works was thought worthwhile. Obviously such projects are much more ambitious: to meet the claim to completeness a lot of research is required.

Over time, the demands regarding the editing of the texts increased. The texts were to be edited in a correct form, that is,

in accordance with the author's own intentions. Thus, the printed text should be compared with the author's manuscripts if such a manuscript existed. However, the question arose of what to do if there are several manuscript versions representing various stages of the author's work or the author's various attempts at finding the most adequate expression of his or her ideas. Or if there were several editions of a given work during the author's lifetime and if the author himself or herself made changes in later editions. Did the author's authentic intentions manifest themselves most clearly in the original, that is, the earliest version? Or should the author's "last will" be regarded as decisive? Usually these problems are solved by a so-called apparatus informing the reader about differences among the various versions. Editions of this type, based on thorough research into the life and work of the given author, were called scholarly (*wissenschaftliche*) editions.

The development of scholarly editorship was also closely connected with the emergence of a critical approach to history. From the Renaissance on, historians increasingly subscribed to the idea that true historical knowledge can only be derived from a thorough analysis of the sources. Accordingly the historian was expected, on the one hand, to be critical with regard to the sources, and on the other hand, with regard to myths, legends and ideological misrepresentations of the past.<sup>3</sup> The high regard for sources manifested itself in a growing number of publications of documents. Such publications fulfill a double function. They, too, are meant to make the texts available to a broad public. But at the same time they are meant to open up these texts, as it were. The first aim, at least today, could be attained by photocopies, microfilm, or similar means. However, to many students these copies would be of little use. Many students would not be able to understand—or even read—the texts in question. Thus, the documents are reproduced in printed form. Nevertheless the editor is expected to give all information about the original that might be relevant from any point of view. Further, the editor is expected to give additional information facilitating the understanding of the document—for instance, some information about when, by

whom, and for what purpose it was produced, and explanatory notes as needed. All this should serve both of the aforementioned critical aims. That is why editions of this type are sometimes, and particularly in Germany, called historical-critical (*historisch-kritisch*).

### ***The roots of the “MEGA”***

The idea of the publication of the complete works of Marx or, possibly, of Marx and Engels, “meeting all demands of scholarly editing,” was discussed for the first time at a meeting of prominent Austro-Marxists in December 1910 (Langkau 1983). This meeting was also attended by David Borisovich Riazanov, who started to realize the plan in the 1920s, calling his edition explicitly *historisch-kritische Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*.

Considering the circumstances, Riazanov’s achievements were, no doubt, impressive. However, the “first” *MEGA* met only partly the standards of historical-critical editing. And those who developed the plan of the second *MEGA* in the 1960s were aware of this. From what I said before, it will be clear that a historical-critical edition could not be realized without consulting the original manuscripts. Only a small part of these manuscripts was in Moscow.

When Marx died in 1883, he left his papers to Engels, and when Engels died in 1895, he left his own papers to August Bebel and Eduard Bernstein, functioning as trustees of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Some years later, these papers were brought from London to Berlin and deposited in the party archives of the SPD. According to Engels’s will, Marx’s papers were given to Marx’s daughters. First they were kept by Eleanor Marx Aveling in London. After her death in 1898, Marx’s other daughter, Laura Lafargue, living at the time in Draveil near Paris, took care of them (Mayer 1966/67, 38ff). After her death, the major part of Marx’s papers, too, was deposited in the SPD party archives in Berlin (Rojahn 1966, 37–39). Thus, from that time on the bulk of the Marx-Engels archives was held by the SPD.



When Riazanov started the "first" *MEGA* in the 1920s in Russia, he got the SPD's permission to make photocopies of the Marx-Engels papers. However, after the Comintern's turn to ultra-leftist tactics in 1928, the SPD, enraged by the Communists' attacks, canceled the agreement, which, in fact, meant the beginning of the end of the first *MEGA* (Riazanov 1926; Bahne 1983).

### ***Berlin and Moscow***

After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the most valuable parts of the SPD archives, including the Marx-Engels papers, were taken abroad. Some years later they were sold to a Dutch insurance company, which, in turn, gave them to the newly established IISH in Amsterdam, where they have been held since that time (Mayer 1966/67, 79 ff; Hunink 1986, 52 ff). Thus, when the two IMLs in Berlin and Moscow at the end of the 1960s started the work on the second *MEGA*, a much more ambitious project than the first *MEGA* had been, they had to turn to the IISH.

The IISH hesitated. On the one hand, a historical-critical edition of the complete works of Marx and Engels was considered necessary. The IISH, with its small staff, was unable to run such a big project itself. Nor was there any other Western institution that would be willing to do it. Apart from this, at that time it was doubtful whether the Moscow IML would support any project that would obligate it to allow a Western institute access to the documents in its possession. On the other hand, the IISH, being itself an independent institution, did not like the idea of cooperating with Party institutes such as the two IMLs in Moscow and Berlin. Eventually, the IISH decided to allow the use of the documents in its possession, but declined any direct participation in the project. The two IMLs, on their part, promised to make their material accessible to scholars from the IISH.

During the following years this cooperation proved to be useful to both sides, and, as a result of frequent contacts, the relationship between the scholars involved became more and

more relaxed. As for the *MEGA* volumes published from 1975 on, a strong ideological touch was quite obvious. However, it did not seriously affect the scholarly character of the venture.<sup>4</sup> In view of this, the project was supported by a growing number of institutions all over the world. In particular, the Karl Marx House in Trier, in what was then West Germany, followed the work on the *MEGA* closely. Combining the functions both of museum and research institute, the Karl Marx House, too, maintained close contacts with the *MEGA* editors.

### *After the Wall came down*

In 1990, both the IISH and the Karl Marx House were therefore prepared to take part in efforts to secure the continuation of the *MEGA*. However, they put forth two conditions:

- 1) the *MEGA* should be continued as a purely academic edition, that is, the editorial work should not be influenced by—or subordinated to—the interests and needs of any political party;
- 2) the *MEGA* should be continued within a broader international framework, that is, any institution or person capable of—and interested in—participating in the work on the *MEGA* should be allowed to do so.

The first point was a matter of principle. As for the latter, practical reasons were decisive:

- 1) Marx and Engels had lived in various countries: in Germany, France, Belgium, and, last, but not least, England. From the early 1840s on, their perspective had been clearly an international one. This international perspective had influenced both their studies and their political activities. This is especially true of Marx, whose studies concerned not only a broad variety of fields such as law, philosophy, history, political economy, technology, agriculture, chemistry, geology, physics, mathematics, ethnology, and so on, but which also concerned a variety of countries, such as Germany,

France, Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Poland, Russia, the Balkans, Italy, Spain, the United States, China, India, and so on. As a result of their political activities, Marx and Engels became central figures of a worldwide movement, one which was developing in each country according to its specific conditions. It was doubtful whether all this could be covered by one or two institutes. Specialists in various fields and from various countries were needed.

- 2) The Marx-Engels archives are partly in Amsterdam (about two-thirds) and partly in Moscow (about one-third). At the same time a considerable part of the editorial work would have to be done in Germany, German being the language of the edition.
- 3) It was doubtful whether the work would be continued in Germany in the future on the same scale as before. An international division of labor—and costs—might be helpful.
- 4) The creation of an international framework might help to safeguard the continuation of the project, which, it was hoped, would not be dependent on the changing conditions in one country.

An agreement on all this was reached very soon, and in the fall of 1990 the International Marx-Engels Foundation (*Internationale Marx-Engels-Stiftung* [IMES]) was established in Amsterdam.<sup>5</sup> The IMES has no other task than that of completing the *MEGA*. The term "foundation" may be misleading. According to Dutch law, anybody may establish a foundation. The only thing he or she has to do is to go to a notary and submit statutes that are in accordance with the law. The name "foundation" does not imply the existence of any funds. The IMES, with its headquarters in Amsterdam, can be best described as an international network. It has a Board, consisting of the directors—or another top official—of the affiliated institutions,<sup>6</sup> and a small Secretariat, dealing with the current affairs. Further, it has an international Editorial Committee, coordinating the work on the *MEGA* and controlling the uniformity and

quality of the editorial work.<sup>7</sup> Finally, it has an international Advisory Board, consisting of prominent scholars from all over the world.<sup>8</sup> However, the IMES as such does not have any funds at its disposal.

When the IMES was formed in 1990, it was supposed that the *MEGA* teams in the GDR and in Moscow would be able to continue their work and that new teams would try to find the necessary funds themselves. However, events took another course. In 1989 at the IML in Berlin, there were some dozens of scholars who had been working on the *MEGA*. Further, there had been *MEGA* teams at various universities of the GDR. The *MEGA* team at the Moscow IML also included some forty scholars. Two years later, very little of this was left. After the unification of the two German states, the existing *MEGA* teams in the GDR were closed down, and, after the unsuccessful coup against Gorbachev in August 1991, the IML in Moscow too was disbanded. Actually, it was split into three new institutions. The former Central Party Archives, in which the Moscow part of the Marx-Engels documents were stored, were placed under the supervision of the Archives Commission of the Russian Federation; the Library was placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture; and the Institute itself was re-established as an independent foundation. The latter institute was willing to continue the work on the *MEGA*, but it would not be able to provide the necessary funds.

### *Making progress*

For some time the situation seemed to be desperate. However, the IMES was not willing to give up. On the one hand, it did its best to inform and mobilize the public; on the other hand it tried to establish contacts with the relevant authorities. Actually it received remarkably broad public support. Well-known scholars, politicians, artists, and many other persons from Germany, France, Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Russia, Japan, and, last but not least, the United States endorsed its efforts.

Finally, the IMES achieved some success. As far as Germany was concerned, after a long period of uncertainty, it was decided,

notably by Chancellor Helmut Kohl himself, that the *MEGA* should be continued, though only the usual scale for projects of this kind in Western countries. Thus, seven full-time paid posts were granted, and in 1993 the task of taking care of this team, consisting of former and new *MEGA* editors, was assigned to the new Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (*Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften* [BBAW]), in Berlin, which, in turn, formally joined the IMES.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1992, a second team, the so-called German-French team, consisting of members of the staff of the Karl Marx House and members of the *Equipe de recherche en civilisation allemande* at the *Université de Provence* in Aix-en-Provence, had been created.

Also, the situation in Moscow had become more stable in 1992. While a small number of the approximately twenty scholars who were left stayed at the so-called Independent Institute (*Rossiiskii nezavisimyi institut sotsial'nykh i natsional'nykh problem* [RNISNP]), the major part moved to the Archives, the so-called Russian Center (*Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniiia dokumentov noveishei istorii* [RTsKhIDNI]). Since 1992, both of these groups have been financed by the IISH, initially with support from the Dutch government and since 1995 with support from the European Union.

All in all, from 1992 on, things took a promising turn. Thus, the IMES could at last focus its attention on its main task, the work on the *MEGA*. Above all, the Editorial Committee felt that the editorial principles of the *MEGA* should be examined closely. For this purpose an international conference was organized in Aix-en-Provence, France. It was attended by members of the IMES bodies, former and new editors, and a number of prominent specialists in the field of editing. After lively debates, new editorial principles were adopted. Taking the view that these principles should be known to the users of the *MEGA*, the Editorial Committee decided to publish them.<sup>9</sup>

Further, the plan of the *MEGA* had to be revised. The former editors had planned more than 170 volumes. Such a size seemed out of all proportion. We had to try—and were pressed to try—to

reduce the number of volumes. At the same time we did not want to give up the aim of completeness. "Completeness" can of course be defined in different ways. One might confine oneself to publishing only those works that were published during the lifetime of the author. As far as Marx is concerned, this would, however, be useless. As you know, Marx had great plans, but he completed only a relatively small part of the comprehensive work he had in mind, leaving a great quantity of drafts and notes. The whole of his published and unpublished writings document the process of his studies, which ended only with his death. It is not an accident that the great debates about Marx in the twentieth century were stimulated specifically by writings that were neither published during Marx's lifetime nor, in their existing form, intended for publication, such as the second and third volumes of *Capital*, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the *German Ideology* and the *Grundrisse*. One of the most important achievements of the *MEGA* will be that, in its second section, besides Engels's editions of vols. 2 and 3 of *Capital*, all of Marx's drafts, too, will be published.

It has been suggested that we might abstain from publishing excerpts and notes, which would fill some thirty volumes. But from what I just said, it will be clear that the excerpts and notes are an integral part—and even a very interesting part—of the whole work. They enable us to follow the creation of Marx's works from the books he read via his excerpts, showing what he found noteworthy in these books, to his first drafts.

Also, it has been suggested that we might abstain from publishing the letters, which would also fill some thirty volumes. Or we might omit at least the letters to Marx and Engels. But this suggestion, too, seems unacceptable. Marx and Engels corresponded with about 2,000 persons. About 4,000 letters from Marx and Engels and about 10,000 letters to them have been preserved. All these letters, pertaining to a period of sixty years (1835–1895), represent an important source of information about the history of the German and international labor movements, and about the history of ideas and cultural history in the nineteenth century. Nearly all the letters from Marx and Engels have

been published, whereas most of the letters to them are still unpublished (see Bagaturija 1996).

There are other ways of tightening the project up. For instance, it is not necessary to reproduce everything completely in full. Also, the reproduction of the same document in various sections of the *MEGA* can be omitted. By these and other changes, we succeeded in reducing the number of volumes to 114.<sup>10</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words on the current state of the *MEGA*. When the IMES was established in 1990, forty-three volumes or partial volumes had been published,<sup>11</sup> four other volumes or partial volumes, being already in print, appeared in 1991 and 1992.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the four teams mentioned above, in 1997 four new teams were formed: a Japanese team, a Danish team, a German-Dutch team in Berlin/Amsterdam and a team in the United States. Thus, at present there are the following teams:

BBAW team in Berlin, working on vols. I/14, I/15, I/16, I/21, I/31, I/32, II/ 14, II/15, IV/10, IV/11, and IV/12;

German-French team in Trier/Aix-en-Provence, working on vols. I/4, I/5, and I/6;

team at the RTsKhIDNI in Moscow, working on vols. II/11, III/9, III/10, III/12, III/13, III/14, IV/3, and IV/5;

team at the RNISNP in Moscow, working on vols. II/4.3, III/11, IV/22, and IV/28;

Japanese team, working on vols. II/12 and II/13;

Danish team, working on Vol. III/30;

German-Dutch team in Berlin/Amsterdam, working on vol. IV/14;

team in the United States, working on vol. IV/27.

Further, two of the former teams at Humboldt University in Berlin, which continued the work voluntarily, are finishing vols. IV/26 and IV/31, respectively. Another volume, vol. I/28 (containing Marx's mathematical manuscripts), is being completed

by two mathematicians from the *Université de Toulouse* in France.

Finally, the teams in Berlin, Trier, and Moscow are working jointly on the volume containing an annotated list of the books once belonging to Marx and Engels that have been traced.

This year the first volume edited under the auspices of the IMES and, according to its editorial guidelines, vol. IV/3, will be published. Most of the texts included in this volume have not been published before. The volume contains a number of excerpts made by Marx from works of British, French, Italian, Spanish, Swiss, Dutch, and German economists in the years 1844–45. Some of these excerpts, and particularly those from the works of Boisguillebert, are closely connected with Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Further, the volume includes Marx's notebook from the years 1844–47, containing the original version of his 1845 "Theses on Feuerbach."

Since 1994 the IMES has also published its own journal, *MEGA-Studien*,<sup>13</sup> containing:

- articles (in German, French and English)
  - on the lives and works of Marx and Engels;
  - their sources;
  - the historical context, dissemination and influence of their writings;
- reports on work in progress on the edition;
- reviews of recent books;
- reports of conferences and the activities of the IMES.

Thus, for the time being the situation seems to be not so bad. I would not like, however, to give too rosy a picture. Were all of the volumes mentioned above to be published, there would still be forty-nine volumes left. Therefore, we would welcome the formation of new teams, for instance in Britain and the United States.

*Internationale Marx-Engels-Stiftung*  
*Amsterdam*



## NOTES

1. The *MEGA* is a complete international historical and critical academic edition of the published works, manuscripts, and correspondence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their original languages and spelling with scientific comments and indexes in German.—Ed.

2. See Rojahn 1987, especially p. 95.

3. See Topolski 1973, 75 ff.

4. See, for instance, Schrader 1980 and Rojahn 1985.

5. For a more detailed description, see Rojahn 1994.

6. At present: Kirill M. Anderson (RTsKhIDNI, Moscow), Jaap Kloosterman (IISH, Amsterdam), Herfried Munkler (BBAW, Berlin), Hans Pelger (KMH, Trier).

7. At present: Elena M. Arzhanova (Moscow), Georgii A. Bagaturia (Moscow), Terrell Carver (Bristol), Galina G. Golovina (Moscow), Jacques Grandjonn (Aix-en-Provence), Jürgen Herres (Berlin), Martin Hundt (Berlin), Götz Langkau (Amsterdam), Teinosuke Otani (Tokyo), Jürgen Rojahn (Amsterdam), Liudmila L. Vasina (Moscow), Carl-Erich Vollgraf (Berlin), Wei Jianhua (Beijing).

8. At present: Shlomo Avineri (Jerusalem), Gerd Callesen (Copenhagen), Robert E. Cazden (Lexington, Ky.), Iring Fetscher (Frankfurt-on-Main), Eric J. Fischer (Amsterdam), Patrick Fridenson (Paris), Francesca Gori (Milan), Andrzej F. Grabski (Lodz), Carlos B. Gutierrez (Bogota), Hans-Peter Harstick (Brunswick), Eric J. Hobsbawm (London), Hermann Klenner (Berlin), Michael Knieriem (Wuppertal), Jürgen Kocka (Berlin), Nikolai I. Lapin (Moscow), Hermann Lübke (Zurich), Michail P. Mchedlov (Moscow), Teodor I. Oizerman (Moscow), Bertell Ollman (New York), Tsutomu Ouchi (Tokyo), Pedro Ribas (Madrid), Wolfgang Schieder (Cologne), Walter Schmidt (Berlin), Gareth Stedman Jones (Cambridge), Jean Stengers (Brussels), Toshiro Sugimoto (Kanagawa), Ferenc Tökei (Budapest), Immanuel Wallerstein (Paris/Binghamton, N.Y.), Zhou Liangxun (Beijing).

9. *Editionsrichtlinien der Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)* (Berlin: 1993). The volume also contains the former editorial guidelines (121–239). See also *Die neuen Editionsrichtlinien der Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* [with a preface by Jacques Grandjonn], *MEGA-Studien*, 1994, no. 1:32–59.

10. See Grandjonn and Rojahn 1995.

11. Fourteen volumes in section I (1–3, 10–13, 18, 22, 24–27, 29), fifteen volumes or partial volumes in section II (1.1–2, 2, 3.1–6, 4.1, 5–9), eight volumes in section III (1–8), and six volumes in section IV (1–2, 4, 6–8).

12. Vols. I/20, II/4.2, II/10, IV/9.

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# Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Dialectics of Negritude

Ernest D. Green

## *Introduction*

This paper examines the life of Léopold Sédar Senghor and his ideas of Negritude. A historical-materialist analysis can be useful in explaining the economic and political context in which he and his movement developed. I am particularly interested in what I call the dialectics of Negritude within the colonial experience. More precisely, I address the nexus among the social construction of “race” by the colonizer, the internalization of these ideas by the colonized, and subsequent attempts by the latter to build forms of racial solidarity as a basis for emancipation.

I argue that the European construction of “race” and culture in regard to the colonial masses was motivated by self-serving economic and political interests. Thus, the very concept of *race* is called into question and assessed from the standpoint of capitalist ideology—that is, in relation to the practical needs of the capitalist mode of production within this historical period. Inherent in the logic of economic exploitation is the dehumanization of the exploited or, in the colonial experience, the dehumanization of the colonized. The assigning of negative attributes to the physiology and culture of Africa assisted the exploitation of Africans by denying their rights and way of life.

The fundamental question I seek to address is whether the use by the colonized of invented categories of oppression like *race* as a basis for genuine solidarity and emancipation is viable, as

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2000)

certain aspects of the Negritude movement suggest, or whether other categories like *class* are needed to seek solidarity and emancipation on other grounds.

The Negritude movement developed in the 1930s in the cafés and lecture halls of Paris.<sup>1</sup> It is a body of ideas and knowledge that at its heart represents an artistic and ideological revolt against European colonization. It was an attempt both to celebrate the black “race” and to defend it against the onslaught of white supremacy. For Senhgor, it was “black Africa’s cultural patrimony, that is to say the spirit of its civilization.” For Léon Damas, it was a matter of “defending his condition as a Negro and a Guianese.” For Aimé Césaire, it meant “the acknowledgment of a fact, revolt, and acceptance of responsibility for the destiny of my race” (Kesteloot 1991, 83).

These statements by the major founders of Negritude represent an acknowledgment and explicit challenge to white supremacy. They found that, despite their best efforts at assimilation, this ideology held not only them in contempt, but also their entire “race.” Thus, while the ideas of Negritude originated from individual alienation, it developed into a defense of African people throughout the Diaspora. It was a call for the black “race” to join together and build a brighter future free from European domination. But was the Negritude movement capable of building racial and cultural solidarity for African emancipation irrespective of the vast differences that separated them, or would it end in failure?

Several opinions on this subject exist. Sartre argued the answer depends upon the ultimate objective one thinks Negritude was created to serve (1977). He understood the development of the Negritude movement in terms of the Marxist dialectic. According to this theory, human history is the unfolding of the rational human character through conflict, opposition to conflict, and resolution, or more formally put, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This ongoing spiral, it is postulated, continues until the practical relations of humans are harmonized, at which time categories that once separated humans (e.g., *race*) are no longer needed. Thus, from this standpoint, Sartre saw the act of

colonization, which included the ideas of white supremacy, as the thesis, the Negritude movement as the antithesis, and the building of new social relations under socialism as the synthesis, where thesis and antithesis lose their quality. Sartre writes,

Negritude appears to be the upbeat of a dialectical progression; the theoretical and practical assertion of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of negritude, as an antithetical value, is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself, and the blacks who make use of it are aware of this. They know its aim is to prepare a synthesis or realization of the human in society without races. Thus, negritude exists to be destroyed. It is a transition, not a result, a means and not a final ending. (1977, xli)

Onoge argues that the Negritude movement had two distinctively different trends (1974). The first trend is what he calls *affirmative affirmation* and the second trend *mystical affirmation*. Concerning the former, and similarly to Sartre's position, Negritude embodied a revolutionary element that called for the destruction of Western imperialism and its replacement by socialism. Affirmative Negritude understood African colonization as a result of capitalist exploitation, and thus sought to reveal this process through cultural production. Onoge, seeing Aimé Césaire as the major representative of this movement, writes:

What Césaire demanded from Africanist social scientists were analyses grounded in historical materialism, revealing the exploitative nature of capitalist imperialism and not metaphysical "conjuring tricks" that were potential opiates crippling the will to revolt. (9)

Concerning the latter, mystical affirmation refers to the tendency to misconstrue the practical relationships that produce the very problems for which solutions are being sought. As a result, sincere actions directed against those problems are nevertheless insufficient, since they do not take the real causes into

consideration. Onoge argues that a key reason for the impulse to myth-make is the conscious or unconscious recognition that one's material survival is derived from the same exploitative process that leaves others oppressed. Myth-making, he contends, helps to avoid very difficult decisions regarding one's safety and comfort in relation to the safety and comfort of others. Onoge sees Senghor as the chief representative of the mystical affirmation trend.

Ngara, like Onoge, sees a similar dichotomy in the Negritude movement, but replaces affirmative affirmation and mystical affirmation with what he calls "the realist school of Negritude" and "the idealist school of Negritude," respectively (1990). The realist school, he argues, consists of writers who comprehend the interdependent and interrelated nature of economics, politics, and culture—the recognition that all the institutions of society are impacted and influenced by the mode of production. He contends that Negritude writers like David Diop and Aimé Césaire used their cultural production to reveal this exploitation process.

Ngara characterizes the idealist school of thought as an over-emphasis on the differences between the culture, psyche, and physiology of Africans and Europeans. Africans are portrayed as peaceful and full of life and warmth of heart, making them fully human, whereas Europeans are envisioned as cold, inflexible, and spiritually lacking, making them less than human. Blackness is seen as timeless and good, whereas whiteness is seen as timeless and bad. The point that Ngara stresses is that this type of Negritude celebrates the black "race" in mystical form, since it does not take into account the historical conditions and levels of economic development that help to shape social and cultural relations. In contrast, the realist school not only celebrates the black "race," but also locates current oppression in its colonial context.

In what follows, I shall first examine the life of Senghor within a historical-materialist framework. This will facilitate the investigation of the dialectics of Negritude as a philosophy of emancipation. Finally, I shall consider the conclusions and lessons to be drawn from Senghor and his ideas of Negritude.



***The life of Léopold Senghor as seen from  
the viewpoint of historical materialism***

Léopold Sédar Senghor was born in Senegal on 9 October 1906, in the village of Joal, a small enclave on the Atlantic coast. He was born as a French colonial subject in the late imperialist phase of the capitalist mode of production.<sup>2</sup> According to Hymans, Senghor was born into relative wealth, his father's fortune being derived from commercial operations based on the peanut trade (1971). His father's wealth would further increase with the development of French colonialism and the introduction of a money economy. They were visited and praised by the king of the Sine-Saloum region, a testament to the family's wealth. This visit had a lasting impact on Senghor.

The divided consciousness that would greatly influence Senghor's ideas of Negritude later in life was already present in his father at the time of Léopold's birth. The full name given to him reflected this. Léopold, his first name, shows his father's devotion to Catholicism; his middle name, Sédar, indicates his Serer ethnicity; and his last name, Senghor, is an example of his father's fondness for his Mandingo heritage (Markovitz 1969).

Senghor's mother was from the cattle-raising Fulani ethnic group. While the Serer looked down upon the Fulani, Senghor's maternal uncle tended cattle, which immensely fascinated Senghor. He was greatly enchanted with the animal life and stories of the supernatural. It is within this setting that Senghor became acquainted and fell in love with the spiritual world, a world that would later in life come to characterize his brand of Negritude. Of this eclectic background, Hymans writes:

His father, a Catholic involved in trading and commerce, belonged to the modern world while his "pagan" uncle, a cattle herder, was part of the traditional world. This circumstance reinforced ethnic conflict. Senghor has remained torn between bourgeois and peasant tendencies. (1971, 7)

By all accounts, Senghor's childhood was a good one. He was one of twenty-four brothers and sisters. At the age of eight,

he was sent off to a boarding school in Ngasobil administered by the Fathers of the Holy Spirit. It was here that Senghor first came into contact with the ideas of white supremacy, albeit contained in the colonial doctrine of the Catholic Church (Washington Ba 1973).

French colonialism, like all colonialism, was characterized by the exploitation of African land and labor. The superstructure of colonial society, dominated by the French ruling class, was organized to accomplish this task. One of its most pernicious ideological features was to render African history, culture, and physiology as negative and uncivilized. While these ideas were propagated through the various institutions of colonial society, the colonial educational system that Senghor entered was its primary political organ.<sup>3</sup> Hymans writes about Senghor's particular situation:

The missionaries taught Senghor and his friends to abandon and scorn the culture of their ancestors, . . . exposing them to culture and the modern way of life, but the effect was a complete destruction of the primary equilibrium of the child. (9)

Through this colonial educational system, Senghor, to a great extent, despite his claims to the contrary, internalized the teachings of white racism. Racism is defined here as the mistaken belief that (a) different ethnic groups by virtue of their physical appearance and/or culture form races and (b) that some races are inherently superior to others. Not only was he infected with these ideas, but so were also his parents, particularly his mother, who reinforced them. Vaillant writes that his parents spoke French

at home with their children, in the firm belief that this is where the future lay, and that the more their children came to resemble and understand French, the happier and more prosperous they would be. They shared the prevailing French goal of assimilation, as did virtually all educated Africans of their generation. (1990, 28)

To maximize the exploitation of African land and labor, it was to the advantage of the colonial ruling class to cultivate a domestic elite who came to see the interests of the colonial rulers as their own. This was accomplished by making available to the domestic elite opportunities for education, material wealth, and political power. Senghor, as it would turn out, was one of the most talented, both in intellect and artistic expression, of this tiny class of compador bourgeoisie. Hargreaves comments on the usefulness of this class to the colonial rulers:

It was natural that Saint-Louis and Dakar should become centers . . . to French imperialism. Not only were they established towns, housing substantial groups of Western-educated elites, but more exceptionally, their inhabitants preserved the civic and political rights of French citizens . . . and also exempted them from the jurisdiction of the native courts, from the restrictive legislation which debarred French subjects from such activities as publishing newspapers and founding political associations. (1961, 51)

### *Developing ideas of Negritude*

As a member of this small elite, Senghor was destined for Paris, the heart of imperialism, to complete his education. It was upon his arrival in Paris in October 1928 that, rather than finding a receptive white world that his education led him expect, he discovered the real contempt that the average European held not only for him, but for his entire "race." This came as a shock to Senghor, who had idealized French culture, particularly its commitment to a Christian tradition that supposedly embraced all "races." Many years later, he would write about this contradiction: "The idea was not linked to the act, the word to deed, morality to life" (1962, 135). The high esteem to which he had held the French was met with indifference. Evidence of Senghor's desire to assimilate into this hostile world can be found in his entrance papers at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, where,

when asked to write his name and nationality he wrote, “Léopold Sédar Senghor; FRENCH” (Vaillant 1990, 67).

Faced with the isolation of any newcomer to a foreign city, coupled with the alienation he felt from most Europeans, he began to become painfully aware of his blackness and the limitations it imposed upon him. No matter how intelligent he was or how excellent his French, he felt rejected and, at times, very ashamed of his own blackness. This sensation was similar to Du Bois’s dialectical notion of double consciousness among Black people in the United States (1996). This dialectic developed from three things happening at once in the black psyche: first, the way one sees and understands oneself (thesis); second, the way one sees and understands oneself through the interpretation of the white world (antithesis); and third, the way one rationalizes and understands this phenomenon (synthesis). For Senghor, as well as for other black colonial subjects, this dilemma was the material basis for the Negritude movement.

Despite the division of Negritude in later years into two camps at odds with each other, both camps represented a deeply felt and sincere desire on the part of black intellectuals to demonstrate to the world Africa’s unique beauty, history, culture, and creative genius. With the likes of René Maran, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Dumas, a new cultural movement was forged to recapture and redeem African dignity.

### *Senghor’s Negritude*

Senghor’s ideal of Negritude was primarily centered around the cultural, psychic, and physiological differences between Africans and Europeans. The portrayal of Africans as peaceful, full of life and warmth, thereby presenting them as fully human, is clearly evident when he writes:

New York! I say to you: New York, let black blood flow  
into your own Blood  
That it may rub the rust from your steel joints, like an oil  
of life,  
That it may give to your bridges the bend of buttocks and  
the suppleness of creepers.

Now return the most ancient times, the unity recovered,  
The reconciliation of the Lion, the Bull and the Tree  
Thoughts linked to act, ear to heart, sign to sense.

“To New York” (Soyinka 1963, 237)

The portrayal of white people in contrast to black people is transparent. Whites are seen as rigid bridges and steel, whereas blacks are seen as supple and flexible. Senghor unambiguously suggests that in order to save whites from themselves they should “let black blood flow into your own Blood.” It is also possible to see how Senghor idealizes the African past. He argues for a return to ancient times, where things were not only simpler but more unified and harmonious.

This same theme is found in other works by Senghor:

Harlem Harlem! Now I saw Harlem! A green breeze of  
corn springs up  
From the pavements ploughed by the naked feet of  
dancers  
Bottoms wave of silk and sword-blade breasts, water-lily  
ballets and  
Fabulous masks.

. . . . .  
Listen New York! Oh listen to your male voice of brass  
vibrating with  
Oboes, the anguish checked with tears falling in great  
clots of blood  
Listen to the distant beating of your nocturnal heart,  
rhythm and blood of  
The tom-tom, tom-tom blood and tom-tom.

“To New York” (Soyinka 1963, 236)

In this example, Harlem becomes idealized and mystified into “a green breeze of corn,” a reference perhaps to its innocence and vitality. Given Senghor’s propensity to see things in terms of black and white, it is possible to assume that the rest of New York is white. This seems all the more plausible when he cleverly speaks of white people in metaphor by using the European classical instrument, the oboe. Lastly, Senghor wants Europeans

to recover their humanity by listening to the rhythm and experiences of the black world.

In a last example of Senghor's work, we can see his continued emphasis on the cultural, psychic, and physiological differences between Africans and Europeans. Here the African world is called upon to teach the white world rhythm and humanity that was lost to the machines of the industrial age. The Rousseauesque attempt to get back to "a state of nature" reflects Senghor's undialectical approach to history. Finally, African and European cultures are frozen in time and space since he implicitly suggests that rhythm is "natural" to the black "race" and not to Europeans:

For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has  
died of  
Machines and cannons?  
For who else would ejaculate the cry of joy, that arouses  
the dead and the wise in a new dawn?  
Say, who else could return the memory of life to men with  
a torn hope?  
They call us cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men,  
They call us men of death,  
But we are the men of dance whose feet only gain power  
when they beat the hard soil.  
"Prayer to the Masks" (Soyinka 1963, 233)

### *The dialectics of Senghor's Negritude*

Senghor's ideas of Negritude reflected the ambivalence he felt toward his European and African heritage. On the one hand, Senghor admired the cultural traditions, history, and mode of life developed as a child and nurtured by his maternal uncle. Senghor's poetry abounds in references to the superiority of the traditional way of life and the uniqueness and beauty of the black "race." On the other hand, the French colonial superstructure used historical, cultural, and physiological differences to infuse a sense of inferiority in those Africans who participated in colonial institutions. This was, of course, central to the process of capitalist exploitation.

To understand Senghor's Negritude, it is first necessary to comprehend the nature of white supremacy. The assigning of negative attributes to the African masses was designed specifically to serve economic and political interests, but there never was, nor could there ever be, anything intrinsically inferior, uncivilized, or negative about African people. The debasement of the African masses makes sense only insofar as it operated to sustain exploitation.<sup>4</sup>

While Africans did differ significantly from Europeans in their cultural formations and physical appearance, this difference cannot be arranged hierarchically, since they both are the logical products of their respective historical developments. White supremacy and capitalist exploitation necessitate the perversion and mystification of objective reality to secure narrowly defined economic and political interests. Wilson writes about the implicit assumption built into the concept of *race* and its practical use in society:

These assumptions are the following:

1. Differences in skin color and other characteristics among people represent different subspecies of human-kind.
2. These subspecies are substantially different from each other.
3. These subspecies are hierarchically arranged from superior to inferior in intelligence, virtue, and other capabilities.
4. The term race is meaningful in interpreting and explaining variations in human behavior and potentials. The word race . . . arises out of an exploitative accumulation process in which wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few. Racial oppression is grounded in this economic base, which in turn sustains racial oppression. . . . It is not coincidental that the word race . . . appeared in the English language at precisely the time Britain began to colonize the world. (1997, 27)

Senghor, interestingly enough, was very aware of white supremacy as an aspect of capitalist ideology (Langly 1979). As

a proponent of African socialism, he became quite familiar with Marxist literature and historical materialism. However, Senghor's work and ideas of Negritude demonstrated a serious lack of this understanding. The internalization and mystification of race led to a failure to grasp the idea of white supremacy as an integral part of a much broader and complex economic mode of production. As Ngara pointed out earlier, Senghor's Negritude celebrated the black "race" in mystical form since it did not take into account the historical conditions and levels of economic development that help to shape the social and cultural relations of a people (Ngara 1990).

By arguing the uniqueness and beauty of the black "race" in an attempt to counteract white supremacy, he unintentionally legitimized not only the false assumptions of "race," but also the capitalist premise it rested upon. Senghor illustrated this point when he wrote:

From our ancestors, we have inherited our own method of knowledge. . . . Let us consider the Negro African as he faces the object to be known, as he faces the Other: God, man, animal, tree or pebble, natural or social phenomenon. In contrast to the classical European, the Negro African does not draw a line between himself and the object; he does not hold it at a distance . . . he touches it, feels it, smells. . . . "I think, therefore I am," Descartes writes. . . . The Negro African could say "I feel, I dance the Other; I am." To dance is to discover and recreate; . . . it is the best way to know. (1961, 72)

The difficulty with this line of reasoning is that it implicitly confuses cultural difference with "race." Since Senghor's writings on this subject are a reaction against white racism, his comments on cultural difference become cloaked in "race" terminology. If white supremacy was understood and acted upon as a form of ideology rooted in exploitative economic arrangements, a different course of action would have been necessary to defeat it, namely socialist revolution, a path taken by other French colonies like Vietnam and Algeria. It should be



remembered that these colonies not only overthrew French economic exploitation, but also the white supremacist ideology it propagated.

To reject the white supremacy thesis, as Senghor did, despite his claims to the contrary, was at the same time to reject the capitalist social relations that created it and made use of it (Fanon, 1963). It also implies that the elimination of racism requires the building of an alternative mode of production that has no need for it. Unfortunately, Senghor was either unaware of this reality or intentionally denied its existence in order to gain favor for personal reasons. As events would turn out, it is the latter that eventually seems more plausible than the former.

Sartre recognized the nexus among capitalism in its colonial phase of development, white supremacy, and the Negritude reaction against it (1977). He correctly understood that the Negritude movement was a reaction against the colonial superstructure that made use of racism to maintain and help perpetuate it. Relying on the dialectics of Marxism, he viewed the capitalist mode of production as a particular social and economic system that, through the course of its historical development, utilized and exaggerated differences, real or invented, among humans.

However, since white supremacy and colonialism deny the basic humanness of all nonwhites for narrow economic and political objectives, and simultaneously create a false superiority complex in Europeans, a synthesis—that is, a society with cultural differences but without hierarchy, and the end of “race” as a classification system—remains the objective to be realized. To Sartre and others, therefore, the Negritude movement was not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. Borrowing the dialectical language of Marx, Sartre ultimately concluded that Negritude was invented to be destroyed.

The realist school of Negritude, in contrast to the idealist school, becomes clearer when one considers the former’s commitment to socialism. Since the realist school linked white supremacy and the Negritude reaction against it to the capitalist mode of production, it also realized that a new mode of production was necessary that did not depend upon the exploitation of

one person by another, and the utilization of false concepts like *race* as an aspect of its production process. In doing so, this school of thought was just as critical of the white bourgeoisie and those segments of the white working class that were contaminated with racism on the same grounds as it was in its criticism of the idealist Negritude movement.

The detachment of Senghor's Negritude from the economic and political system of capitalism is perhaps best illustrated in his misunderstanding of Marxism and his formal involvement with politics. Senghor ultimately rejected Marxism on the basis of his perception of its materialism, which he saw as a disregard of spiritual values. He viewed the theory of historical materialism as an example of Western thought at its most sterile extreme: "discursive reason pushed to its farthest limits . . . lost . . . in a materialism without warmth, in blind determinism" (Viallant 1990, 268).

This belief that the materialist and atheist content of Marxism would lead to a world without spiritual values is another misconception. Marx criticized formal religions and forms of spirituality that aligned themselves with ruling classes and thereby helped to maintain oppressive class-based societies.<sup>5</sup> He saw formal religion as a type of ruling-class ideology that provided a false consciousness to oppressed classes. Marx reasoned that if oppressed classes attributed their miserable lot in life to the will of an external super being, then the class responsible for their actual suffering would be protected along with a mode of production whose functioning necessarily requires the oppression of classes.

Marx's materialism, with which Senghor took issue, explains the world and its anguish as a consequence of human social relations, in contradistinction to an abstract mysticism or prearranged super order. What makes it so threatening to the capitalist ruling class is that, in order to end human suffering, an end must be put to the economic and political conditions that give rise to it—namely, capitalism. This, of course, is in direct contrast to idealism—an idealism that Senghor's Negritude shares—that attempts to explain the world and the suffering in it from the

outside in—in other words, from the assumption that human beings and their earthly problems (e.g., racism, colonialism, and capitalism) are the creation of an external force or mystical super being. This perspective looks at the world as preordained, ahistorical, while Marx's materialism looks to human social relations when seeking an understanding of suffering and oppression in the world.

Despite Senghor's acquaintance with Marxism, his failure to understand the dialectal relationship between capitalism and its reliance upon racism was most apparent in his political role as president of Senegal. The first signs of this were apparent even before France granted Senegal its formal independence. The stance Senghor took, as a member of the overseas parliament, in relation to the liberation struggles in the French colonies, most notably the Algerian revolution, was quite telling. His failure to provide serious political support to these liberation struggles was in direct contradiction to his own rhetoric. Senghor was aware of the bond that should have been present among struggling African nations when he wrote:

Obviously, the personality of a people cannot flower without freedom to develop, and there can be no freedom . . . in colonialism; there can be no freedom if one's original being is stifled; there can be no independence in dependence. . . . That is what justifies the struggle against colonialism. (1961, 68)

His deeds, however, did not live up to his actual words, as Vaillant illustrates:

Senghor found himself in a difficult position. He and other African deputies knew that the Algerian war strengthened their hand. At the same time they were still hoping to be rewarded by a France grateful for their loyal support in her time of trial. They feared that if they opposed government policy in Algeria the government might retaliate by refusing to grant them concessions in West Africa. As a result of this thinking, not one of the West African deputies

opposed the French government's request for emergency powers to prosecute the Algerian war. They also sided with the government when it asked for special war credits. They hoped they would be rewarded with a bargain to their advantage in West Africa. (1990, 268)

In January 1961, Léopold Sédar Senghor became president of independent Senegal. His metamorphosis from one of the founders and leaders of the Negritude movement to the leader of his nation was complete. It was as president, however, that the sharpest disconnect between his Negritude and the contradictions of capitalism would become apparent. Perhaps the most obvious of these signs was the virtually indistinguishable character of the economic and political systems before and independence. French economic and political interests were protected at the expense of the African masses. After a decade of Senghor's rule, and with the ideas of Negritude finally having the opportunity to be put into practice,

a French commission charged to assess ten years of independence in Senegal concluded that the situation was far more complicated than the Cartierists believed. Under the umbrella of French aid to Africa, individual French firms made large profits in Senegal in the early 1960s. Much of it was repatriated to France, while French technical advisors not only lived well at Senegalese expense but saw to it that French interests were served. The desire to help . . . became entangled with the determination of French companies to make their profit. . . . French firms employed far fewer Senegalese than promised and automated their factories in order to reduce wage bills. Though the French spoke in public about France's duties to humanity . . . individual firms continued to act in their own economic self interests. (Vaillant 1990, 321)

The willingness of Senghor to allow this type of exploitation to occur at the expense of his people raises serious questions about the extent to which Senegal was truly independent of

France. It also raises serious questions about the effectiveness of Negritude as a emancipatory philosophy. In fact, the continued French exploitation of African land and labor under the guise of an “independent” Senegal is the hallmark of the neocolonial phase of capitalist development.<sup>6</sup> As colonialism gave way to revolutionary movements (e.g., in Vietnam and Algeria), a policy shift was necessary to prevent other colonies from doing so. Ake writes:

Neo-colonial dependence is of course the effect of imperialism, which integrated Africa into the world capitalist system. . . . African leaders have encouraged it . . . because it serves their own interests. Thus, to solve the problem the African bourgeoisie must destroy capitalism itself, thereby committing class suicide as a class. Not to solve it is to foster the conditions for their revolutionary liquidation. (1978, 33)

Since Senghor’s ideas of Negritude were always divorced from the capitalist mode of production when the two confronted each other directly, with the former having to its advantage one of its originators and president of state, the latter (capitalist forces and relations of production) turned out to be more powerful and determining. The rhetoric of Negritude, insofar as it was detached from this reality, was destined to fail, since capitalism sets primary the extraction of profit, to which all else is secondary. From this perspective, it is rather easy to understand the contradiction between French talk about responsibilities to humanity on the one hand and the ruthless exploitation by its firms on the other. It also can explain why Senegalese workers, and more importantly, their wages, were replaced as quickly as possible through automation. Thus, Senghor’s Negritude in reality was incapable of attaining the smallest of goals that it had set for itself.

The failure of Senghor’s ideas of Negritude to galvanize public support for his policies was evident, and confirmed by several studies undertaken in the mid-1960s. When a

group of middle-level functionaries were asked whether they understood the concept of Negritude, only about half answered in the affirmative. Those answering yes said that Negritude referred to African art and culture and respect for African heritage. They did not associate it with any particular policy or with their own state. Another survey discovered that, of 679 villages in the southern Casamance, 599 had never heard of the word Negritude. (Vaillant 1990, 325)

### *Conclusion*

Léopold Sédar Senghor was a victim of French colonialism and the white supremacist ideology it propagated. Dialectically, the imposition of this economic and political system on his country and himself from a very young age deeply affected his personality and outlook on life (thesis). The domination of the educational superstructure by alien and hostile interests left this sensitive and truly talented person little option but to follow its racist dictates. At its heart, despite rhetoric to the contrary, this education taught him to hate that which was African and to love that which was European and French. Like so many members of his generation, Senghor internalized self-hatred that crippled his ability to understand himself and the historical circumstance that gave rise to his own Negritude (antithesis).

It was in Paris that Senghor would come face-to-face with a hostile and indifferent white world that he naively assumed would appreciate his best efforts at assimilation. The results of long hours put to studying and mastering the French language, history, and culture fell on deaf ears. It was also in Paris that he was forced to confront his blackness and reconcile this fact to himself and the world. For Senghor, at least, Negritude was in theory a bridge that united two opposing landscapes, one African the other French. Unfortunately, in reality, Senghor's Negritude acted more like a cover behind which he hid a well-disguised inferiority complex (synthesis).

Despite its platitudes that spoke of love and respect for African civilization and heritage, Negritude remained primarily an

apolitical bourgeois art form detached from the realities of the masses. Senghor's main problem was his inability to understand how his reality was grounded in economic and political exploitation. He never made the connection between his fight against white supremacy in mystical form and the colonial phase of capitalist development that relied upon it for its survival. As a result, he fundamentally saw himself as French, and as history would demonstrate, he put French interests before those of his own people and the people of other oppressed colonies seeking independence.

The one theory that could have aided Senghor in understanding himself, his ideas of Negritude, and the plight of his countrymen was rejected. In spite of his knowledge of Marxism, his basic misunderstanding of it was perhaps his greatest flaw. Marxist theory could have explained white supremacy as a fundamental aspect of the social relations of the capitalist mode of production. It could have also explained that his ideas of Negritude, divorced from this reality, was incapable of being a liberating philosophy. Finally, Marxist theory could have helped Senghor understand that the resolution of his dilemma could only be realized in an alternative mode of production that did not rely on exploitation and racism.

Senghor's complete submission to French colonial and neo-colonial rule was most apparent in his formal political role as president. In the long tradition of neocolonial African rulers (e.g., Mabuto, Abacha, Banda, and Moi), he put the economic and political agenda of the mother country above the interests of the masses. Senghor's support of the political agenda was demonstrated by his complicity in the French suppression of the Algerian revolution and the lack of knowledge of the very word Negritude by his most senior deputies. His support of the capitalist economic agenda was apparent from the statistics of French profits, which he protected. Ultimately and tragically, Senghor's Negritude not only failed him, but the vast majority of his compatriots as well.

Finally, it should be noted that the racism that developed out of colonial exploitation and the reaction to it in the Negritude

movements was secondary to the class question. While there are several excellent critiques of this position, they fail, in my view, because they analyze racism as an independent phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> I take this position on the assumption that in order seriously to attack and eliminate racism, the power of the state power must first be seized. Conscious class action as a unifying force is the only mechanism, if retrograde “race”-based politics are to be avoided, capable of accomplishing this task. An antiracist program to change the behavior of whites toward nonwhites in an environment of individualism and competition is unlikely ever to be fully successful.

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#### NOTES

1. Among the several excellent studies on this subject are Kesteloot 1991 and Vaillant 1990.

2. The term “late imperialist phase” of the capitalist mode of production is distinct from its early phase, which included the colonization of the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While these two forms of colonialism differed significantly, they are both part of a developing capitalist mode of production. For a broader discussion of this topic, see Lenin 1974. See also Wilson 1996.

3. For a discussion on the structure and content of French colonial education, see Cohen 1979.

4. See the chapter “The Historical Origins of Racism” in Wilson 1996.

5. See the chapter “On Religion” in Freedman 1968.

6. See the chapter “Neo-Colonialism” in Ake 1978.

7. For a broader discussion of this issue see “Euro-Marxism” 1986 and Blaut 1998.

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# The “Older Woman” in Shakespeare’s Plays

Brigitte Schnabel

This essay discusses different stagings of the final scene of *Twelfth Night*. At the end of this play, Shakespeare presents us with two couples: one in the traditional *man-older-than-woman* constellation (Viola and the Duke) and one in the less usual *woman-older-than-man* constellation (Lady Olivia and Sebastian, Viola’s twin brother). The question is: why do productions and literary comments mock, ignore, or even deny the latter age constellation? Does Shakespeare possibly reflect here aspects close to his own experience? Is he far more sensitive to this issue than many of his contemporaries?

To approach an answer to this question, one needs to recall some details from Shakespeare’s life and the problematic nature of any attempt to write his biography. As we know, it is relatively difficult to offer a complete and extensive description of Shakespeare’s life. He never had a diligent biographer like the German poet Goethe’s Eckermann. Shakespeare’s biography has had to be put together like a puzzle and will probably remain incomplete forever. The dates of the events in his life had to be gathered from entries in churchbooks, commercial and legal documents, or accounts of the court. They had to be deduced from title pages of early editions or from accounts of contemporaries. No biographical or theoretical writings are available to give an insight into his private life or his working process. This has left

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much room for speculation in the course of the last three centuries, and for positive or negative evaluations of special events in his life.

Two rather sensitive subjects seem to be his marriage and the difference in age between him and his wife. When Anne Hathaway and William Shakespeare married in 1582, the young groom was eighteen, which at that time meant a minor, and the bride was a woman of twenty-six. Biographers, therefore, describe her as a mature woman of the world who made a boy, seven or eight years her junior, get her pregnant and marry her. Indeed, their first daughter, Susanna, was born six months later and baptized on 26 May 1583. Judith and Hamnet, twins who were christened on 2 February 1585, followed later. All three children were born before William attained legal maturity. These are the facts as we know them.

Interpretation and speculation during later centuries make an unhappy marriage out of their life and an unloved, immoral, or unfaithful woman out of the wife. The suggestion that Anne was unfaithful was to be repeated more than once, and even finally found its way into Joyce's *Ulysses*. The nineteenth-century scholar Karl Elze offers a good insight into the motives behind these judgments. He argues:

An older woman—nay, even one of the husband's own age—will always be one stage in advance of the man in her physical development, and even more so intellectually and in her ideas about life; the man never overtakes her in this, and any true or enduring sympathy between them becomes an impossibility. She does not look up to him as she ought: on the contrary, is inclined to look down upon him; she comes to find herself unable to live in his interest, and expects him to adapt himself to hers, which is contrary to nature. She possesses, or believes she possesses, more knowledge of life than her husband, and thus instinctively considers it her right—nay, her duty to direct and guide him, which, in a lively or energetic woman, is bound to lead to a love of domineering. . . . In most cases also,

when a woman is married to a man younger than herself, and the period of first and ideal love is passed, it is the older woman who is more concerned about worldly matters . . . ; or it pleases her feminine vanity that, in spite of her age, she can attract another lover. Sensuality may bridge over the gap for a time, but not permanently. . . . These are phenomena based upon the unalterable laws of nature. (1901, 81-82)

I should like to mention two more facts relating to the puzzle of the generally acknowledged biographical dates that have also been interpreted from a patriarchal point of view: Shakespeare's reasons for going to London (first mentioned in 1592), and his final will. His leaving for London is conventionally seen as a flight from his wife and his continuously growing family. The only evidence for this interpretation, however, is that the family was experiencing severe financial difficulties at that time. It is not even certain that he really left Stratford for many years; he may have been commuting between Stratford and London. Documentary evidence supports the fact that he bought the grandest house in Stratford in 1597, when he was 33 and Anne 41, and that he returned to Stratford between 1610 and 1613 to live permanently in this grand house together with his wife and his daughter Judith and her husband. When he bought the house he was already a well-known and well-off actor, playwright, and shareholder of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Had he wished to flee his wife and family, he could have lived a completely independent life in a house of his own in London, pretending that his business needed him there, and he could have provided his allegedly unloved wife and family with only a small house.

In his final will, Shakespeare provided for the Stratford poor, for his friends, and above all for his family and his favorite daughter Susanna. With regard to his wife, he seems to have been silent, except for a short remark, "I give unto my wife my second-best bed with the furniture," which meant the bed furnishings (Schoenbaum 1993, 21). Does this ultimately prove all the negative statements about his marital situation? Schoenbaum asks in this connection:

Or had this object sentimental associations that did not attach to the best bed, which was perhaps reserved for overnight guests at New Place? Long afterwards someone would point out that, according to English law, a widow was entitled to one third of her husband's goods and real property, and that there was no need for this provision to be rehearsed in the will. (1993, 21)

Anne outlived her husband by seven years and was present when the Shakespeare Memorial in Stratford was erected.

No other evidence is provided by biographical data. When relating this to *Twelfth Night*, I am far from claiming to have found new biographical hints in the play. But it cannot be overlooked that a theme involving questions touching the love between a woman and a man junior to her is contained in the plot. Here are arguments the young seventeen- or eighteen-year-old Shakespeare might have been confronted with. For example, Duke Orsino asks the boy Viola/Cesario whether, despite his youth, he has ever loved a woman.

ORSINO: What kind of woman is 't?

VIOLA: Of your complexion.

ORSINO: She is not worth thee then. What years, i'faith?

VIOLA: About your years, my lord.

ORSINO: Too old, by heaven. Let still the woman take  
An elder than herself, so wears she to him;  
So sways she level in her husband's heart.  
For boy, however we do praise ourselves,  
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,  
Than women's are.

VIOLA: I think it well, my lord.

ORSINO: Then let thy love be younger than thyself,  
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;  
For women are as roses, whose fair flower  
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.

(*Twelfth Night*, act 2, scene 4, lines 24–38)

The Duke talks here about women of his age (!), although he praises and woos an intelligent, good-looking woman possibly not very much younger than himself throughout the play. He himself is not aware of this constellation, but if this aspect were presented in the performance, the audience would be. This is not the first time he contradicts himself in the play. Did he not say just before that men's love could not hold the bent? Only some moments later he underlines the contrary, namely, that no woman's heart

Can bide the beating of so strong a passion  
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart  
So big, to hold so much.

.....  
Make no compare.

(Act 2, scene 4, lines 93–100)

So, how reliable an adviser is he? Contrary to Orsino's statements, Shakespeare presents us with the deep, desperate, and honest feelings of Countess Olivia (and Viola's, of course). Countess Olivia, having fallen in love with the page, remarks:

Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit  
Do give thee five-fold blazon. Not too fast. Soft, soft—  
Unless the master were the man. How now?  
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?  
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections  
With an invisible and subtle stealth  
To creep in at mine eyes. Well, let it be.

(Act 1, scene 5, lines 282–88)

She knows very well that she is acting against decorum and that her honor, in keeping with the contemporary code of honor, and her reputation are at stake:

I have said too much unto a heart of stone,  
And laid mine honour too unchary out.

(Act 3, scene 4, lines 194–95)

On several occasions she asks the page cautiously:

I prithee tell me what thou think'st of me.

(Act 3, scene 1, line 136)

Although the declaration of love to a disguised girl is a comical device, Shakespeare never allows Viola/Cesario to mock Lady Olivia, having provided for a more serious connotation in the subtext. Shakespeare presents Viola's twin brother as a person who likes and accepts Lady Olivia's love, wishing, if this were a dream, that the dream were never over: "If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep (Act 4, scene 1, line 61). He assures her, after all the complications are dissolved: "Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived. You are betrothed both to a maid and a man" (Act 5, scene 1, lines 256–57). And perhaps Shakespeare directs Olivia's wedding prayer before she enters the church to the audience also when she says:

and heavens so shine

That they may fairly note this act of mine.

(Act 4, scene 3, lines 34–35)

The action is deliberately set in Illyria. Illyria is more a utopian country than the real coast of Croatia and Albania at the Adriatic Sea. In a nowhere-land Shakespeare could be more playful with conventions, with the different ways love works, and offer solutions or constellations of couples that would not be accepted by contemporary society. It is a fictitious world, where anything can happen, and the result is happiness and marriage, at least for the main characters.

The choice of title and subtitle seems to support this intention. In Elizabethan times, the twelve days after Christmas, up to the so-called Twelfth Night on 6 January, were traditionally a time of carnival, comedy, and festival. All kinds of folly and disguise were allowed in this topsy-turvy world. The short festival period up-ended authority, servants could order their masters about. "Do what you will" was the motto. Thus the mood of these twelve nights, as much as utopian Illyria, makes the reversing of stable conventions in society possible, both dramatically



and politically. In fact, people in the play are reversing the order of things, are doing "what they will": Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby, reverses day and night with his nightly feasts. He and the servants seem to be the real rulers of the house. They are making fun of the steward Malvolio, a person of authority within the household. Malvolio himself tries to reverse things by attempting to become Lady Olivia's husband, Count Malvolio. Even the fictitious letter to Malvolio touches on the theme of reversing, with its line "be not afraid of greatness" (Act 2, scene 5, line 135). Viola's cross-dressing is a kind of reversal, too. She makes a boy out of a girl, thus having better chances for survival.

But the dramatic figure most concerned with reversals is Lady Olivia herself. She, a woman, rules a grand house, alone and without any protection from a man. There is no father, brother, uncle, or husband who is a person of authority in this house. She lost father and brother a year ago, and refuses to accept uncle and husband-elect Orsino. She reverses conventional expectations of her behavior when she dares refuse the marriage proposal of the mightiest wooer of the region, Duke Orsino. Instead, she woos the person she loves, although she does not see through the disguise as everybody else does. By means of the comedy, Shakespeare rewards her for her courage and despair with the spiritual and bodily duplicate, the twin brother. Olivia, and also Viola, dare to make their own choices, and by doing so, are reversing decorum again. They pursue their course to the men they love, although their loves seem hopeless. Viola's love seems hopeless because of her pretended sex, her disguise as a boy, and her lower social rank. Lady Olivia thinks she loves a person of lower rank, the page, and, as she knows, someone younger than herself. This seems to be the tender sore of the play, the taboo, not only in Shakespeare's time, but in the following centuries too.

While Shakespeare still offers us the phenomenon in the guise of a turbulent cross-dressing comedy, later producers and critics of the play seem to have had their difficulties with it. Often starting from a patriarchal point of view, either they could not recognize the constellation offered by the text, or they passed

it over in silence, because it was too critical a point. Some neglected it or tried to prove that Lady Olivia was even younger than the twins, to regain the conventional balance of age (Brown 1957, 176, 177). Even those who show some sympathetic feelings for Olivia have difficulty with her confession of love and ask why a woman who runs a big house so intelligently should make such a mad, if not immoral, decision in love (see, for example, the comment in Shakespeare 1993b, 215). Productions and comments circle more around the man-older-than-woman relationship between Viola and Orsino, the treatment of Malvolio, or the question of whether the text should be presented as a romantic play or a dark comedy. In the 1980s and 1990s some productions work out homoerotic components or alienate the happy ending, as was the case for the otherwise demanding production performed on the occasion of the 1993 Shakespeare Days in Weimar. The alienated endings offered in these so-called dark productions aim at showing that “love is difficult (if it exists at all), sex is egoistic greed, laughter is cruel, and any beauty is fraught with melancholy or danger” (Gay 1994, 46, 47). Producers like Bill Alexander offer “a metaphor for the conservative and selfish society of the 1980s” (*ibid.*).

Accepting the age constellation between Lady Olivia and Cesario/Sebastian still seems to present a challenge. Rex Gibson observes, “In contrast with nineteenth-century productions, Olivia is now often played as a young woman” (see his comment in Shakespeare 1993a, 167). Roger Warren and Stanley Wells mention a performance at the 1980 Canadian Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, which dared to offer a mature Olivia, which was “greeted by a strident comment from a woman in the audience” shouting, “That’s really quite embarrassing” (Shakespeare 1994, 34). The reaction of this woman shows how deeply rooted a taboo is broken by touching on the theme of the woman-older-than-man couple.

Shakespeare, however, a Renaissance humanist, was intellectually and emotionally open to this question, as well as being personally involved. Renaissance humanism proclaims as one of its highest values the self-realization of the individual in all

spheres of life—in politics, education, art, and love. Individual freedom in choosing a partner is doubtless an indivisible human right for Shakespeare, independent of class, race, nationality and age, for men *and* women.

All quotations from *Twelfth Night* are taken from the *Oxford Shakespeare Edition*, 1994.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at a conference of the European Society for the Study of English at the University of Glasgow, 7–12 September 1995.

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## MARXIST FORUM

We present in this section of the journal an article by Domenico Losurdo, “Flight from History? The Communist Movement between Self-Criticism and Self-Contempt,” addressing the question of anti-Communism on the Italian Left.

Domenico Losurdo is a professor of philosophy at Urbano University. Together with Hans Heinz Holz, he edits the Marxist journal *Topos: Internationale Beiträge zur dialektischen Theorie*. He also serves as president of the Hegel-Marx Society.

Readers are invited to send in comments on this article.



# **Flight from History? The Communist Movement between Self-Criticism and Self-Contempt**

**Domenico Losurdo**

## ***Introduction***

In 1818, in the middle of the Restoration and just at that time when the collapse of the French Revolution seemed obvious to all, some of those who had initially welcomed the events of 1789 now placed them at arms length; for them it had become a colossal misunderstanding or, even worse, a despicable betrayal of noble ideals. It was in this sense that Byron sang: “Yet France was drunken with blood and spat out crimes. Its Saturnalia were deadly for the cause of freedom in every epoch in every country.” Must we make these grave doubts our own today, if we were to substitute 1917 for 1789 and the cause of socialism for the “cause of freedom”? Must Communists be ashamed of their history?

In the history of persecuted ethnic and religious groups, we find something quite remarkable. At a certain point even the victims tend to assimilate the worldview of the oppressor, and on this account begin to loathe and hate themselves. This self-contempt has been studied above all with regard to the Jews, who for millennia have been subjected to systematic campaigns of discrimination and defamation. Something similar and equally tragic occurred in the history of blacks, who were robbed of their identity as they were deported from their homelands, enslaved, and oppressed. At a certain point, African American women,

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even those of extraordinary beauty, began to dream and yearn to be white, or at least to lighten the darkness of their skin. Such is the extent to which victims may be subjugated to the values of their oppressors.

This phenomenon of self-contempt does not affect only ethnic and religious groups. It can also arise among social classes and political parties that have suffered a particularly profound defeat, especially when the victors, standing in the background or setting aside their usual weapons, intensify their attacks, today utilizing the profound firepower of the multiple media. Among the many problems with which the Communist movement must struggle, that of self-contempt is certainly not the least important. Let us not even talk about the former leaders and spokespersons for the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), who as it turns out now assert that they may have been Party members in the past without ever really being Communists. It is no accident that these people today look at a figure like Clinton—who could say at his re-election that he thanked God that he was allowed to come into the world as an American—with wonder and perhaps even envy. An admittedly very subtle form of self-contempt may ensnare anyone who has not had the good fortune to belong to an elect or a privileged people, especially to that people which considers itself predestined to carry to every corner of the world and by every means available ideas and goods “*Made in USA.*”

Thus, as I have said, let us set aside those ex-Communists who today bewail the misfortune that they were not born Anglo-Saxons and liberals and lived so far from the sacred heart of the true culture. Sadly this self-contempt has also taken hold within the ranks of those who continue to identify themselves as Communists, yet who resist any notion that they had anything to do with the past that both they and their political opponents regard as synonymous with ruination. The inflated narcissism of the victors, who religiously transfigure their own history, has its counterpart in the conquered who are holding themselves hostage.



To me it is clear that the battle against this onerous self-contempt will be just that much more effective the more our critical analysis of the momentous and fascinating period beginning with the October Revolution becomes really radical and free from preconceptions. Despite any seeming parallel, self-critique and self-contempt are contradictory attitudes. Self-criticism, with all of its sharpness and particularly its radicalism, expresses a consciousness of the necessity to examine one's own history; self-contempt represents a cowardly running away from this history and away from the ideological and cultural struggle that is expressed in this history. If the foundation of self-criticism is the revival of Communist identity, then self-contempt is another word for capitulation and the denial of an autonomous identity.

Such is the general outline of the analysis I have published in a series of articles in *Ernesto: Mensile comunista*. I present here revised versions of these texts, and I would like to thank the journal for its consent to do so.

### ***I. At a fork in the road: Religion or politics?***

An analysis of the ideas, attitudes, and moods of the contemporary Left today requires that we delve deeply into the past.

#### *1. An enlightening event, almost 2000 years ago*

In the year 70 A.D. the Jewish national revolution against Roman imperialism was forced to capitulate. The capitulation was preceded by an unforgiving siege that not only sentenced Jerusalem to starvation, but also destroyed all social relationships: "Sons ripped bread from their father's mouths, and, what was the very worst, the mothers were taken from the children." If the siege itself was horrendous, so too were the measures taken to contend with it. Traitors and deserters, real or imagined, were killed without exception. Suspicion had become pathologically widespread, and often rested on false accusations that were brought forth by individuals having private and vicious motives. Even the elderly and the young were suspected of hiding food

and were tortured. Yet none of this occurred without reason: the triumph of the Romans not only brought death to the national revolution's leaders and fighters, it brought exile and dispersion to an entire people.

These events are described by a Jewish author who was himself a resistance fighter there for a period of time, but who changed sides and praised the profound courage and invincibility of the victors. Out of Joseph—as he was called—emerged Josephus Flavius; he assimilated this name from that breed of soldier that had destroyed Jerusalem. More important than this shifting of camps was what he knew and could disclose about the Christians. Originally an integral part of the Jewish community, they nonetheless felt the need to declare that they had nothing to do with the uprising that had just been suppressed. They continued to rely on the Holy Book, sacred also to the defeated revolutionaries, but this latter group was then accused of falsifying and betraying the sacred scripture.

This dialectic can be traced especially clearly in the Gospel according to Mark, which was written immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. This was a catastrophe that Jesus had foreseen: "Not one stone will remain upon another." And the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, had already been prophesied by Isaiah. According to this, the tragedy that had just befallen the Jews was not ultimately attributable to Roman imperialism: it was, on the one hand, an original component of the divine plan of redemption, and on the other, a result of the progressive deterioration of the Jewish community. The revolutionaries had improperly interpreted the messianic prophecy in a worldly and political way, instead of in an inwardly spiritual manner: horror and catastrophe were the inevitable outcomes of this falsification and betrayal. Determined to distance themselves from the Jewish national revolution, the Christians also resolutely distanced themselves from all historical and political action.

## *2. A history of subaltern classes and religious movements*

Gramsci has made it clear that, in the contemporary world, various more or less explicitly religious perspectives may also

appear in the context of liberation movements. Just look at the dialectic that developed in the wake of the collapse of “real, existing socialism.”<sup>1</sup> Set aside those individuals who hurriedly swung aboard the victors’ train. Let us concentrate instead on the destruction, the intellectual and political devastation, that followed this collapse within segments of the Communist movement. Just as with the Christians in the Gospel according to Mark, who turned to the Roman conquerors and proclaimed, as the situation seemed to require, that they had absolutely nothing to do with the national uprising, so too in our own time not a few Communists are doing likewise. They passionately deny the accusation that they are in any way connected to the history of “real, existing socialism.” At the same time they reduce this history to a simple series of horrors in the hope that this will lend them credibility especially in the eyes of the liberal bourgeoisie.

Marx summed up the idea and method of historical materialism with the statement about human beings making our own history, yet not under conditions of our own choosing. When someone today modestly attempts to direct attention to the permanently exceptional situation that characterized developments since the October Revolution—when someone wants to research concretely the objective “conditions” within which the project of building a postcapitalist society occurred—just bet that the “Communist” imitators of the early Christian assembly will cry out that this is but a scandalous, indecent attempt at rationalization. To understand this attitude look to the Gospel of Mark rather than to the *German Ideology* or the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In the eyes of these “Communists,” the imperialist encirclement of “real, existing socialism” and the socialist revolution are simply as irrelevant as the Roman siege of Jerusalem and the Jewish national revolution were for the assembly of Jewish early Christians. From this perspective every effort to analyze the concrete historical conditions is a distraction and immoral; the only thing that really matters is the authenticity and the purity of the gospel of salvation. Distanced too far away to perceive the conquest by the Romans as painful, the fall and

destruction of Jerusalem actually seemed to please the Jewish-Christian believers; this had been foreseen by Jesus, and in any case from now on it was possible to proclaim the Gospel without the falsifications and deviations that politics was said to require. In like manner there are not a few Communists who declare that they have a sense of relief and “liberation” since the collapse of “real, existing socialism.” Now it is possible to return to the “authentic” Marx and to the idea of Communism and to proclaim these without the nasty encrustations that history and politics have deposited upon them.

### 3. “Back to Marx” and the formalistic cult of martyrs

In this way the slogan “Back to Marx” has come to pass. Yet it can be rather easily shown that Marx is the most resolute critic of all “back to” philosophies. In his own time he made fun of those who, in their disputes with Hegel, wanted to go back to Kant and even back to Aristotle. One of the fundamentals of historical materialism is the conclusion that theory develops along with history and the concrete process of change. This great revolutionary thinker did not hesitate to acknowledge that he stood in debt even to the short-lived experience of the Paris Commune. Nowadays, however, decade upon decade of incredibly rich historical experience (from the October Revolution to the Chinese and Cuban revolutions) is declared to be meaningless and unimportant in comparison to the “authentic” Gospel announced once and for all in the sacred texts. These need simply to be rediscovered and religiously rethought.

At the same time those who proclaim the slogan “Back to Marx” are the first not to take it really seriously. How else can anyone explain that they devote such attention to Gramsci and to Che Guevara? These are certainly individuals whose thought and action is predicated upon the Bolshevik Revolution and the development of the international Communist movement, and who thus understood important decades of world history *since* Marx’s death—history that took place under conditions that Marx did not foresee, nor could he have foreseen them. In which text from Marx, pray tell, is it prognosticated that we will find

socialism on a small island like Cuba or a guerrilla in Bolivia fighting for a socialist type of revolution? And as far as Gramsci is concerned, it is known how he greeted the October Revolution as *The Revolution against Das Kapital*. It was the Mensheviks who at that time used the phrase "Back to Marx" and understood it in a mechanistic way. The greatness of Gramsci is to be found specifically in his opposition to them.

"Back to Marx" is clearly a religious phrase. Just as the early-Christian assembly wanted to have nothing to do with the Jewish national revolution, and thereby opposed Isaiah and Jesus, so too today certain "Communists" oppose themselves and Marx to the historical developments begun with the October Revolution. The appeals to Gramsci and Che Guevara also carry with them quite remarkable tendencies. Neither can be conceived of apart from the teachings of Lenin, yet this must be carefully hushed up. Different as they are, they share the fate of having been in a certain way defeated. They never were able to participate in the exercise of power gained through revolution; instead they had to endure the coercive force of the old sociopolitical order. People esteem the martyrdom of both of these outstanding representatives of the international Communist movement, but not their thinking or their political activity, which belongs to a resolutely repressed history.

#### *4. Recovering the capacity for political thought and action*

The results of this ultimately religious attitude weigh very heavily. I will limit myself to two examples. The Italian publications *Il Manifesto* and *Liberazione*<sup>2</sup> correctly judged the embargoes against Iraq and Cuba to be genocide or attempted genocide, and then criticized the United States for granting permanent normal trade relationships to China, because this implicates it in repression of "dissidents." A country said to be guilty of genocide is called upon to defend and respect human rights; on the one hand it is found guilty for its political embargoes, then on the other hand guilty for refusing to take any steps toward embargo. This is clearly bereft of any logic. Yet one will search in vain for even the faintest traces of logic in the

discourse of a religious mind that shifts about in a realm of fantasy constantly concerned to proclaim its own rejection of evil wherever this evil may occur, such as embargoes against the people of Iraq and Cuba or as repression of “dissidents” in China.

One needs to have done only the slightest political or historical research to realize that the anti-Chinese campaign of that period was a “more or less foregone conclusion from the events of Tiananmen Square” (Jean 1995, 205). In reality the United States is disturbed about “China as the last great region beyond the influence of U.S. politics, the as yet unconquered *last frontier*” (Valladao 1996, 241). But for the religious mind, which is only concerned to declare (and savor) its own purported purity, no kind of historical and political analysis counts. Why be bothered that the demand for a Chinese embargo at the expense of the Chinese people would indirectly legitimate the already practiced embargoes of Iraq or Cuba? The conquest of this “last frontier” by the United States would mean the dismemberment of China (following upon that of the USSR and Yugoslavia) and a catastrophe for the Chinese people. Making a debacle of this great Asian country would tremendously strengthen the military and political ability of U.S. imperialism to carry out its strategy of embargo and the genocidal strangulation of the peoples of Iraq and Cuba. Yet such thoughts are but superficial considerations in the religious primitivism of certain “Communists.”

Another example. In *Liberazione* one could read articles that quite correctly compared the radical wing of the secessionist movement in Italy with the Nazis (Caldiron 1977). But just a little while later this same publication undertook a polemic against those who demanded the intervention of the courts to halt the Lega Nord’s propagation of race hatred among secessionists as well as its preparations for a counterrevolutionary civil war. It seems that these comrades have not posed a very fundamental question: just how appropriate is it for Communists to demand that the Nazi groups not be penalized? Once again, every effort to seek a logic here other than a primitive religious mentality proves futile. Coercion is condemned absolutely. Who cares if

this condemnation of law enforcement and judicial intervention powerfully invigorates the violence of the Lega supporters and the Nazis? No matter what, one's own soul has been saved. We have a paradoxical situation here. The Vatican emphasizes again and again the danger of legalistic plans, and calls for government institutions to oppose quite decisively the danger of rebellion and counterrevolutionary civil war. Jesus, who emerged from the disastrous failure of the Jewish national revolution, openly declared: "My realm is not of this world." The "Communists" have appropriated this slogan today, making it theirs even more than the Christians.

I have compared the perspective of certain "Communists" with that of the Jewish-Christian believers. But this needs to be made more precise. The withdrawal of these believers into their own inwardness also contains a positive element: the distancing from a national revolution also contributes to the emergence of universalistic thinking. But the contemporary withdrawal into inwardness and the distancing from a revolution and a historical development that is proclaimed today in explicitly universalistic terms quite simply means an involution and a regression. We do not need to get all worked up about it. It is quite natural that a disastrous failure of historical proportions gives rise to perspectives of a religious type. Yet it would be catastrophic to be stuck in this position. Communists, if they do not want to sentence themselves to powerlessness and subalternity, must recover the capacity to think and act in political terms, even when this politics is carried along by momentous ideational tension.

## ***II. The collapse of the "socialist camp": Implosion or Third World War?***

### *1. "Implosion": A myth in defense of imperialism*

How did U.S. imperialism succeed in gobbling up Nicaragua? It subjected the country to an economic and military blockade, to surveillance and destabilization by the CIA, to mined harbors, and to a secretly waged undeclared, bloody, and dirty war, making a mockery of international law. Faced with all of this,

the Sandinista government felt compelled to undertake limited defensive measures against external aggression and internal reaction. Incredibly, the U.S. administration swung itself into the role of defender of human rights against totalitarian repression, and directed the fire of its entire multimedia machinery against the Sandinista government. This campaign was supported in the main by the Catholic hierarchy, yet some of the beautiful souls on the "Left" played right along. Ortega's ability to counteract the aggression was increasingly limited and destroyed. While ideological crusades and economic strangulation undermined the social support for the Sandinista government, military power and the terrorism of the Contras (supported by Washington) weakened the will and ability to resist. The result was elections in which the extraordinary financial and multimedia power of imperialism was allowed full play. Already bloodied and impoverished, with the knife closer to their throats than ever before, the Nicaraguan people "freely" chose to give in to the aggressors.

The strategy used against Cuba is just the same. Here one may well pose the question: was the collapse of the Sandinista government the result of an "implosion"? Could the overthrow of Fidel Castro and Cuban socialism, sought for decades by U.S. imperialism, be described as an "implosion" or "collapse"? Immediately visible here is the mystifying character of the concepts used by imperialism to portray a social crisis or catastrophe as a purely spontaneous and internal process, though in reality it can not be separated from the momentous stress that imperialism applied at every juncture.

The concept "implosion" is not any more persuasive when it is applied in this manner beyond the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua to the "socialist camp" in general. George Kennan emphasized as early as 1947, as he was formulating the politics of containment, that it would be necessary to influence "the internal developments, both within Russia and throughout the international Communist movement." This should take place not just by means of the "informational activity" of the covert agencies, though the most influential advisors to the U.S. consulate in Moscow and within the U.S. administration of course



underscored this especially. But articulated more generally and more ambitiously, the aim was “to increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate,” in order to “promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power.” What is usually expressed with the remarkable euphemism “implosion” is here more precisely defined as a “breakup,” which would be so little spontaneous that it was foretold by roughly forty years, planned, and actively sought. At the international level, the economic, political, and military power relationships were to be such that—and this is still Kennan—the West would exercise a kind of “power of life and death over the Communist movement” and the Soviet Union (Hofstadter and Hofstadter 1982, 418f).

## *2. On the sources of the Cold War*

The collapse of the “socialist camp” must therefore be seen in the context of an unremitting exercise of power, which was the so-called Cold War. This stretched across the entire globe and lasted for decades. At the beginning of the 1950s, its conditions were described as follows by General Jimmy Doolittle:

There are no rules in such a game. Hitherto acceptable norms of human conduct do not apply. . . . We must . . . learn to subvert, sabotage, and destroy our enemies by more clever, more sophisticated, and more effective methods than those used against us. (Ambrose 1991, 377)

Eisenhower came to the same conclusions. He, of course, shifted from the office of supreme military commander in Europe to that of U.S. president by no mere accident. We are talking about the assaying of enormous power, which on both sides utilized any means necessary (espionage, subversion, dirty tricks, etc.) and became real war in various areas of the globe—for example, in Korea. Apparently seeking to overcome a lull in military operations in January 1952, Truman dallied with a radical idea. As he makes clear in his diary, one could confront the USSR and the People’s Republic of China with an ultimatum

and make clear that if it were disregarded, “Moscow, Leningrad, Mukden, Vladivostock, Peking, Shanghai, Port Arthur, Darien, Odessa, Stalingrad and every other manufacturing plant in China and the Soviet Union will be eliminated” (Sherry 1995, 182). What is going on here is not simply some private rumination. During the Korean War, the use of atomic weaponry against the People’s Republic of China was seriously contemplated, and this threat was made all the more horrendous given the recent memories of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

Without a doubt the Cold War aimed at the dissolution—more accurately the *breakup*—of the USSR. But when did it begin? It was already underway as the Second World War raged. Nagasaki and Hiroshima were destroyed even as it was clear that Japan was ready to capitulate. Above and beyond using the bomb against this already defeated country, the United States aimed this threat at the USSR. This is the conclusion of prestigious U.S. historians based upon irrefutable evidence. The new and terrible weapon was not only to be tested over desert areas for demonstration purposes; it was to be dropped immediately on two large cities. In this manner the Soviets would come to realize, unmistakably and thoroughly, what the real nature of power relationships now was—as well as the U.S. resolution to shrink from nothing. And in fact Churchill declared his approval of “eliminating all the Russian centres of industry” if it were necessary. At the same time U.S. Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson was prepared “to force the Soviet Union to abandon or radically alter its entire system of government.”

Paradoxically, it was the military leaders who reacted negatively and registered opposition to these plans for bombardment. They called the new weapons “barbarous” because they would indiscriminately kill “women and children.” These were viewed as no better than the “bacteriological weapons” and “poison gas” that were prohibited under the Geneva accords. Beyond all this, Japan was “already defeated and prepared to capitulate.” These military officers did not even know that the atomic weapons were really aimed at the Soviet Union, the one country that was prepared to oppose Truman’s policy to make the United States

into “the world’s marshal and sheriff” (as explicitly formulated at a cabinet meeting on 7 September 1945). The horrible destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima disturbed public opinion in the United States to a degree that could even be called an outcry. For this reason Stimson intervened with an article that was played up by all the media. It spread the deceitful fable that these two cruel massacres were necessary to save the lives of millions of people. In reality, however, as the U.S. historian cited here emphasizes, it was about stopping the wave of criticism and getting public opinion used to the idea that the employment of nuclear weapons would now be absolutely normal (as well as renewing a warning to the USSR (Alperovitz 1995, 316–330, 252, 260f).<sup>3</sup>

In Japan another situation was unfolding that is also helpful in understanding the Cold War. In its aggression against China, the imperial army of Japan had committed gruesome crimes. Numbers of captives had been used as guinea pigs for dissection and other experiments, and bacteriological weapons were used against the civilian population. Yet those persons responsible for this and the members of the notorious Unit 731 were guaranteed immunity by the United States in exchange for the delivery of all the data collected through these war crimes. In the Cold War that was just getting started, not only nuclear bombs but also bacteriological weapons were put into place (Meirion and Harries 1987, 39).

In this way the beginnings of the Cold War and the final phases of the Second World War are interrelated. In fact it is not even necessary to wait until 1945 to see these connections. It is enlightening to look at the declaration that Truman made immediately after the Nazi invasion of the USSR. At this point the United States was not officially a participant in the war, though in fact an ally of Great Britain. It is understandable that the future U.S. president would make clear that he “doesn’t want to see Hitler victorious under any circumstances.” Yet on the other hand he does not shy away from announcing: “If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany and that way let them kill as

many as possible.” In this fashion Truman made known—despite the given alliance with Great Britain and thereby indirect alliance with the USSR—that he was decidedly interested in seeing the country that arose with the October Revolution bleed to death. At the same time the British minister Lord Brabazon made similar sentiments known. He was forced to step down, yet the fact remains that influential circles in Great Britain continued to see the USSR, with whom they were formally allied, as their mortal enemy (Thomas 1988, 187).

In 1944, Vice President Truman (who in a year would be president) became engaged in altering the policy set in the summer of 1941. One should add that Franklin Delano Roosevelt (who not accidentally had Truman as vice president for a year) did not seem to have been unacquainted with the intention of weakening the Soviet Union or bleeding it dry. Toward the end of the war, it was becoming clear that the Soviet Union and not Great Britain would emerge from it as “the most important opponent of a global ‘Pax Americana,’” and Roosevelt radically altered his military strategy. According to an observation of a German historian:

The consequence of this, letting the USSR carry on the main effort toward the defeat of Germany, resulted from the decision to put into place only 89 of the 215 divisions originally called for in the “Victory Plan;” the chief military might of the U.S. was shifted to the navy and the air force to secure superior strength in the air and at sea. (Hillgruber 1988, 295 n. 71)

Perhaps it is necessary to delve back even further. Andre Fontaine begins his *Geschichte des kalten Krieges* [History of the Cold War] in a very telling way with the October Revolution, which was, of course, really contested both with hot and cold war. In the period between October 1917 and 1953 (Stalin’s death), we see Germany and the Anglo-Saxon powers combating the USSR relay style, so to speak, passing the baton to relieve one another. The aggression of Wilhelmanian Germany (continuing until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk) was followed first by that

of the Entente, then that of Hitler's Germany, and finally the Cold War in the narrow sense, whose beginnings were visible decades before and even connected to the two world wars.

*3. A deadly combination: The new face of war*

In the struggle against the Soviet Union and the "socialist camp," the U.S. administration used the same deadly combination of economic, ideological, and military pressures that it had successfully utilized to bring down the Sandinista government and which it hoped would lead to the breakdown of the social and political system in Cuba. This was the same mixture that it also deployed against other nations such as Iraq, Iran, Libya, and from time to time against China.

This new, more subtle, and highly developed type of warfare was worked out in the course of the prolonged battle against the social formation that emerged from the October Revolution. Herbert Hoover, himself a high-level representative of the U.S. administration and later president, emphasized that sending soldiers against Soviet Russia was sending them to prevent "infection with Bolshevik ideas." In his estimation it would be still better to utilize an economic blockade in a struggle against the enemy and against those nations who let themselves be seduced by Moscow, because the threat of an economic blockade and the perils of starvation would get them to come to their senses. The French premier, Georges Clemenceau, was immediately fascinated by Hoover's suggestions. He acknowledged that this would be a "really effective weapon" that offered "greater chances for success than military intervention." Gramsci, in contrast, was incensed by the imperialistic formula, "Your money or your life! Bourgeois rule or starvation."<sup>4</sup>

Since the start of the Cold War (narrowly defined), yet another weapon has also been introduced. As early as November 1945, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Averill Harriman, recommended opening up an ideological and propaganda front against the USSR. One could certainly begin this with the dissemination of newspapers and journals, yet "the printed word" was in his estimation "fundamentally unsatisfactory." Still better

would be to utilize strong radio broadcasts in all of the various languages of the Soviet Union. The penetrating power of stations such as these was repeatedly recommended and praised (Thomas 1988, 223). Thus radio became the newest weapon in the gigantic confrontation that was now beginning. Radio, which had served the Nazi regime in the solidification of its social consensus, was now utilized to destroy the social consensus of the Soviet state.

In combination with this new weaponry, the old standard weapons continued to be directly or indirectly employed. The epoch beginning in 1945–46 has been characterized by Eric Hobsbawm as “a Third World War, though a very peculiar one” (1994, 226). It is particularly inappropriate to call a war “cold” that begins with Nagasaki and Hiroshima. What we had here was a war that not only heated up repeatedly in various places around the globe, but periodically threatened to become, almost in the blink of an eye, so hot that the whole (or nearly the whole) planet would go up in flames. In terms of the confrontation between the chief antagonists, one must never lose sight of the fact that this represented a probing and experimentation with terrible military might, though most of the public fronts were in political, diplomatic, economic, and propaganda battles. Even if there were never to be a direct and total clash, these forces nonetheless had serious consequences. This assaying and estimation of power in the end had effects on the economy and politics of the enemy nation, its entire system of internal relations. This was the aim, and it succeeded, as we have seen, in destroying the alliances, the “camp” of the enemy.

At this juncture the concept “implosion” is revealed to be but a myth in defense of the systems of capitalism and imperialism. These systems are celebrating their own presumed advantages in comparison exclusively with what are considered to be the built-in disadvantages, crises, and difficulties of the social systems in Moscow, in the Caribbean, and in Latin America. The concept of implosion or collapse serves primarily to crown the winner. Yet it has found a friendly acceptance within the Left and among Communists, especially among those who present themselves as

ultra-Communists and ultra-revolutionaries. This is but renewed evidence of their ideological and political subalternity.

A refusal to use the concept “implosion” does not mean a refusal to engage in an unflinching historical examination of “real, existing socialism” and the international Communist movement. Far from it: this kind of examination is only possible when one explicitly reflects on the reality of the “Third World War.” Because this unremitting examination must never be mistaken for capitulation, it is necessary also to carry out fully the critique of subalternity and religious primitivism as these have taken hold in the Communist movement in the wake of defeat.

### ***III. A Communist movement with limited sovereignty?***

We have shown that the concept “implosion” is completely inappropriate as an explanation for the collapse of “real, existing socialism.” It is far more reasonable to speak of a “Third World War,” a world war in which a multimedia and ideological barrage has played a central role. This aspect also accounts for the disorientation of the vanquished. It is as if an ideological Hiroshima has destroyed the ability of the international Communist movement to think in its own behalf.

#### *1. Normality and the exceptional circumstance*

“Sovereign are they who get to decide the exceptional circumstance.” This aphorism formulated by the ultrareactionary and ingenious legal scholar Carl Schmidt can aid us in understanding not only the concrete way in which a constitutional system operates, but also in understanding the vitality of a political movement and its actual degree of autonomy. An example: In Algeria in 1991 a coup annulled the election that would have brought the Islamic Reform Front into power. A military dictatorship was set up using the rationalization that the reform movement represented an immense danger to the country and its prospects for modernization. The generals pointed to the exceptional circumstance, and showed themselves to be the real holders of political power. As Mao Zedong made clear:

“Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.” And sovereign are those who decide when the guns speak. At least this much can be said about the realities of power within the realm of a government.

Now let us apply the same methodological criterion to an investigation of the relations between the different political camps. The coup in Algeria was accepted at that time by the West and defended with the argument that it avoided the establishment of an Islamic—and obscurantist—government that would have brought an end to all freedom of expression and horrible retrogression, especially where women were concerned. In a similar manner a few years earlier, the USSR had tried to defend its intervention in Afghanistan and supported a government embarked on an ambitious modernization program. It thereby battled the rabid resistance of Islamic fundamentalists. In this instance the West displayed not only its disapproval, but also armed to the teeth the same sort of “freedom fighters” who in Algeria are branded as common criminals and bloodthirsty murderers. Thus we see that appealing to exceptional circumstances in one instance is not regarded as valid in another. Sometimes breaking the rules is legitimated and sanctified, and on other occasions regarded as heresy to be condemned.

It should not surprise us that the United States or France inconsistently judge controversial cases according to changing geopolitical and economic conditions. It is much more interesting to inquire into the attitudes of the Left and especially the Communists. All in all they seem to plug into the established ideology: they view the coup in Algeria as if it were something almost natural and noncontroversial, though they never tire of condemning the Soviet use of force in Afghanistan. The exceptional circumstances, which call for the suspension of the usual rules of the game, are the exclusive prerogative of the liberal, capitalist, and imperialist West to decide. And thus arises the regrettable condition of a Communist movement without sovereignty, or at best with limited sovereignty. If that person is sovereign who decides about exceptional circumstances, then the sovereign *par excellence* sits in Washington. Washington’s



sovereignty is complete to the degree that it is able to limit and sometimes entirely cast aside the power of independent thinking of those very groups, journals, newspapers, and movements that consider themselves to be Communist.

## ***2. Bobbio and the exceptional circumstance***

What has been said above is not all that may be said in defense of the thesis presented here. In August of 1991 a curious putsch occurred in Moscow, which Yeltsin kept from being really understood. Instead, he provided it with a colossal propaganda trial, which became the precondition of its ultimate success. A certain amount of suspicion is legitimate here. The editorial in *Espresso* on the 1 September of that year carried the famous headline: "Yeltsin, or rather Bush, made the real putsch." But this is not what interests us just now. Those who initiated the "putsch" made assurances that they wanted to oppose a dramatic threat to the unity and independence of the USSR, and that they were relying on the special use of force that was foreseen in the constitution in case of exceptional circumstances. Now, who does not remember the massive international disarmament campaign at that time that also drew in, or overran, the Communists?

Two years later it was Yeltsin who, as the protagonist of a putsch, dissolved the parliament that had been freely elected by the people and allowed it to be fired upon. This time the machinery of repression was well oiled and promptly put into service. It did not content itself with empty threats. The constitutional system was liquidated with utter brutality, yet this did not prevent the "democrat" Clinton or the "socialist" Mitterrand from expressing their approval. And the Communists? Above all a moving sensibility was displayed by *Il Manifesto*, which looks toward Turin in order to follow the convolutions of the grand theoretician of the absolute inviolability of rules and regulations. When asked to articulate his position, Bobbio<sup>5</sup> proclaimed: "I defend government by rule of law and will always defend it. Yet in the Russian instance I ask myself: do conditions still exist there for a law-governed state?" (*La Stampa*, 24 September 1993). Too bad that this question did not occur to the illustrious

philosopher two years earlier, in August 1991. Nonetheless, his consideration here is simple and rational, just a matter of distinguishing exceptional circumstances from normality. This is a consideration from which Communists also have much to learn, yet they refuse to distinguish such things and leave it to the sovereign sitting in Washington, or more modestly in Turin, to decide whether exceptional circumstances exist.

It is enlightening to look at the subaltern dependency of the Left especially with regard to the campaign that the U.S. administration has undertaken against the People's Republic of China. A whole series of disclosures has recently shed new light on the events of Tiananmen Square. Banned students and intellectuals, who were exiled to the United States, are today criticizing the "radical" exponents of the movement back then for seeking to impede reconciliation with officials in Beijing at any cost. Thus we see the real goal pursued by certain circles (in China and outside it) after the disturbances of 1989. This is made clear in an article in *Foreign Affairs* (a journal close to the State Department) where it is gleefully forecast that China will fall apart after the death of Deng Xiaoping. It is also noted in passing that this was exactly the result sought in 1989, the year when the collapse of Communism was observed "in a dozen countries" (Waldron 1995, 149). From this we can see that the same circles that today want to pillory the leadership in Beijing were ready at a moment's notice to rationalize the canon barrage that might have been fired by a Chinese Yeltsin.

### *3. The struggle for hegemony*

Yet none of this seems to evoke any real analytical effort on the part of some on the Left, though they are so full of praise for Gramsci. They seem to forget that one of the fundamental aspects of his work is the battle against hegemony. Categories, judgments, historical comparisons—one could say that all of these are today ultimately extracted by this Left from the dominant ideology. The thirtieth anniversary of the Hungarian uprising became a platform for a recollection of the 1956 Soviet

invasion of Hungary. And, in accordance with logic and duty, the Communists busied themselves with profound and pitiless self-critique. Toward the end of 1997, however, nobody took the opportunity to remember the repressive measures taken by Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan fifty years earlier. A pretty insignificant event? From official Hungarian sources we know that the tragic events of 1956 claimed the lives of 2500 people. At the beginning of 1947, nine years before, 10,000 people died as a result of the USA-sponsored Kuomintang repression (Lutzker 1987. 178).

Every year there is a renewed memorialization of Tiananmen Square, but who remembers the hundreds or perhaps thousands of people who died during the U.S. intervention in Panama (bombing thickly populated areas without any declaration of war) in the same year, 1989? There are so many reasons to assert that the Left, including numerous Communists, is operating with but limited sovereignty, especially in terms of its own historical understanding and historical perspective.

This lack of autonomy is all the more evident when we look at how certain concepts are used. I shall limit myself to one especially obvious example. Whenever did the leftist press and the Communist press not join the bourgeois press in referring to the opposition against Yeltsin (including the Russian Communists) as “nationalists?” It might as well suffice just to read the pronouncements of U.S. leaders to get ourselves a good grounding in the facts. From his point of view, Bush expressed himself at the time quite clearly:

I see America as the leader—a unique nation with a special role in the world. And this has been called the American century, because in it we were the dominant force for good in the world. We saved Europe, cured polio, went to the moon, and lit the world with our culture. And now we are on the verge of a new century, and what country’s name will it bear? I say it will be another American century. Our work is not done, our force is not spent. (1989, 125)

Let us listen to Bill Clinton more recently: America “must come to lead the world”—“our mission is timeless” (1994). And finally let us listen to the pragmatist Kissinger: “World leadership is inherent in America’s power and values” (1994, 834). We see here the regrettable mythology of the chosen people taking shape once again. The chauvinism that characterizes it is unmistakable. Yet those who dare to oppose this chosen people are branded as nationalists.

Mistrust is more than justified. Even the American news magazine *Time* admits the following: “For four months a group of American advisors participated *secretly* in the campaign to elect Yeltsin.” An “influential member of the State Department” had declared so there would be no mistake about it that “a Communist victory” could under no circumstances be tolerated (Chiesa 1997, 14 and 36). Therefore, whatever the final judgment may be about the putschists of August 1991, it must be recognized that their conduct was undergirded by a justifiable concern for the unity and independence of the country! And whatever the final judgment may be about the way in which the Chinese Communists met the crisis of 1989, the fact remains that they all have reason to be on guard against maneuvers designed to destroy the unity and independence of the one single country today in a position to restrain the definitive triumph of the American century.

Let me say something very clearly: the point here is not to justify this or that position with regard to the tensions between the former CPSU and the CP of China. Every concrete action of this or that Communist Party (and this means every party that calls itself Communist) must be examined in a concrete way, without preconceptions. And this analysis must not be uncritically derived from those interests and methods that are spread by the dominant ideology. An approach that is free from preconceptions must be extended to everything, and have the aim of retrieving independent judgment and historical understanding. Communists are called upon to liberate themselves once and for all from that limited sovereignty that the victors of the Cold War

(that is to say the “Third World War”) would gladly make permanent.

#### ***IV. The years of Lenin and Stalin: An initial assessment***

##### *1. Total war and “totalitarianism”*

You cannot separate the history of the USSR from its international context. The despotism and terror, first of Lenin and then of Stalin, are less related to the much-maligned Oriental tradition than to the totalitarianism that began to spread worldwide following the Second Thirty Years War as governments, even in the liberal countries, expanded their “‘legitimate’ power over life, death, and freedom” (Max Weber). Evidence for this is found in the total mobilization for war, widespread use of military courts, world championship style competition in executions, and the arbitrary use of force. It is especially revealing to examine this last phenomenon.

Even in liberal Italy the top military leadership regularly utilizes this, discarding the principle of individual accountability. There are lessons to be learned from how this works in the United States too. After Pearl Harbor, Franklin D. Roosevelt had U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry (including women and children) deported to internment camps. This occurred not on the basis of any sort of due process, but rather solely on account of their membership in a distrusted ethnic group. (Here too the principle of individual accountability was abrogated—a characteristic component of totalitarianism).

In 1950, the McCarran Act was passed, which called for the construction of six detention camps for political prisoners in various regions of the country. Among the congressmen approving of this measure were future U.S. presidents Kennedy, Nixon, and Johnson! Beyond all this, the phenomenon of the personal abuse of power should also be seen in a comparative perspective. Franklin D. Roosevelt was ushered into the presidency out of the depths of the Great Depression and was immediately granted tremendous controls and powers. Re-elected three times, he died

at the beginning of his fourth term. The Soviet government, building up its power during a war characterized by the total mobilization and coerced consolidation of populations (even in countries with secure liberal traditions and relatively safe geographical positions, surrounded either by oceans or the Mediterranean Sea), had to contend with permanently exceptional circumstances.

If we look at the period from 1917 to 1953, the year Stalin died, we see that this epoch was characterized by at least four or five wars and two revolutions. From the West, the aggression of Wilhelmanian Germany (until the peace of Brest-Litovsk) was followed first by that of the Entente and then by that of Hitler fascism. Ultimately there was also the aggression of the Cold War that threatened to become a tremendous hot one through the use of atomic weapons. From the East, Japan (which only after 1922 pulled back from Siberia and after 1925 from Sachalin) became a military threat to the borders of the USSR with its invasion of Manchuria. This led to larger border skirmishes before the official start of the Second World War in 1938 and 1939. All of the wars mentioned here were total wars in the sense that they were either begun without a declaration of war (whether one looks at the Entente or the Third Reich), or the invaders had the declared intention of destroying a given regime, as when Hitler's campaign sought the elimination of the "sub-humans" to the East.

In addition to these wars, we must add the revolutions. Aside from that of October, there were the revolutions from above that began to collectivize agriculture and to industrialize the expansive country. The dictatorships of Lenin and (for all of the differences) that of Stalin had one essential feature in common: they were confronted with this total war and with permanently exceptional circumstances, and the Soviet Union was a backward country without a liberal tradition.

## *2. Gulag and emancipation in the Stalin period*

Up to this point we have said little or nothing about the internal developments in this country that emerged from Red

October. At the outset let me make clear that the terror is only one side of the coin (and this is true also for the Stalinist period). The other side needs to be described with some citations and quotations from impeccable sources. “The fifth five-year plan for the school system was an organized attempt to eradicate illiteracy.” Further policies in this area led to the preparation “of a completely new generation of skilled workers and technicians and technically skilled managerial personnel.” Between 1927/28 and 1932/33 the number of college and university students increased markedly from 160,000 to 470,000. The proportion of students in higher education from working-class families rose from one-fourth to one-half. “New cities were founded and old cities were reconstructed.” The emergence of gigantic new industrial complexes went hand in glove with massive upward mobility. This led to “social advancement for capable and ambitious citizens from working-class and agricultural backgrounds.” As a consequence of the cruel and extensive repression of those years, “ten thousand Stakhonovites became factory managers,” and there occurred a parallel phenomenon of upward mobility in the armed forces. One understands nothing of the Stalin period if one does not see it as a combination of barbarism (with an immense Gulag) and social progress.”<sup>6</sup>

*3. A history we need to be ashamed of?*

Members of the phantom (anti-Marxist) “Back to Marx” movement claim that Communists above all must acknowledge that the history of the use of power by Lenin and Stalin is a shameful one. Yet it is not. The epoch-making feature of the October Revolution and the historical turning-point introduced by Lenin is described as follows by Stalin in 1924:

Formerly, the national question was usually confined to a narrow circle of questions, concerning, primarily, “civilized” nationalities. The Irish, the Hungarians, the Poles, the Finns, the Serbs, and several other European nationalities—that was the circle of unequal peoples in whose destinies the leaders of the Second International

were interested. The scores and hundreds of millions of Asiatic and African peoples who are suffering national oppression in its most savage and cruel form usually remained outside of their field of vision. They hesitated to put white and black, “civilized” and “uncivilized” on the same plane. . . . Leninism laid bare this crying incongruity, broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between Europeans and Asiatics, between the “civilized” and “uncivilized” slaves of imperialism, and thus linked the national question with the question of the colonies. (1965, 70–71)

Was this just talk? All theory that does not bring immediate profit can be regarded as nonessential only in the mind of the short-sighted capitalist manager or provincial shopkeeper. In no case can this be the view of a Communist, who is supposed to have learned from Lenin that theory is indispensable for the construction of an emancipatory movement, as well as from Marx that theory becomes a material force of the utmost importance when it is grasped by the masses. And this really did happen.

Even in the darkest years of Stalinism, the international Communist movement played a progressive role—not only in the colonial areas, but also in the developed capitalist countries. In the “Third Reich,” the Jewish philologist, Viktor Klemperer, described in heart-rending terms the degradation and insult that were connected to wearing the star of David;

A removal man, whom I have grown fond of from two earlier removals, suddenly stands before me in the Freiburger Strasse and pumps my hand with his two paws and whispers so that one must be able to hear it across the Fahrdamm: “Now Professor, don’t let it get you down! Before long they’ll be finished, the bloody brothers.”

The Jewish philologist was referring with loving irony to the fact that it must be “decent people who reek strongly of the KPD [German Communist Party]” who were challenging the regime in this way (Burleigh and Wipperman 1991, 94).



Let us shift from Germany to the United States. There Franklin D. Roosevelt has become president. But in the South a politics of segregation and lynching is directed against the African American population. Who is opposing it? The Communists, who not for nothing were branded as “foreigners” and “n—er-lovers” by those with the dominant mind-set. An American historian describes the courage that Communists needed in the United States: “Their challenge to racism and to the status quo prompted a wave of repression one might think inconceivable in a democratic country.” To be a Communist really could mean: “to face the possibility of imprisonment, beatings, kidnapping and even death” (Kelley 1990, 30 and xii).

In this manner, Communists struggled against anti-Semitic and racist barbarism in two very different countries, and—as we want to stress—they viewed Stalin’s USSR filled with sympathy and hope.

#### *4. Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Stalin*

Now let us examine the ideology of the dictator himself, and we shall not liken it to that of Hitler—such an absurd comparison can be left to the professional anti-Communists. Instead, let us look at the ideologies of two other leaders of the antifascist coalition. A few years ago a well-respected English newspaper disclosed that Churchill was attracted to the idea that groups of vagabonds, barbarians, derelicts, and criminals—who are not capable of participating in social life at the level of civilized beings—should be forcibly sterilized (Ponting 1992).

This type of thinking was also evident with Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was enamored of a radical project at least for some length of time after his declaration in Yalta that he felt “more than ever the need for revenge against the Germans” due to the crimes they had committed. “We’ve got to be tough against the Germans—and I mean the German people, not just the Nazis. We’ve got to castrate the German people or at least treat them so that they can never again bring forth people who will want to act as in the past” (Bacque 1992, chap. 1).<sup>7</sup>

In spite of the immense losses and the indescribable suffering that resulted from Hitler fascism, Stalin never engaged in any kind of comparable wholesale racialization of the Germans. In August 1942, he asserted:

It would be ludicrous to equate the clique around Hitler with the German people or the German government. The lessons of history show that Hitlers come and go, yet the German people, the German state continue. The strength of the Red Army rests upon the fact that it can not and does not abide racial hatred against other peoples, including the German people. (1942)<sup>8</sup>

In this case too one could shrug it off as mere theory, mere talk. But one thing is certain: apart from the barbarism and terror of these years, Marxist theory, even in Stalin, was superior to the ideas held by even these respected exponents of the bourgeois world.

*5. Two chapters from the history of subaltern classes and oppressed peoples*

We recommend some reflection to the Communists who have joined ranks with the dominant ideology in demonizing Stalin. They continue to look to Spartacus. Historians report that Spartacus, in order to avenge and honor the death of his comrade Crixius, sacrificed three hundred Roman prisoners, and killed others the night before this battle. Still more violent was the action of the slaves who dared an insurgency some decades before. According to Diodorus Siculus, they broke into the home of the rulers, raped the women, and brought about “a massive blood bath, that did not even spare the infants.” These are certainly not the types of conduct that Italian Communists want to valorize when they wave the portrait of Spartacus at their *Liberazione* festivals or depict it in the pages of their revolutionary Communist newspaper. They never place him on the same plane as Crassus, who (after restoring an iron discipline to the Roman Legion through the exercise of arbitrary power) succeeded in putting down the insurgents and had four thousand

prisoners crucified along the Appian Way. Crassus was the richest man in Rome. He wanted to see slavery made permanent and he wanted to deny all dignity to the “instruments with speech” of the world. Yet one of these talking instruments had some success, at least for a time, in confronting and deflating the arrogance of his imperial masters, expressing the protest of his comrades in work and suffering. Insofar as they honor Spartacus, the Italian Communists are also reinforcing the fact that his personality and his destiny were (in spite of the errors) part of a movement that was a liberation movement and inseparable from the history of subaltern classes.

It is little different with the Russian Communists and the meaning of their demonstrations against the use of the portrait of Stalin. They want to avoid identifying with the Gulag and the systematic liquidation of opponents, just like the “*Liberazione*” avoid identification with the brutality against women and the massacre of prisoners and infants that the insurgent slaves were guilty of. The simple-minded transfiguration of Spartacus is the other side of the coin of demonizing Stalin. It makes no sense to flee from reality or to sanitize it arbitrarily in order to protect our comfort zone. One need not be a Communist to recognize that “Stalinism,” with all of its horror, is a chapter in a liberation movement that defeated the Third Reich and that provided the impetus for anticolonialism and for the struggles against anti-Semitism and racism; every honest historian knows this.

One historian observes: It is an error to think “Nazi racism was renounced as early as the 1930s.” Even the neologism “racism” with its negative connotations comes into use only later. Before then racial prejudice was a component of the dominant ideology taken for granted on both sides of the Atlantic (Barkan 1993, 1–3). Can we even imagine the radical confrontation and transformation of the concepts “race” and “racism” without the contributions from Stalin’s USSR?

#### *6. Communists must reappropriate their own history*

During his presidency, Bill Clinton declared that he wanted to model himself on Theodore Roosevelt. Teddy was not only the

theoretician of the “big stick” needed when dealing with Latin America. The person of whom Clinton was so enamored was also a proponent of the “eternal war” without “false sentimentality” against the American Indians. “I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are the dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn’t like to inquire too closely about the tenth” (Hofstadter 1967, 209). Of course this is not the Theodore Roosevelt that Clinton wanted to take as his model. But this should give us pause to think: a careless reference to a personality that stepped right up to the threshold of a theoretical justification for genocide. And we should also think about the silence of others who tirelessly demand that the Left and the Communists must come to terms with their criminal past.

On the other hand, there are well-known legal scholars who speak of a “Western genocide” (or at minimum a massacre that has already cost hundreds of thousands of lives) with regard to the long-standing embargo against the people of Iraq. And this massacre did not occur as a result of a horrific and extraordinary circumstance, but rather in a period of peace. Even the Cold War was over, and the security and hegemony of the United States were in no way threatened. Upon what logical basis can one contend that the crimes of Lenin and Stalin are worse than those of which Clinton is guilty?

Sergio Romano has called the periodic bombings against Iraq a continuation of the election campaign by other means. Terror bombing as political advertising: this would have warmed Goebbels’ heart, yet it is undertaken by the leading state of the “democratic” West. And all of this, once again, in a period of peace. The question must be posed: for what reason should a future historian consider the U.S. president “more humane” than those who led the USSR during one of the most tragic periods of world history? Here the attitudes of certain Communists really become repellent and coarse as they demonize Stalin and view Clinton as a representative, albeit a moderate one, of the “Left.” Let us examine the history of colonialism and imperialism. The West eliminated most Indians from the face of the earth and

enslaved the blacks. Similar fates awaited other colonial peoples at their hands, yet this did not stop the West from characterizing its expansion as the advancement of freedom and civilization, thus a cause for celebration. This vision has culminated in the domination of its victims in such a manner that they have internalized their defeat and feel entirely dependent on the conqueror. They hope to sit in the lap of “civilization,” and they have given up their historical understanding and cultural identity. Today we are witnessing a kind of colonization of the historical consciousness of Communists. And this is more than just a metaphor. Historically the Communist movement has come to power in colonial lands at the periphery of the West. On the other hand, the triumph of globalization and the Pax Americana, seen from the point of view of the media, means that everywhere beyond the West becomes just a colony or a province. At least this is so potentially; from the point of view of the center of empire, Washington can (and does), day in and day out, strike any spot on the globe with the concentrated fire-power of its multiple media. To resist this is difficult, yet without this resistance, there are no Communists.

## ***V. Why the United States won the “Third World War”***

### *1. The U.S. diplomatic-military offensive*

The beginning and the end of the “Cold War” were marked explicitly by two military warnings, two threats, not just of war but of total war and annihilation: the atomic destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima ordered by Truman, and the Star Wars program initiated by Reagan. But not just for this reason can the period between 1945 and 1991 be understood as a kind of “Third World War” with its own unique characteristics. The victors successfully disturbed and transformed the political-military strategy of their enemies. In 1953, Yugoslavia became a kind of corresponding member of NATO five years after it broke with the USSR on the basis of its approval of the “Balkan Pact” with Turkey and Greece, and was thus integrated into the “defensive

position of the West.”<sup>9</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, a kind of “*de facto* alliance” against the USSR was built up through the U.S.-China reconciliation process, though for its part the USSR wanted to win the United States for a “quasi-alliance against China” (Kissinger 1994, 729).

It is obvious that the winning diplomatic initiatives of the West were connected to powerful military pressures. Let us look at the People’s Republic of China, which was politically seeking its own national unity after decades and even centuries of colonial humiliation, yet caught up in a conflict in which its major goal was the recovery of Quemoy and Matsu, two islands that, as Churchill emphasized in a letter to Eisenhower on 15 February 1955, lay “offshore” and “are legally part of China.” They formed a kind of pistol at its temple. And this pistol was not to be considered out of bounds by the U.S. administration. It would not hesitate to threaten to defend the islands with atomic weapons. Thus, in 1958, when the Quemoy-Matsu crisis broke out anew, the USSR, fully aware of the military superiority of the United States, gave to China a defense agreement that limited itself only to the mainland. The great Asiatic power was thus forced to give up its goal—one that even Churchill saw a legitimate and “natural.” The assurances were of no use that Khrushchev had given Mao two years earlier, rebuilding the leadership that the socialist camp required along with *contre-cordon sanitaire*. Obedience to the political line of the USSR no longer appeared as the path that could end colonial degradation or achieve national unity. In this manner, the threat of using military force (above all nuclear), if not the actual use of force itself, decisively influenced the development of the Third World War.

## 2. *The national question and the decline of the “socialist camp”*

None of this reduces the magnitude of the mistakes, crimes, and guilt of the socialist camp. Quite the contrary, it makes these clearer. Let us take a look at the most difficult points of crisis. In 1948, the USSR broke with Yugoslavia. In 1956, the invasion of Hungary. In 1968, the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1969,

bloody border confrontations between the USSR and China. Though avoided then, war between two governments calling themselves socialist would become a tragic reality a decade later: first between Vietnam and Cambodia, then China and Vietnam. In 1981, martial law in Poland in order to prevent a “comradely” intervention by the USSR, and to bring under control an oppositional movement that had found widespread support because it appealed to the national identity that Big Brother scorned. For a variety of reasons, it is nonetheless common to all of the crises that the national question played a central role. Not for nothing did the dissolution of the socialist camp begin at the edges of the “empire,” in countries that had been dissatisfied for a long time with the limited sovereignty forced upon them. There were also decisive factors internal to the USSR. The stirrings in the Baltic republics, which had had socialism “exported” to them in 1939 and 1940, were key to the ultimate collapse, well before the obscure “putsch” of August 1991. In definite ways the national question, which had importantly helped the success of the October Revolution, also sealed the end of the historical cycle which it began.

The strengthened vitality of the People’s Republic of China (no matter how one evaluates its political orientation back then) is explicable only because Mao took to heart historical experiences and understood how to analyze critically the major difficulties in the USSR caused by its policies in regard to the peasantry and national minorities (1979, 365 f and 372). At least during certain periods of their history, the Chinese Communists understood to stay on the high ground represented by Lenin’s views of 1916, which stressed that the national question remains even after Communist and workers’ parties come to state power. A position paper of the Chinese Communist Party in 1956 stressed that within the socialist camp continuing efforts are necessary to overcome the tendency toward great nation chauvinism. This is a tendency that by no means disappears immediately with the conquest of a bourgeois or semifeudal regime, and that may even be heightened during the “heady” times when revolution is newly victorious. The position paper states:

[This is a ] phenomenon that is not unique to any particular country. For example, country B can be small and backward compared to country A, yet large and developed with regard to country C. Therefore it can happen that country B, while complaining about the great-nation chauvinism of country A, can simultaneously display characteristics of great-nation chauvinism toward country C. (*Ancora a proposito* 1956)

I am treating the problem here very generally, yet is not hard to see that behind B we could find Yugoslavia complaining about the arrogance and chauvinism of the USSR (A), yet itself showing hegemonic ambitions toward Albania (C). Ultimately the Chinese Communists came to denounce the USSR as socialist in words but imperialist in deeds. They utilized a concept (social imperialism) that correctly castigated actions like the invasion of Czechoslovakia, but which nonetheless unfairly erased national conflict from socialist reality and fell thereby into a utopian perspective on socialism.

Not so very long ago Fidel Castro attempted to analyze and evaluate these issues and came to this remarkable conclusion: "We socialists have committed the following error: we have underestimated the power of nationalism and religion." (Here one should remember that religion in particular can form an essential element of national identity, as in countries like Poland and Ireland. Today we might also say the same about the Islamic world.) Unable to acknowledge and respect national peculiarities because of an abstract and aggressive "internationalism," Brezhnev's openly chauvinistic and hegemonic theory of the "international dictatorship of the proletariat" came to pass, which resulted in limiting the sovereignty of countries officially allied with the USSR. The breakup and collapse of the socialist camp stems from this, as does also the ultimate triumph and practice of the "international dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" worked out by the United States.



*3. The economic and ideological front of the "Third World War"*

Above and beyond the diplomatic/military side of the "Third World War" was the economic side, the war's second front. A technological embargo had been declared against the USSR and kept in force, for all practical purposes, until the final breakdown of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless it would be erroneous to overestimate the role played by the economy in this process. It will suffice to relate the views of a few establishment U.S. sources on this matter. Paul Kennedy viewed the Russia of the 1930s as being on the road to a speedy transformation to an economic superpower, and considered the five-year period from 1945 to 1950 as constituting a minor economic miracle. Lester Thurow characterized the economy of the Soviet Union in the years that immediately followed as growing "faster than the United States," and also contended that "the sudden disappearance of Communism" is "mysterious," at least as regards the economy (1992, 11 and 13). Since the collapse of production in the formerly socialist countries occurred only after 1991, it can very definitely be said that the economy was not the key factor in the collapse of "real, existing socialism."

We are thus compelled to examine the third front of the "Third World War," the ideological one. One of the first goals of the CIA was to set up an efficient "Psychological Warfare Workshop." In November 1945, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, Averill Harriman, demanded the construction of high-powered radio stations that could broadcast in all of the USSR's diverse languages. In 1956, during the days of the Hungarian uprising, the dozen or so small and secretly constructed radio transmitters played a major role.

*4. A completely unrealistic theory of Communism*

The multimedia supremacy of the United States was not, of course, the most important factor. During the 1950s (when, as we have seen, the rhythm of Soviet economic development was extremely promising), Khrushchev proclaimed the goals of Communism in terms of outpacing the United States. At that time

“real, existing socialism” was ideologically on the offensive to such a degree that, in terms of history and philosophy of history, it considered the fate of capitalism as being already sealed. The ensuing years and decades demonstrated the unreal nature of this perspective. Forced to reduce its ambitions drastically, the Soviet Union proved unable to analyze its own history or to examine its own ideology in a fundamental way. Its leaders offered assurances again and again that rapid progress was being made on the path toward the realization of Communism. Yet this was a Communism understood in the fantastical manner that is oftentimes handed down to us as a definition from Marx and Engels. According to the *German Ideology*, Communism is supposed to bring forth a condition where it is possible for every one of us “do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner” according to one’s own wishes “without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (Marx and Engels 1976, 47).

If we would like to adopt this definition, it would require that the productive capacities of Communism be advanced so wonderfully that the problems and conflicts that are ordinarily connected to the measurement and regulation of the labor necessary for the production of social wealth and the distribution of this wealth would have disappeared. Furthermore, such an understanding of Communism presupposes not only the end of the state, but also of the division of labor, and indeed labor itself, not to mention the disappearance of all forms of power and duty. Decades of rich historical experience should have given rise to a profound examination of these themes and problems. In reality we have not gotten much further than the efforts of Lenin in reformulating the theory of socialist revolution and taking into account the lengthy duration of the transition and its unavoidable complexity. What is lacking is the (absolutely necessary) radical reexamination of the theory of socialism and Communism in the totality of postcapitalist society.

It is clear that when the attainment of Communism is put off until an ever more distant and unlikely future, “real, existing

socialism” loses its credibility and legitimacy all the more. A Party leadership that gradually became more and more self-important, more spoiled and more corrupt, lacked any type of general legitimacy. A time like ours seeks political justification in terms of democracy and people’s self-determination. In addition, the tangible consequences of “real, existing socialism” undermined the very reasons for its existence. Ever-present compulsion became more and more unbearable within the civil society that did develop thanks to mass education, the wide extension of culture, and a modicum of social security.

The internal difficulties of the “socialist camp” became all the more obvious as the rhythm of economic development began to lag. The thesis of the inevitable (and immediate) crisis of capitalism, propounded by socialism’s philosophy of history, increasingly came into crisis itself. The foundation for social consensus disappeared, and the powerful mechanisms of repression were met with growing revulsion. At the same time, the Soviet leadership mindlessly cranked out its tiring hurdy-gurdy tunes about the arrival of the fantastical kind of Communism described above. And these kinds of litanies had very disadvantageous consequences for the economy. Disequilibrium and underdevelopment were already manifest and demanded energetic interventions to heighten the productivity of labor. Yet the solving of this problem is not made any easier by the idea that we supposedly find ourselves on a path to Communism aiming at universal leisure, nor by branding every attempt at a rationalization of the production process as the “restoration of capitalism.” If we want to speak of a collapse in Eastern Europe, this was far more of an ideological than an economic one.

5. *“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”*

But is not an explanation idealist if it places the accent far more on ideology than on the economy? In thinking about this question, Marxists would be well served if they recalled Gramsci’s irony with reference to “the baroque conviction that we are all the more orthodox the more we reach back and grasp

‘material’ things” (1975, 1442). In addition, it is worth remembering one of Lenin’s most famous statements, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” (1961, 369). Certainly the Bolshevik Party had a theory for acquisition of power, yet insofar as revolution meant going beyond the destruction of the old order and the construction of a new one, the Bolsheviks and the Communist movement essentially were without revolutionary theory. An eschatological wish for a completely harmonious society, free of contradiction and conflict, cannot be considered a theory of the postcapitalist society in need of construction. We must acknowledge the grievous and gaping void here. This void cannot be filled by going back to Marx or to other classic sources. We are confronting here a new, extremely difficult, and absolutely inescapable task.

## ***VI. The People’s Republic of China and the historical analysis of socialism***

### *1. Mao Zedong and the Chinese Revolution*

In China, the Communist Party rose to power riding on the tide of a national-liberation struggle of epic proportions. The projects relating to profound social transformation were thus closely connected to the task of recovering the greatness of the Chinese nation. This is a nation with a civilization going back through the millennia, yet after the Opium War it was coerced into semicolonial (and semifeudal) relations. How did this gigantic Asian land both modernize and socialize, and thereby overcome the fragmentation and national degradation that imperialism had forced upon it? And how did it succeed in this amid the difficult conditions of the Cold War and the economic, or at least technological, embargo that had been deployed by the advanced capitalist countries? Mao Zedong believed that these problems could be solved through the uninterrupted mobilization of the masses. This led to the “Great Leap Forward,” and then to the “Cultural Revolution.” As the difficulties and dead ends of the Soviet model began to become evident, Mao proclaimed the slogan “advance the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat.” A new stage of the revolution was called upon to

guarantee both economic development and progress in the direction of socialism. This new stage of socialism had the mission of liberating the initiatives of the masses from all bureaucratic obstacles—even from the bureaucratic obstacles of the Communist Party and the state that it controlled.

Make no mistake about it: this policy led to massive losses. On the political level, instead of the hoped-for rapid development, there occurred a terrifying slowdown or even back-sliding in the democratization process. The democratic warranties and rules of the game were done away with within the Communist Party and then even more so in the society at large. Clearly relationships worsened between the Han and the national minorities, who were subjected to multiple vendettas during the “cultural revolution.” They were sharply discriminated against, or indoctrinated through intensive short-term schooling. This pedagogy was inspired by an aggressive and intolerant “enlightenment” approach that came from Beijing or other urban centers populated by the Han. Because the mediating roles of the Party and the state had been swept away, there really only existed, on the one hand, the immediate relationship to the charismatic leader, and on the other hand, the immediate relationship to the masses (though these were in fact manipulated and fanaticized by means of the news media and controlled by an army prepared to intervene in emergencies). These were truly the years of a triumphal Bonapartism.

Immense losses were also obvious in the economic arena, and these were not only on account of the splits and continual confrontations that resulted from the crisis of having no criteria of legitimation other than fidelity to the charismatic leader. There is a perhaps more important dimension to the problem. The “Great Leap Forward” and the “Cultural Revolution” took no account of the need to normalize the process of transformation. No one can call upon the masses to be heroes all the time, to endure being continuously and eternally mobilized, always ready to sacrifice, to do without, to deny oneself. The call to heroism must always remain the exception and never become the rule. We could say with Brecht, “happy is the people that has no need of heroes.”

Heroes are necessary for the transition from exceptional conditions to normalcy, and are heroes only insofar as they guarantee the transition from exceptional conditions to normalcy, which is to say they are heroes to the extent to which they are willing to make themselves superfluous. It would be a very peculiar “Communism” that required sacrifice and self-denial ad infinitum, or nearly ad infinitum. Normalcy must be organized according to a variety of principles, by means of mechanisms and norms that allow for the greatest possible undisturbed enjoyment of daily events. Here you need rules of the game, and insofar as the economy is concerned, incentives.

In the last years or months of his life, Mao himself must have been aware of the need for a change in course. Deng Xiaoping understood this, how to push along this kind of change without imitating the Khrushchev model of “de-Stalinization.” He did it without demonizing those who preceded him in holding power. The enormous historical contributions that Mao made by building up the Communist Party, and through his leadership of the revolutionary struggle, were not to be forgotten. The serious mistakes committed toward the end of the 1950s were seen in a larger context, namely within the contours of more-or-less hasty, even crazy, experiments, which accompanied the projects proposed in the building of a society that was without historical precedent. Was it not the same Mao, who in his better times, 1937, authored *On Practice*? He demanded that we not lose sight of the fundamental fact that just as the “development of an objective process is full of contradictions and struggles, . . . so is the development of the movement of human knowledge” (1968, 18–19). This is in fact the key to understanding the oscillations that are characteristic of the history of the Communist parties and the societies that see themselves as guided by Communist principles. The point is to emphasize the objectively contradictory character of consciousness and the knowledge process, and not the “betrayal” or the “degeneration” of this or that personality. Insofar as Khrushchev demonized Stalin and reduced everything to the “cult of personality,” he perpetuated the problematic side of this heritage. Because Deng Xiaoping

refused to quarrel in this manner with Mao, he is the heir of the better side.

The procedure chosen by the new Chinese leadership, in any case, avoided a delegitimation of revolutionary power. Above all, it made possible a genuine debate about the conditions and characteristics of the construction of a socialist society, because it did not shift all the difficulties, uncertainties, and objective contradictions onto one person as scapegoat. In the course of this debate the internal presuppositions of the “Great Leap Forward” and the “Cultural Revolution” were criticized and rejected.

## *2. A tremendous and innovative New Economic Policy (NEP)*

In the economic arena we are gradually seeing “market socialism” emerge. Characteristic of this is the development of a large private sector and a concern to make the public sector efficient. Getting connected up with the world market and the technology of the West, as well as with its wisdom in the areas of industrial organization and business management, does not come without a price. In China, openly capitalist “special economic zones” have appeared. On the other hand, what are the alternatives? Above all it is no longer possible, after the crisis and dissolution of the USSR and the “socialist camp,” for a nation to isolate itself from global capitalist markets unless it wants to condemn itself to backwardness and powerlessness. Under the new conditions of the world market and global politics, isolationism would be tantamount to giving up on modernity *and* socialism. And even with the attendant high costs, the outcomes of undertaking this new course are generally visible: a rapid expansion in the development of productive forces; an economic miracle of European proportions; access like never before to economic and social opportunities for hundreds of millions of Chinese. All of this adds up to a liberation process of enormous proportions.

In the political realm, the questions were how to develop democracy and eliminate the residue of the old regime that had survived the revolution as well as reduce the arrogance of the

new bureaucrats (which was derived from the arrogance of the Mandarins). And so the path that the aged Mao found so worthy—"Advance the Revolution under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat"—was relinquished. Because this path had intensified rather than eliminated the power plays and arbitrariness of the bosses and little bosses, it created a crisis that delegitimated even the very few norms and warranties that existed in society. The limitation and regulation of power is today grounded in the rule of law, a codified system of rules, norms, and rights. Such a system of law was hitherto unknown, but is now rapidly growing simultaneously with the separation of Party organizations from governmental structures. An electoral system has emerged in the villages along with a wide assortment of candidates. Other measures are being experimented with in this democratization process, which, as the leaders of the People's Republic explicitly acknowledge, is far from complete. In the course of its history, "real, existing socialism" branded "formal" freedoms as empty and deceptive. Paradoxically, the cultural revolution operated along the same lines. Currently, however, the Chinese Communist leaders value very highly the "formal" freedoms guaranteed by law. They also adhere to the notion that the emphasis must be placed today on economic and social rights, given the present stage of economic development in the People's Republic. The decision to pursue also political modernization is irrevocable. In both political and economic terms, no socialism is now even thinkable that does not understand how to analyze, compare, and creatively evaluate the most forward-looking practices of the capitalist West as it rode the wave of bourgeois democratic revolution.

The social order that in China is currently considered valid presents itself as a kind of gigantic and expanded New Economic Policy (NEP). This is an NEP that has become harder to achieve because of globalization and power relationships worldwide. Nonetheless, the program is quite conscious of the necessity to connect continually socialism, democracy, and the market with one another, and to transcend the crudely simplified notion of the homogeneity of the society it is attempting to build.



*3. The stakes are immense*

To speak of a restoration of capitalism in China would be looking at the problem too superficially. A solid bourgeoisie has undoubtedly emerged there, although it currently has no possibility of transforming its economic power into political power. We need to understand the difficult situation in which the Chinese leaders find themselves. On the one hand, they have to push forward with the democratization process. This is an essential element of socialist modernization as it is also a means of consolidating power (today the only principle of legitimation is that of investiture from below). On the other hand, they must avoid having the democratization process lead to a conquest of power by the bourgeoisie, which, by the way, is the goal sought in an entirely unremitting fashion by the United States. It is resolved to undermine the hegemony of the Communist Party by any means necessary. If it can bring China into conformity with the capitalist West, it will attain the planetary triumph of the "American Century."

It is a shame that the U.S. administration gets support for this also from the "Left." Certain leftists get upset about the priority that is given to the attainment of a modicum of material equality within a developing country having one billion two hundred million inhabitants. Here these leftists demonstrate that they have retrogressed to the position of the neoliberals, who do not merely view Marx with contempt, but also liberals like Rawls. They talk about the primacy of freedom over equality, or put it another way in terms of negative over positive freedom. They quickly add that their principle is only valid "under the presupposition of a minimum income guarantee."

But what of the openly declared capitalism of the "special economic zones?" Those who are undertaking an anti-Chinese crusade in the name of Mao Zedong would do well to think over an important fact. As late as five years before the conquest of power, the great revolutionary leader acknowledged the durability not only of capitalism in this gigantic country, but also the

“slave-holding regimes” (referring to Tibet) as well as the “feudal landlords,” yet he was not at all upset by this. And if we want to consider how broadly extended conditions of poverty and unemployment clash with the upwardly mobile lifestyles of the newly rich, think back to an extraordinary page from Gramsci written in 1926. He is analyzing the USSR and writes about a phenomenon “that has never occurred in history.” A “ruling” political class “in its entirety” lived “under conditions that were worse than certain elements and strata of the dominated and subjugated class.” Masses of people, who endured a life of deprivation and want, were made to feel even more insecure by the theatrics of the “NEP-man in furs, who had access to all the material goods of the earth.” Yet this must not lead to perturbation or refusal, because the proletariat can neither conquer power nor retain it if it is not able to sacrifice particular and immediate interests to the “general and permanent interests of the class.”

The construction of a socialist society is an extraordinarily complex process. Certainly the contents and essential characteristics of the society that the Chinese Communists seek remain vague. The process of acknowledging the objective realities is occurring one more time, and one gets to know the objective realities confronting a society unprecedented in history neither linearly nor easily. Given the theoretical weaknesses of Marxism, it would be stupid during this epoch of globalization to underestimate the great danger of the homogenization of China through adaptation to the surrounding context of capitalism. But it would be an act of political blindness to assume that this homogenization has already occurred, and even worse to promote the process by joining the anti-Chinese campaign instigated by the United States. The stakes are immense in this game. The realities of a continent-wide country include every sort of difficulty and contradiction. Yet China is resolved to overcome underdevelopment and not to give up its political independence. Furthermore, by becoming technologically autonomous, it seeks to attain socialist modernity. Should it succeed in this, the power

relationships of our planet would be drastically and completely altered.

***VII. Marxism or anarchism? Think through Communist theory and practice in a fundamentally new way***

*1. Materialism or idealism?*

The historical events introduced by the October Revolution have led to certain conclusions for many leftists that might serve as negative models. Very often the degeneration and the collapse of the USSR and the “socialist camp” are explained by tracing everything back to Stalin. This attitude is translatable into the sigh: Oh, if only Lenin had lived longer! What a terrible misfortune that his place was not taken by Trotsky or Bukharin. Too bad that the Bolshevik leadership did not understand how to follow the path Marx would have wanted—the path of the “authentic” Marx—as understood by one or another of the inflexible judges over the history of “real, existing socialism.” And if perchance one of them (like Rossana Rossanda) had held power instead of Stalin, we would not have had the return of the Czarist flag and the Duma to Moscow. Not at all, we would have the victory of the soviet system and the red flag over New York. If that analysis were correct, we would not only have to go back to Marx, but at least as far as Plato and his idealism. It really is hard to imagine a more radical liquidation of historical materialism. The objective circumstances are of no interest at all: the condition of Russia and its historical background; the class struggles domestically and internationally; power relationships in the areas of economics, politics, and the military, etc. Everything was the result of the crudeness, the brutality, the will to power, the paranoia—in any case, the character of a single personality. Ironically, it is just this type of explanation that reproduces the fundamental errors of Stalinism. These are reproduced even to a greater degree, because the objectively existing contradictions are forgotten and a weak and prejudicial recourse is made to the concept of “betrayal.” Mind you, not to a specific act, but rather

to almost seventy years of history regarded as one long uninterrupted "betrayal" of Communist ideals. All of this committed by Stalin, who is thus to be delivered over to the execution squad of the historians, or better yet, to the journalists and ideologues.

From this type of analysis sometimes an entire philosophy of history is hammered together. In the period around 1968, a book was circulated fairly widely whose very title, *Proletarians without Revolution* (Carria 1966), was thought to deliver the key to understanding universal history. Always inspired by the most noble Communist sentiments, the masses were regularly betrayed by their leaders and the bureaucrats. And this is also paradoxical because what was intended to be a complaint of the masses against the leaders and bureaucrats converts abruptly into an indictment against the masses. The analysis reveals the masses to be completely irredeemable simpletons who are entirely unable to comprehend their own interests at decisive moments. They long to consign their fate to swashbucklers. And here once again we see an overarching idealism; deception and betrayal by swashbucklers is supposed to explain all of world history.

Occasionally there are slight variations of this account. Here one contrasts the initial liveliness, beauty, and abundance of debate in the soviets with the monotony of the bureaucratic and autocratic apparatus that takes over. Again we give the traitors, gravediggers, and killers of the soviets the merry chase. People who reason this way (or who sigh this way) forget that historical upheavals and revolutions are generally accompanied by a transition from poetry to prose. The Protestant Reformation challenged the pope and the powers of the day by distributing the demands of the general priesthood, yet the original enthusiasm did not survive the occurrence of difficulties, objective contradictions, and the outbreak of the terrible conflicts that followed. The changes could only take place on a more limited, yet more realistic, basis. The revolutions of 1789 and 1848 in France give us similar things to consider.

It is not reasonable to compare the inspiration and encouragement of the initial stages of the battle against the old regime

needing to be toppled with the later more prosaic and more difficult phases. Here a new government must be built in spite of all the difficulties and in spite of contradictions of every sort, including those that derive from having too little experience. It would be like condemning a marriage or partnership (including the successful ones) in the name of the unique and irreplaceable moments experienced when one first fell in love. It appears that in the developmental stages of a revolution the original enthusiasm of the participants can suspend for a time the mundane division of labor and everyday business. Still these will eventually again demand our attention. Therefore it makes sense to reduce that sector of society that will need to be called upon to be actively involved, and this leads unavoidably to a certain degree of professionalization in political life. The institutions that developed out of the Protestant Reformation followed one and the same dialectic. So too did the clubs of the French Revolution, the Russian soviets, the sections of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) that emerged during struggle, or reemerged in the student organizations that arose during the movements of 1968. A "general priesthood" cannot last forever. Rather it makes room for more limited and prosaic structures, which, if the revolution or movement has succeeded, are very different from a return to the old order. In terms of the USSR, the real problem was never a taking leave from the original beauty of the soviets, but rather the return of the Duma and the economic and political power of big money.

2. "*Dictatorship of the proletariat*"  
and "*withering away of the state*"

In order to get beyond the idealist types of pseudo-explanations, it is necessary to replace the concept of betrayal (that really plays a minor role) with that of learning. The victory of a revolution can only be considered secure when the class that has carried it out succeeds in giving its sovereignty a durable political form. All of this takes place in the middle of a long and complex learning process marked by conflict and contradiction, experiment and error. This learning process lasted from 1789 to

1871 for the French bourgeoisie, for example. Not until after this period does this class really find its form of political rule, as Gramsci underscores, in a parliamentary republic grounded in universal (male) suffrage. This proves itself to be durable when it succeeds in connecting hegemony and compulsion in such a manner that its dictatorship and use of force only become visible in moments of acute crisis.

Why did not something quite similar occur after the October Revolution? In order to explain the “totalitarian” petrification of the Soviet regime, the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat is often cited. This is a very superficial understanding. Ultimately it acts as if the demands of the liberals, or at least the non-Marxists, for freedom preclude a theoretical justification for dictatorship during a transitional phase or for situations of acute crisis. In reality, all of the classical philosophers of liberalism (Locke, Montesquieu, Hamilton, Mill, etc.) have explicitly allowed for the suspension of constitutional guarantees and the use of dictatorship in exceptional circumstances. For Italy, the example of Mazzini is of particular interest. He spoke of a “dictatorial, strongly concentrated power” that would suspend the Charter of Rights, and fulfill its mission only when the national revolution had finally triumphed and independence had been attained. What the national revolution was for Mazzini, the socialist revolution was for Marx, Lenin, or Stalin. With regard to the USSR, the problem can thus be reformulated. Why was the transitional phase (or exceptional circumstance) never overcome?

Of course, one must never lose sight of the economic encirclement. But closely connected to this objective fact is an important subjective limit: the political and cultural education of the Bolshevik leaders. As with Marx and Engels, so too with these leaders. Time and again they were confronted with the problem of democracy, yet this came to the fore only to disappear again almost immediately. The reason was this: one of the fundamentals of their theory or their worldview was that the state withers away with the overcoming of class antagonisms and

social classes, and so democracy as a form of the state also withers away.

This theory, or rather illusion, of Marx and Engels is grounded in a dramatic historical analysis. The First Republic, born in France in 1789, was transformed in the course of the revolution first into dictatorship and then into the empire of Napoleon I. The Second Republic, a child of the 1848 revolution, soon made room for the Bonapartist dictatorship of Napoleon III. In England, during periods of crisis, the ruling class did not hesitate to suspend habeas corpus or legal rights, and subjected Ireland to a kind of permanent siege when its people rather undiplomatically rejected British colonial rule. And afterwards the liberal and democratic state had no difficulty in transforming itself into an open and even terrorist dictatorship whenever a crisis situation emerged or became more acute. Lenin drew a conclusion from all of this. With the outbreak of the First World War, the Bolshevik leaders saw governments with long-established liberal traditions change over into ones that would totally regiment their populations, becoming bloody behemoths. They were prepared to utilize martial law, execution squads, and arbitrary terror, sacrificing their citizens in massive numbers on the altar of imperial expansion and the state's will to power.

Whether we look at it from the point of view of its historical or psychological origins, the theory of the withering away of the state flows into an eschatological vision of a society without conflict that consequently needs no norms of legality to regulate or limit conflicts. The abstract utopian quality of this watchword is something of which Marx and Engels at definite times seem explicitly conscious. For example, they obviously oscillate between speaking of the withering away or demise of the state in general, yet on the other hand refer specifically to the "state in its contemporary political sense" and "political force in its own peculiar sense." Furthermore, the state, as they quite appropriately analyze it, is not only an instrument of class domination, but also a form of the "reciprocal rights" and "mutual security"

that exist between individuals and the class in power. It is not at all clear why one would find “rights” and “security” superfluous for the individual members of a solidified society after the disappearance of classes and class struggle.

In any case, waiting for the withering away of all conflict and the demise of the state, and political force generally, makes it impossible to solve the problem of how to transform the government that emerges from socialist revolution. This expectation privileges the continuing existence of inflexible “overturners,” whose perspective is incapable of giving concreteness or stability to the emancipation of the subaltern classes. After the October Revolution, there were outstanding revolutionary socialists who proclaimed that “the idea of a constitution is a bourgeois idea.” With this as one’s basis, it would not only be easy to justify terroristic measures during emergencies, but also extremely difficult or impossible to make a transition to constitutional normalcy, especially since this is branded as bourgeois from the start. In this manner, exceptional circumstances privilege utopianism, and utopianism makes exceptional circumstances more extreme.

### *3. Politics and the economy*

In general, one can say of Marx and Engels that politics, after playing a decisive role in the conquest of power, apparently disappears along with the state and the use of political force. This is all the more true when (in addition to the disappearance of classes, the state, and political power) the division of labor, nations, and religions, in short all possible sites of conflict, are thought to have disappeared.

This messianic vision ultimately leads to anarchism, and has also played a deleterious role in regard to the economy. A socialist society is quite unthinkable apart from a more or less extensive public sector (or one regulated by government) within the productive apparatus as well as within the service industries, the functioning of the public sector being decisive. The solution to this problem can be left to the anarchist myth of the emergence of the “new type of person,” who, it is alleged, will



spontaneously identify with the collective without the appearance of any sort of conflict or contradiction between private and public, individual and individual, social group and social group. This is obviously a secular version of the religious notion of “grace,” which would make the law unnecessary. Or the solution can be sought in a system of rules and incentives (both material and moral), and of controls that are intended to secure the transparency, efficiency, and productivity of this sector. Certainly all of this is made more difficult, if not impossible, by an (anarchistic) phenomenology of power that situates domination and oppression exclusively in the state, the centralized power, and the general social rules. In this manner, the dialectic of the capitalist society as Marx described it is quite reversed. In “real, existing socialism,” anarchism led to terror as compared to a civil society. This terror became all the more unbearable as exceptional circumstances faded, and the philosophy of history that promised the withering away of the state, of national identities, of the market, etc., increasingly lacked credibility.

#### *4. A Communism beyond the abstract, anarchical utopia*

Even now we lack a theory for conflict within a socialist society or within the socialist camp. This is why the most profound crisis of the Communist movement set in at the same time, paradoxically, as the triumph and immense expansion of socialism after World War II. The anarchistic and messianic version of Communism which prevails up to the present time must be confronted with its own definition as a “realistic movement.” This has nothing to do with a resurgence of the slogan coined by Bernstein (“the movement is everything, the goal is nothing”). Bernstein refused to challenge the political domination of the bourgeoisie and the arrogance of the imperialist powers. (It is well known how the leaders of German social democracy looked at the “civilizing” mission of colonialism with great approval.) The one ambition that Bernstein would gladly have given up (thus perpetuating the established sociopolitical systems nationally and internationally) was the building of a postcapitalist and postimperialist society, a social order that can and must no

longer be imagined as an insipid and uncritical utopia. Detachment from this kind of utopianism is the fundamental precondition of the Marxian notion of Communism as a “realistic movement.”

It is entirely understandable that the desire outlined here to find a new conception of Communism has given rise to some perplexity. In their polemic against my position with regard to the withering away of the state, it appears to me that comrades Luigi Cortesi and Walter Peruzzi do not present arguments that can make plausible the idea of a society without conflict or the need for legal safeguards. Instead they give vent to their disappointment that no properly inspired vision of a postcapitalist society leaps forth from my pages. Many a comrade might even go further, and question whether it is worth the trouble of fighting for a future society that does not bring with it the elimination of all conflict and contradiction. This is a little bit like the religious notion that life on earth does not really make any sense without the prospect of an afterlife beyond.

The wisdom of Gramsci would be a fine counterweight to these basically anarchistic and religious tendencies. He accomplished an enormous historical task as the first to have deliberated about an effective and radical project of liberation that never viewed itself as the end of history. It is really a matter of drawing a clear line of demarcation between Marxism and anarchism, and thereby taking leave once and for all from abstract utopianism, while at the same time demonstrating the historical reasons why it arises. We can also make good use here of a piece of advice from Engels, who observed the following, while comparing the revolutions in England and France: “In order to secure even those conquests of the bourgeoisie that were ripe for gathering at the time, the revolution had to be carried considerably further. . . . This seems, in fact, to be one of the laws of evolution of bourgeois society” (1990, 291–92) There is no reason not to apply the materialistic method developed by Marx and Engels to the real historical movements and revolutions they both inspired.

This article originally appeared in March 1999 under the title “Fuga dalla storia? Il movimento comunista tra autocritica e autofobia,” published in Naples by Edizioni La Città del Sole. A German translation by Hermann Kopp was published in 2000 as *Marxistische Blätter* Pamphlet 01 by Neue Impulse Verlag, Essen. The article presented here was translated from the German edition.

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#### NOTES

1. The term *real, existing socialism* was used in the Soviet Union and its allied socialist countries to describe the socioeconomic and political system that they had adopted for socialist construction. The term was intended to distinguish an idyllic, utopian approach to the establishment of a communist society from the practical realities of socialist construction under conditions of constant economic, military, and political pressure by the imperialist powers committed to their destruction.—Ed.

2. *Liberazione* is the organ of the Communist Refoundation Party. *Il Manifesto* identifies itself as a “Communist daily newspaper.”—Ed.

3. On Truman’s policy, see Thomas 1988, 187.

4. See in this regard Losurdo 1997, 75–88. In regard to Hoover’s policy, see Trani 1979, 124).

5. Norberto Bobbio is an Italian philosopher and member of the Italian Senate, representing the Party of the Democratic Left.—Ed.

6. On the problems treated here, see Losurdo 1996a, 1996b, and 1998.

7. With regard to the racialization of the Germans (and the Japanese) in the United States during the Second World War, see Losurdo 1996a, 158–69.

8. Compare also Losurdo 1996a, 153–54.

9. This is the way the *Yearbook of International Politics* of the Istituto gli Studia di Politica Internazionale expressed it on p. 391 that same year (cited in Canfera 1996).

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## Book Reviews

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*Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881–1905.* By Hadassa Kosak. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. 220 pages, paper \$16.95.

In his *World of our Fathers*, a study that begins with the period following that covered by *Cultures of Opposition*, Irving Howe writes of the poor, semiskilled, unworldly Jews who came to New York en masse beginning in the 1880s:

Thousands must have succumbed quietly to the wretchedness of the East Side, overcome by exhaustion and prepared to end their days quietly without fuss, over an iron or a sewing machine. What did they wrest out of their lives?

These are the people of Hadassa Kosak's study, and she answers Howe's question decisively: they struggled to secure day-to-day existence, organized, fought many labor and other battles, and brought industries and neighborhoods to a standstill. It is true that the actions of this group did not fit well into established frames of interests within native unionism and embryonic socialist politics. These immigrants nevertheless "expressed working people's right to act collectively against their adversaries and to demand social, economic and cultural change" (131), and set an important foundation for the future development of political and cultural organizations in and beyond New York City.

The internal divisions of this community were as important as its conflicts with other social groups. Containment of Jews within the Russian Pale, restrictions on higher education, and the military's thirst for cannon fodder were among the standard

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experiences of oppression, surpassed periodically by the terror of pogroms. At the same time there were tensions and divisions within Jewish communities over the constraints of religious and cultural traditions, and divisions over the distribution of power. These were made worse by the economic decline of the 1870s and 1880s. European and U.S. Jews initially supported the emigration of Jews from the Pale. Worried, however, over the volume of migrants and the inadequacies of their skills, they also restricted their flight.

Once Russian and German Jews found themselves on U.S. soil, tensions grew between them. The latter, well established economically, funded charitable organizations to assist immigrants. Differences between established Jews and new arrivals in areas such as language, occupational skills, and different orientations toward cohesiveness became sources of subordination and put many Russian Jews in a fighting spirit rather than in a mood to remain the passive recipients of humanitarianism, especially when the hand of charity was one of social and moral regulation. Their German counterparts offered work under exploitative conditions, sometimes penalizing families for retaining traditional schooling and religious practices, and encouraged rapid Americanization to avoid conflicts with the norms of this society. Attempts at regulation of this kind were expressions of class interest, promoting assimilation through conformity with existing relations of production. This is a point that needs further development, if only to focus the evidence on how such strained relations confirm that ultimately in capitalist society class cuts through all other social divisions.

Kosak adopts the perspective of the English social historians E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm (and the U.S. academics influenced by them); in their perspective, class is not simply a place within the system of production, but a cultural experience developed through social struggle and the flowering of historical consciousness. Kosak's analysis is based on the importance of cultural codes "more enduring than any set of material circumstances [and] pivotal in their relationship to the exercise of political culture" (8). Rather than a negation of their value,

cultural codes were a means of interpreting material conditions as a foundation of solidarity. The familiarity of these codes through tradition was important; their practical value, however, was not frozen in tradition but served as substance and direction for the kind of actions undertaken to address problems of everyday life and propelled many working-class Jews toward further oppositional politics.

Methodologically, this perspective resists the constraints of meaning often imposed by static sociological concepts such as class or division of labor, and generates a viable analysis of the significance and limitations of local institutions. Rather than an affirmative set of relations, the social practices of this community were “a transformative tool that enabled historical actors to struggle for control over such issues as definitions of community, its value system, and legitimacy of authority” (160). The *Landsmannschaften*, for example, were mutual-aid associations that secured family and religious connections, served as a labor pool and offered material support; they were important bases for political discussions of the experience of capitalism, and their democratic structure surpassed the paternalism of charitable organizations.

Much of what is discussed in this context is the spontaneous response to exploitation and other forms of class and cultural conflict on and off the job. Women, for example, were instigators of meat boycotts because of high prices and of actions against landlords for evictions and excessive rents. In these actions they referred to themselves as “strikers” and to non-supporters as “scabs,” adopting and imposing, respectively, identities of workplace conflicts. The language demonstrates their consciousness of the restrictive, even exclusionary, institutionalization of labor and political struggles.

Economic need may have been the visible motivation for locally organized confrontations with bosses, landlords, and the law, but collective actions were also concerned to advocate a substantive body of rights, universally applied. “This type of militancy, which was not unique to Jewish labor, was condemned by the U.S. press for its anarchic opposition to the

market system and for addressing the larger issues of political economy” (108). Not surprisingly, the mainstream press and elements of organized labor failed to appreciate the complexity of interests and conflicts in this community, but unwittingly acknowledged the depth of its commitment to social justice. Notwithstanding the need for effective discipline and focus that would later develop in labor and political organizations, the analysis here points to the necessity of integrating cultural interests and activities that were not confined to those persons immediately affected by workplace or other disputes. A forward-looking solidarity, in other words, was not one that could be built on an economic perspective of workers’ discontent.

Kosak makes the point that trade unions and political parties are two sites of agitation that have most often been the subjects of historians’ concerns; her study is an argument that too narrow a focus on these activities ignores the range and social impact of the complex of collective actions. It was because of the sustaining power of a historical identity and a growing sense of autonomy through mass actions that Jewish immigrants developed a greater capacity to address their own needs and contribute to the realization of a better society.

For this reason, it would also be important to develop a stronger analysis of the growth of class consciousness in a way that continues to demonstrate its grounding in this Jewish culture but which also transcends it. Certainly this was more evident after the period Kosak studies, especially with the impact of the 1905 revolution in Russia and the pogroms of 1903–1906. Since after this period Jewish workers formed the core of the Socialist Party, as Nora Levin in *While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871–1917* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), Howe, and others have argued, and contributed significantly to the Communist Party later, it seems imperative to draw out a more pointed argument showing why individuals in this political culture directed their energies into a consciousness of class politics and the necessity of socialism. Similarly, Adam M. Weisberger’s recent study, *The Jewish Ethic and the Spirit of Socialism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), draws attention to

secular messianism as a cultural resource for many German-Jewish socialists. The universalist ethic evident among Kosak's subjects might be further developed by tracing the messianic idea as it was represented in U.S. Jewish life and politics. This would seem especially important because of the cultural orientation of her work. It might also help to overcome the latent pragmatism of Howe's references to the subject, framed as they were by the depreciative terms "impulse" and "madness." These would be important additions to Kosak's valuable study.

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*Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement.*  
By James Kirkpatrick Davis. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997.  
240 pages, cloth \$24.95.

Anyone concerned with the FBI's history of domestic surveillance will find *Assault on The Left* a valuable source. It is essentially an extension and elaboration of Davis's earlier book, *Spying on America: The FBI's Domestic Counterintelligence Program* (New York: Praeger, 1992). In both books he has thoroughly researched the federal government's attempt to destroy the Left in America. The book under review concentrates on the FBI's effort to destroy the New Left and covers the period from 28 October 1968 to 27 April 1971.

The major instrument of that effort to destroy the Left was the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), created by the National Security Council at its 279th meeting on 8 March 1956. Its antecedents, however, started in June 1939 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt instructed all law enforcement agencies and officers to provide the Federal Bureau of Investigation with any information relating to sabotage, espionage, and subversion.

During World War II, the FBI investigated twenty thousand cases of alleged sabotage. Its activities went beyond investigation of actual crimes to include surveillance of legal organizations and law-abiding individuals. By 1945 the FBI's budget took about half of the entire budget of the Justice Department. Tony G. Povedo, in his article "The FBI and Domestic Intelligence," published in the *Journal of Crime and Delinquency* (April 1982), reported that the FBI undertook "a massive public relations campaign to exploit cold war fears that eased the Bureau's transition from wartime to peacetime and allowed it to maintain its wartime gains," thus becoming the nation's acknowledged expert on the "international and domestic threat of communism."

Starting in March 1946, J. Edgar Hoover helped to initiate and coordinate the institutionalization of anti-Communism. The next year President Truman authorized the Loyalty and Security Program, aimed at all federal employees. In 1950, the Emergency Detention Act and the Subversive Activity Control Board were only two of many actions aimed at the political Left. By the time President Eisenhower was inaugurated in 1953, the FBI had amassed dossiers on more than six million Americans. The Smith Act trials, aimed at destroying the Communist Party USA, followed. (This short and very incomplete account is offered as background for the formation of COINTELPRO.)

Shortly after the National Security Council meeting, Mr. Hoover formalized COINTELPRO, which would finally have five domestic programs. The first, made official on 18 May 1956, was CPUSA COINTELPRO, the purpose of which was to "monitor, analyze, infiltrate and ultimately destroy the CPUSA." This first formation lasted fourteen years, during which there were 1,850 separate CPUSA COINTELPRO proposed actions, of which 1,388 were carried out.

The second was SWP COINTELPRO, organized on 12 October 1961. Hoover called for "a disruption campaign along similar lines [to that directed against the CPUSA] . . . on a selective basis." There were forty-six actions against the Socialist Workers Party and its affiliate, the Young Socialists Alliance.

In September 1964, the FBI created WHITE HATE COINTELPRO, its third. Its targets were the seventeen Ku Klux Klan organizations, the American Nazi Party, and the National States Rights Party. In all, 139 actions were carried out. Three years later, on 25 August 1967, the Bureau organized BLACK HATE COINTELPRO to “expose, disrupt, misdirect and otherwise discredit” the Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Deacons of Defense and Justice, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Nation of Islam. In this instance, Hoover approved 301 actions.

As a result of the confrontation at Columbia University in 1968, Hoover authorized the creation of the fifth and last COINTELPRO, known as NEW LEFT COINTELPRO. Its mission was to stem the tide of protest against the Vietnam War. This operation mounted 285 actions during its lifetime, from 28 October 1968 until 27 April 1971.

The author describes its end in a fascinating and little-known incident of U.S. domestic spying. A month earlier, a group of antiwar activists burglarized the local FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania. They “liberated” some thousand documents exposing COINTELPRO, thus starting the exposure of COINTELPRO and its relationship with the FBI. It took five years, however, before full exposure was possible, mainly through the efforts of Carl Stern of NBC, who persistently pressured public officials to release the documents. When they were finally released, 52,000 pages relating to COINTELPRO, of which over 6,000 dealt with NEW LEFT COINTELPRO, became available to researchers.

Davis had access to all of this material, and he is able to document the assault on the Left in amazing detail from the beginning of anti-Vietnam War protest, the Columbia University confrontation, the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic Party convention in Chicago, Nixon’s escalation of the war in 1969, the activities of the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the events around the exposure of the secret war in Cambodia, to the culminating Kent State demonstration.

The book is full of examples of COINTELPRO's work. For example, we learn that Dr. Morris Starsky, an assistant professor at Arizona State University, became an early target. Starsky, an outspoken antiwar activist who encouraged his students to participate, became the object of a special action by the Phoenix field office of the FBI. The author details the campaign against him that culminated in his dismissal. Years later, as a result of media action and Carl Stern's probing, he learned that COINTELPRO was the cause of his dismissal. A federal court ruled that he was fired illegally and damages were assessed against the university.

Davis offers the reader details of COINTELPRO's activities year by year and city by city. I am not aware of any monograph that offers as much data on this issue as this one. The weaknesses of this fascinating exposé are not with the research, but in the minimal emphasis on the political framework and background. The author makes very little attempt to relate this material consistently to the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the general strategy of anti-Communism that characterized the period. Joseph McCarthy is not even mentioned in the index and the term *McCarthyism* appears only a few times in the text.

Davis's own figures make it clear that anti-Communism was the main ideological rationale for the existence of COINTELPRO. The FBI field offices proposed 3,247 actions under all the COINTELPROs. Of that number, fully 1,850—more than half—were carried out by CPUSA COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO and indeed much of the FBI's other domestic activity were directly related to the government's policy of anti-Communism. Exploring that relationship would, in my judgment, have strengthened the book.

Nevertheless, this is a book which should be in the library of every historian dealing with the United States in the period following World War II.

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## ABSTRACTS

**Jürgen Rojahn, “Publishing Marx and Engels after 1989: The Fate of the MEGA”**—The author reviews the history, problems, and current status of the project to publish the complete collected works of Marx and Engels, including published and unpublished works, notes, and letters, in the languages in which they were originally written. The project was initiated in the USSR by David Riazanov in the 1920s, subsequently halted, then resumed in the 1960s with funding from the German Democratic Republic and the USSR. It faltered again with the collapse of the socialist regimes in those two countries. The paramount problem in reviving the effort was its funding. Work on the project is now continuing on an expanded international scale, although its scope is somewhat curtailed because of limited funding.

**Ernest D. Green, “Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Dialectics of Negritude”**—The Senegalese poet and political leader Léopold Sédar Senghor was educated in French colonial Senegal to view himself only as French. Together with Aimé Césaire, Léon Dumas, and René Marin, he founded a new cultural movement called Negritude to recapture and redeem African dignity as a reaction to the harsh racism experienced in France. Although exposed to Marxism, he chose not to draw upon its concepts, but followed a path of accommodation with the former colonial rulers after becoming president of Senegal. This accommodation was clearly evident in his economic policies to protect French profits in Senegal and his failure to support the Algerians in their fight against the French for independence.

**Brigitte Schnabel, “The ‘Older Woman’ in Shakespeare’s Plays”**—The author examines how Shakespeare’s treatment of a woman violating the social taboos by marrying a man junior to herself in *Twelfth Night* might relate to his own marriage to a

woman older than himself. Another taboo is violated in the play, which portrays the love of a woman for a man of lower social status. The persistence of these taboos today is shown to affect the presentation of the play in modern productions. The author suggests that the values Shakespeare held as a Renaissance humanist may have been reinforced by his personal experience.

***Domenico Losurdo, “Flight from History? The Communist Movement between Self-Criticism and Self-Contempt”***—The article responds to the deluge of attacks on the history of the Communist movement from within the Communist movement and the ex-Communist and utopian Left in Italy that reflect disillusionment following the collapse of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe. The author, a leading European Marxist philosopher, discusses the nature of the calls to go “back to Marx” and the theories of implosion that are invoked to explain the collapse of “the socialist camp.” After reviewing the broad scope of the imperialist strategy to bring down socialism, he discusses critically the steps that had to be taken to confront the imperialist onslaught. At the same time, he deals with the excesses and mistakes that could have been avoided, especially in regard to the national question, the institutionalization of democratic structures, and the illusion of the harmonious development of social relations under socialism. The article also examines the lessons drawn by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party from the experiences of European socialism and assesses the strategy underway today in the People’s Republic. He points to the necessity of a new understanding of questions such as dictatorship of the proletariat and the withering away of the state.

## ABREGES

***Jürgen Rojahn, «Publier Marx et Engles après 1989 : le destin du MEGA»*** — L’auteur passe en revue l’histoire, les problèmes, et la situation actuelle du projet de publier les oeuvres complètes de Marx et Engles, y compris les oeuvres

publiées et non-publiées, notes, et lettres en les langues dans lesquelles elles se sont écrites à l'origine. David Riazanov initia le projet en Union soviétique dans les années vingt, puis le projet s'arrêta, puis il se résuma aux années soixante avec des fonds de la République démocratique d'Allemagne et l'Union soviétique. Il chancela encore avec l'effondrement des régimes socialistes en ces deux pays. Le problème souverain à faire revivre l'effort c'était les capitaux. On continue à travailler sur le projet à l'échelle internationale en pleine expansion, bien que son étendue se tronque à cause des fonds réduits.

**Ernest D. Green, «Léopold Sédar Senghor et la dialectique de la Négritude»** – Le poète et chef politique sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor fut éduqué au Sénégal colonial français à se regarder comme seulement français. Avec ses confrères Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, et René Marin, il fonda un nouveau mouvement culturel qui s'appelait la Négritude pour rattraper et sauver la dignité africaine comme réaction au racisme brutal qu'ils éprouvaient en France. Quoique exposé au marxisme, il choisissait de ne pas en tirer ses concepts, mais de suivre un chemin de compromis avec les anciens dirigeants coloniaux après être devenu président du Sénégal. Cette accommodation se manifestait clairement dans sa politique économique qui protégeait les profits français au Sénégal et le fait qu'il ne soutenait pas les Algériens dans leur lutte contre la France pour l'indépendance.

**Brigitte Schnabel, «La 'femme plus âgée' dans le théâtre de Shakespeare»** – L'auteur examine comment la représentation en *Twelfth Night* d'une femme qui violait les tabous sociaux en se mariant avec un homme plus jeune pourrait s'accorder au mariage de Shakespeare lui-même avec une femme plus âgée. Un autre tabou se viole dans la pièce qui décrit l'amour d'une femme pour un homme d'une position inférieure sociale. L'auteur démontre que la persistance de ces tabous aujourd'hui a un effet sur la présentation de la pièce dans les productions contemporaines. L'auteur suggère que les valeurs tenues par Shakespeare comme humaniste de la Renaissance pourraient s'être renforcées par son expérience personnelle.

**Domenico Losurdo, «L'envolée de l'histoire? Le mouvement communiste entre la critique de soi et le mépris de soi»** – Cet article répond au déluge des attaques sur l'histoire du mouvement communiste par la Gauche ex-communiste et utopienne et de l'intérieur du mouvement communiste en Italie qui reflètent la désillusion qui suivait l'effondrement du socialisme en Union soviétique et en Europe de l'Est. L'auteur, un philosophe marxiste européen de premier plan, discute de la nature des appels de «retourner à Marx» et les théories d'implosion qui s'évoquent pour expliquer la chute du "camp socialiste." Après avoir passé en revue l'étendue large de la stratégie impérialiste à faire tomber le socialisme, il discute d'un oeil critique les pas qu'il avait fallu prendre pour faire face à l'assaut impérialiste. Au même temps, il traite des excès et des fautes qu'on aurait pu éviter, surtout à l'égard de la question nationaliste, l'institutionnalisation des structures démocratiques, et l'illusion du développement harmonieux des rapports sociaux sous le socialisme. L'article examine aussi les leçons tirées par les dirigeants du Parti communiste chinois des expériences du socialisme européen et évalue la stratégie en jeu aujourd'hui en République du peuple chinois. Il démontre la nécessité d'une nouvelle compréhension des questions telles que la dictature du prolétariat et le déclin de l'état.