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## Lukács's Concept of *Imputed Consciousness* in Realist Literature

Robert Lanning

Hans Freiberg is a partisan, a student of philosophy, and the son of a German-Jewish professor. Between partisan activities, “traveling in night trains, on our way to derail night trains,” he introduces his comrades to Masaryk, Adler, Korsch, Labriola, Lukács, Marx, and Engels. Hans knows the odds of fighting in the French forests in the 1940s, and if it comes to it (which it does), he wants to choose the meaning of his death. For Hans, death as a partisan is a choice; as an individual it is a refusal “to have [a fascist] destiny inscribed in his [Jewish] body.” We know little more than this of the character in Jorge Semprun’s *The Long Voyage* (1964), and these pieces lie in sections of the novel separated by 150 pages.

In an interview in the 1960s, Georg Lukács considered Hans and the mother in Heinrich Boll’s *Billiards at Half-Past Nine*, to be representative of the “formation of a conscious minority [as] the precondition of a mass movement.” On the strength of a few sentences, Lukács gives to Semprun’s character the status of a literary type: “this Jewish communist partisan who falls in France is the first figure in literature who stands at the level of the Warsaw uprising” (1975a, 67–70). Hans can be given such a heightened status because he articulates a moral lesson about the partisans’ actions, and because these are integral to Semprun’s larger

narrative of consciousness and resistance. Similarly, the mother in Boll's work is a background figure throughout the novel whose defining action occurs only at its end. We may not need to know more about such characters to confer upon them the status of literary type, such as we do about Goethe's fully developed Wilhelm Meister or Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann's *Faustus*. With or without extensive representation, the literary type is able to represent both the tensions of everyday life, and historical trends and conflicts that shape the wider world.

The realist, Lukács argued, has a responsibility "to seek out the lasting features in people, in their relations with each other and in the situations in which they have to act; he must focus on those elements which endure over long periods and which constitute the objective human tendencies of society and indeed of mankind as a whole" (1977, 47). A literature that reflects the substance, contradictions, and uncertainties of life, that demonstrates the political and ethical ground upon which characters develop, illuminates the critical choices for or against human progress. As he remarked to Anna Seghers, this is the "intellectual and moral work" of the writer, reflecting the lives of people through the imaginative and analytical work of literary construction in ways that might lead to a greater awareness of how historical relations produce a social environment of a given time and place (Lukács 1981, 178).

The tremendous social power of literature consists in the fact that it depicts the human being directly and with the full richness of his inward and outward life, in a concrete fashion not equalled by any other field of reflection of objective reality. Literature is able to portray the contradictions, struggles and conflicts of social life in the same way as these appear in the mind and life of actual human beings, and portray the connections between these collisions in the same way as they focus themselves within the human being. (Lukács 1981, 143)

Realism is the superior form of literature, for it is capable of bringing to consciousness the possibilities and problems of social life which the interested person may then bring to bear on the struggle for social change.

In contrast to his views on realism, Lukács had a clear dislike for "illustrating literature" that trapped characters in didacticism and immediacy, illustrating appropriate paths of behavior and acceptable political attitudes. Although Lukács characterized these literary problems as "Stalinist" after 1956, his term "literature-as-illustration" more appropriately captures the central problem applicable to other literary styles. Expressionism, naturalism, and romanticism carried their own problems, some of which were similar, some different from the so-called "Stalinist" literature. None of these forms was capable of fully representing the complex reality of capitalism and the necessary struggles against it. The term "literature-as-illustration" describes a literature devoid of the historical substance of class struggle, scientific inquiry, and philosophical debate—a literature that reduces history and the problems of everyday life to slogans and formulaic resolutions.

The realist writer or critic can argue *against* illustrative literature, but the realist cannot argue *for* an approach to narrative and character development that considers political and ethical issues to be an affront to a supposed neutrality of writer and reader. The tension implicit here is what moved Steiner to note, "Marxism-Leninism and the political regimes enacted in its name take literature *seriously*, indeed desperately so" (1998, 323)

By Lukács's definition, realism is political as written and as read; it is an act of motivated discovery through a particular perspective on the world. From the *Bildungsroman* of bourgeois realists such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, to the novels of "upbringing" and "development" in the German Democratic Republic, realist literature has been designed to illuminate the formation of the self, the individual's ethical outlook, his or her relation to the structural and interpersonal relations of society, and, as Caudwell put it with regard to poetry, "emotional reorganization" (1946, 245). But while realist literature can contribute to the political development of the individual, any socializing or educational effect on the reader is an *indirect* result (Királyfalvi 1975, 52–53, 120–21).

Literature-as-illustration, as an interpretation of reality, was intended to have the direct purpose of shaping the self toward

predetermined ends. Its violation of the principles of critical and socialist realism was also an affront to the integrity of those expected to appropriate its formulas. The rejection of such literature, however, is not a refutation of the issues that give it substantive political orientation. As Martens has pointed out, notwithstanding the problems of “socialist realism” in the German Democratic Republic, women’s educational and occupational opportunities, relatively greater control of one’s body, and related issues were themes of legitimate social and individual need (2001).

Literature can never be reduced to its educational value, nor can “educational work” constitute the foundation of socialist transformation (Lukács 2000, 85–86). It was Hegel’s caution against the certainty of educational outcomes (Lukács 1963, 112) and Goethe’s rejection of didacticism that informed Lukács’s view of the educational value of literature.

Goethe sought a unity of methodical planning and chance in human life, a unity of conscious direction and free spontaneity in all human activities. Thus hatred of “fate,” of any fatalistic resignation is constantly preached in [*Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*]. Thus the educators in the novel constantly stress contempt for moral “imperatives.” (Lukács 1968, 57)

Literature is never more than one contribution to social and individual development. As Margolies has argued, in order for literature to achieve even the *indirect* purpose demanded by realism, “there must be at least a common denominator of emotional consciousness”(1969, 109; cf. Caudwell 1946, 158, 165). There must be an argument for how realist literature can contribute to the formation of individual and collective consciousness on terms other than didacticism and prescription.

Thus, while literature-as-illustration is rejected, it is nevertheless important to demonstrate that the work of the realist, as Lukács describes it, has a purpose in shaping the reader’s view of reality, even if that amounts only to a “broadening of horizons.” To suggest that the reader engage in the same kind of intellectual

and moral work as the writer is to argue for a dialectical "completion" of the act of writing. The effect of the work on the reader is not complete, but is only an invitation taken to reflect on the portrayal of reality and relate that portrayal to mediating influences of which he or she becomes aware. Subjectively, the realist portrayal can be accepted or rejected. But if the realist portrayal is to be evocative (Királyfalvi 1975, 77), its evocation is aimed at generating or further developing interest in the reader, to move him or her to consider the work of art as a mediation between objective reality and the individual's experience of it. Just as wage workers and corporate bosses are drawn together in their differences as political beings, the political act of literary creation is not left to writers alone. As literature reveals historical transformations, individual divergences and patterns of being, it becomes a source for the political and social formation of the individual. The writer provides a map of the terrain of conflict that the reader may independently substantiate and develop. But such a response is not imminent in the novel itself. If literature is "a central force toward shaping" the lives of people (Steiner 1998, 328), the expectation of reflection and analysis is required of the reader as well as the writer.

This article proceeds with a discussion of Lukács's expectations of the writer's work, followed by an explanation of two closely related concepts in his aesthetic methodology—the *typical* and the category of *specialty*. I then suggest that the important connection between these two points of discussion is to be found in Lukács's concept of *imputed class consciousness*, one of the criteria for the adequate formation of social knowledge and of self-consciousness in the individual.

### ***The writer's knowledge of reality***

Realist narrative is not satisfied with the reflection of immediate reality, but a representation of objectively possible reality drawn from the writer's work of observation and analysis. The root of this perspective is Aristotle's distinction between the crude facts of history and the possibilities of poetry, and his discussion of the relation of potentiality to actuality (1963, 113–14,

419–20). Narrative written and appropriated by historical subjects is evocative of feelings or passion underlying action. Objectively, we assess the meaning in terms of the form and content of the narrative itself: Is it historically possible? Do the moral lessons that can be drawn from it meet a legitimate need? Are these lessons relevant to a program of progressive social change? Is the meaning simply relativistic? The reader's outlook, derived in part from his or her biographical experience, whether politically committed or socially passive, plays a part in the reception of the work; it shapes the reading but need not restrict its possibilities.

As a principle of historical materialism, the greatness of a writer, whether of bourgeois or socialist orientation, "springs from the depth and richness of his experience of reality" (Lukács 1963, 134). This "experience of reality" is not limited to its subjective character, nor is it a product of factual observation and recording alone. Rather, narrative that results from these methods attempts to substitute a more dynamic synthesis of possible experience for precise detail copied from everyday life.

In Scott, Balzac or Tolstoy we experience events which are inherently significant because of the direct involvement of the characters in the events and because of the general social significance emerging in the unfolding of the characters' lives. (Lukács 1971b, 116)

The writer must show through the narrative the dynamic relation between character and social reality. This is a creative possibility only if he or she knows what conditions and relations are possible to imagine within a particular historical context. So crucial is this principle of realism that the political orientation of the writer need not be a criterion for literature that may serve the ideological and organizational purposes of socialism. Lukács's numerous discussions of the critical realism of Balzac and Mann and Lenin's references to Tolstoy (1963a, 1963b, 1963c) are examples of writers who produced literature that contains knowledge of reality beyond their personal political orientation. This is what Steiner refers to as "the concept of dissociation—the image of the poet as Balaam speaking truth against his knowledge or avowed philosophy" (1998, 321).



***Specialty and type in the method of realism***

In his introduction to Lukács's *Essays on Realism*, Rodney Livingstone suggests that after Lukács's withdrawal from politics at the end of the 1920s, he concentrated on realist literature as a substitute for the working class that had failed to fulfill its historical function. In Livingstone's interpretation, for which he draws support from Ferenc Feher, Lukács adopted an essentialist view of realism that placed literature at the center of the struggle to "de-reify reality" (Livingstone, in Lukács 1981, 11–12). According to this view, after working-class failure, Lukács accepted literature as the *actual* moving force of social change.

Reification, of course, was one of the major problems Lukács addressed in *History and Class Consciousness*. His concern was the perceived overdetermination of the proletariat's immediate conditions and experience. Reification freezes the immediate conditions and experience as an inevitable, immutable, and impenetrable reality. For the individual, reification throws up an inner barrier to the complexity of reality, especially those elements obscured by the familiarity or oppressiveness of everyday life that might actually serve as resources for social change (Lukács 1971a, 164). Indeed, literature is one source, but not the essential one, with which to de-reify reality. Since Lukács recognized that his expectations of the working class were excessive, the essentialist view of literature would merely re-create the idealist-oriented errors he felt he had committed in *History and Class Consciousness*. If one accepts the "de-reifying" powers of literature on these terms, a direct relationship between the novel as written and a consequent course of action by the reader is the logical expectation. According to such a view, realist literature would achieve this on its own; it would provide a precise map of social change and the coordinates of conscious development and action; it would, therefore, be illustrative.

Instead, Lukács opened the possibilities within literature through his category of *specialty*. Specialty is described as a site or space in which mediations between the categories of Universal and Individual take place. It is a "space for movement" (Parkinson 1970, 131) in which social phenomena lose their immediacy

(Jameson 1971, 167) and become more concretized subjects of knowledge through interaction in a field of mediating phenomena. In Marx's methodology (for example, 1986a, 108–9), mediation is not merely an interaction or relationship between two phenomena; it is a rational, objective activity that is diffused throughout social reality. As a field of mediations, specialty is an "organizing mean." The example Lukács adopts from Hegel helps to clarify: "If I plan to plow a field, the plow is a 'mean' between myself and my object. But this 'mean' is something rational, and in a sense higher than the ends – e.g. the pleasures of eating – which it serves" (Parkinson 1970, 127). Methodologically and practically, consideration of mediating influences is a way of thinking, an act of learning that rejects the immediate appearance of reality as incomplete and draws attention to the multiple influences not readily apparent. From influences that are outside the immediate situation, the aesthetic organizing mean develops the content and character of the subject in a way that could not be achieved through immediate experience alone. The aesthetic organizing mean is capable of developing the literary subject and preserving its individuality as an element of the dialectic (Parkinson 1977, 39; cf. Lukács 1971b, 28; Kiralyfalvi 1975, 34–37; Marx 1986b, 38). In "its immediate mode of appearance," Parkinson writes, individuality "contains in itself all its determinations, but in an 'underdeveloped' (unanalysed) form" (1970, 129). It is the aesthetic *development and analysis* of social determinations that make them a source of knowledge and potential direction for the historical subject.

The mediations chosen for development by the writer indicate his or her perspective. But a writer's political orientation, as has been noted above, is not the only means by which the important and marginal features of a historical moment are chosen, or how the characters will be shown to develop (Lukács 1963, 33, 54–55; cf. Plekanov 1957, 25–26). Rather, a realist's literary perspective is broader than his or her personal political outlook; the literary perspective includes an awareness that a work *can* (not must) be used to draw attention to, and develop consciousness of, a broad theory of society and a political program. The method Lukács

advocates is indeed applicable to the critical realism of progressive bourgeois writers. However, despite Graham's argument to the contrary (1998), the method is most important *because* Lukács links it to the struggle for socialism as a struggle for human betterment.

The concrete expression of speciality is the *typical*, the enduring, objective tendencies of social phenomena. From its Latin and Greek origins, *type* is an impression, image, or model of a thing or person. One of its Latin meanings is *probrius*, which denotes a special or peculiar thing. But the significance of *typical* is not that it is singular in the sense that something is outstanding; rather, the corresponding term, *exemplar*, helps to clarify the concept if the chosen connotation is that of an "example of a species," instead of the common but erroneous usage that suggests something that stands above the remainder of its category. The literary type as an exemplary character is to be portrayed in a way that implies that his or her ideas and actions are not singularly different from the possibilities that other characters may also determine from a proper analysis of the same circumstances. We may say that a person who exhibits a self-conscious, relative mastery over the complex of social conditions, personality, and the structure of choice is *typical*. Dialectically, the typical is understood to be a simultaneous conservation and transcendence of its perceived limits. To be a *typical* human being, an *exemplar* of the species as a whole, means to recognize consciously that one's "innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society" (Lukács 1963, 122).

This is evident in the work of Anna Seghers, whose typical characters, though "weak and seemingly insignificant," are persons in whom she "saw a force capable of shaping the future of society" (Bangerter 1993, 130). Her literary types are developed as characters confront the reification of everyday life. In *The Seventh Cross*, for example, the mundane reality among ordinary working people is revealed to have a deeper, more profound level in the simple but significant decisions that expose the apparently static character of everyday life as a facade. As they encounter and assist George Heisler, an escapee from a Nazi camp, Seghers's

characters do not experience a sudden transformation of self. Heisler, a member of the Communist resistance, is not portrayed as an extraordinary leader. In the course of his escape, he wishes to return to the peace and comfort of a village street but at the same time confronts his past feelings, remembering how he once “despised the strength and glamour of everyday life” where “every face and every paving stone reflected shame” (Seghers 1987, 50–51). Franz, one of Heisler’s associates, describes himself as a man with ordinary desires that are now beyond his grasp, since “this other thing—this yearning for justice—came into my life” (264). The ordinary life of which they wish to be a part is understood by these characters as much more than its appearance; it is attractive for its calm and familiarity, but repulsive because it obscures the awareness of an essential human struggle.

Dr. Kress and his wife Gerda have grown so accustomed to their daily relations that they surprise one another by their individual responses to Heisler’s dilemma; in transcending their previous caution and inaction, they reach a new level of relations with each other (308–9). Seghers’s *typical* characters emerge, even momentarily, from the safe haze of everyday life where the effort to fulfill needs and requirements of the day seems to blend people with the inorganic objects in their surroundings. Their emergence from the mass is a movement toward a more complex knowledge of reality than that to which they had conditioned themselves in the gradual encroachment of fascism.

To the extent that the reader comes to know something of these characters, a conception of them as individuals with identifiable traits and particular outlooks may be formed. These traits and perspectives are preserved in the narrative even while the aesthetic construction integrates the individual into more complex situations and collective actions. The qualities of personality Semprun gives to Hans—commitment, friendship, intellectual curiosity, and resistance—are sufficient to exemplify meaningful human conduct even through the minimal “disclosure of these latent potentialities” (Lukács 1971b, 154). The sufficient level of portrayal is the *indirect* significance of the representation that draws Gerard, Semprun’s main (autobiographical) character, to

pursue the partisan model initially struck by Hans.

The category of specialty, and therefore of type, does not serve aesthetics alone. As a field of mediations, it applies as well to ethics and to science (Parkinson 1970, 127–28, 131). Parkinson notes that for Lukács ethics is a “form of activity, perhaps better rendered ‘ethical conduct,’” and as an organizing mean stands between “purely objective law and purely subjective morality” (Parkinson 1970, 127; cf. Lukács 1975b). Ethics as conduct draws from universal laws that serve humankind as a whole. But aesthetics is less rigidly conceived than ethics; it possesses a wider range of reality that can be experienced as “good” or “bad” (Parkinson 1970, 127–28; Kiralyfalvi 1975, 65–66; Lukács 1963, 35–36). Aesthetics draws from moments of personal conscience as well as socially unreflective, self-preserving acts, yet encourages questionable ethical conduct to be addressed less conclusively, as dialogue rather than prescription.

Tim O’Brien illustrates the point in *The Things They Carried* when his main character has to decide whether to go to Vietnam or emigrate to Canada. He is confronted in his imagination by the ordinary scenes of American boyhood: “I saw a seven-year-old boy in a white cowboy hat and a Lone Ranger mask and a pair of six-shooters; I saw a twelve-year-old Little League shortstop pivoting to turn a double play; I saw a sixteen-year-old kid decked out for his first prom” (1991, 60). His overwhelming concern is offending the ordinary folks in his hometown’s Gobbler Café whose conversations and concerns avoid the moral issues of imperialist war. Even as he makes a decision to participate in the war, O’Brien’s character illustrates a typicality as he reflects critically on the objective historical place of those facts of everyday life, understanding that they are an incomplete knowledge of reality. That he makes a decision that preserves the power of those images does not outweigh the significance of the character’s demonstrated knowledge of their place in the complex of social contradictions.

By contrast, literature-as-illustration has a direct, didactic purpose, to bring the reader to a certainty of judgment, finished as written and read; it leads in a predetermined direction, certain

of its task of reshaping the reader's thought and values. But such a completeness—the certainty of effect of writing upon reading upon action—is for Lukács a violation of the principles of the category of specialty, for the range of movement, deliberation, and choice is diminished or eliminated. Thus, incompleteness and indirectness remain aspects of a method that allows the space for mediations to remain an open field. Although a single work of art may constitute a turning point for a particular individual's life, it is more probable that the "effect of the art-work upon [a reader] after the experience remains almost completely imperceptible, and only a whole series of similar experiences will reveal visible attitudinal, cultural changes" in the individual (Lukács, in Kiralyfalvi 1975, 120). Additional mediations outside the literary text are the source of this effect.

Lukács states that the *typical* is the invention of the writer, who "first defines the basic issues and movements of his time and then invents characters and situations not to be found in ordinary life" (1971b, 158). The meaning of this is twofold. First, the type is not a mirror image of the daily life of any particular individual, although such a life is not precluded from portrayal. When Lukács notes that the writer constructs characters in "situations that he could not possibly have observed himself," he refers to the requirement of the artist's work of investigation and analysis (1981, 180). For the realist, there is no escaping actual historical circumstances as a resource for characters, but the construction of a character by precise replication of historical fact cannot be adequate for realistic portrayal. As literary forms, reportage and naturalism accept the immediacy of observation and historical evidence as the essential in literature because these serve as adequate proximity to truth. The process of historical formation and the contradictions of social life through which individuals develop are obscured by factual, but superficial, literary representation, even though the writer has based the work on "the accurate observation of everyday reality" (Lukács 1971b, 158). Lukács viewed the "imminence" of facts as an organizational and methodological problem, an orientation that informed his later critique of illustrative forms of literature (1971a, 22–23). When Marx argued in

volume 1 of *Capital* that it "is not enough that the conditions of labor are concentrated in a mass, in the shape of capital, at the one pole of society, while at the other are grouped the masses of men, who have nothing to sell but their labor-power," he was alluding to the basic, factual arrangement of capitalist society that is further entrenched in the minds of workers when they accept the arrangement as the "self-evident laws of Nature" (1996, 726). Such facts, because they remain undeveloped and unanalyzed, become a source of reification.

Secondly, the intensification of characters and situations is a creative representation of the author's "development and analysis of issues and contradictions" that are part of the reality of everyday life. The type that emerges is a synthesis of the writer's evaluation and exposition of the objective possibilities of the context. The successful, "extreme" intensification is the writer's understanding not only of the possibilities of addressing contradictions in everyday reality but of demonstrating the different approaches to those contradictions by characters at various levels of consciousness (Lukács 1971b, 159). Lukács embellishes his meaning in a comment on the *average*, something the typical is not. "The 'average' is a dead synthesis of the process of social development. An emphasis on the average transforms literature from a representation of life in motion into a description of more or less static conditions" (1971b, 164; cf. 1963, 122–23; Kiralyfalvi 1975, 80). Writing of this sort is only capable of observing and recording immediate relations of reality; it avoids "the depiction of decisive social problems." It presents, therefore, a limited knowledge of reality, reducing social conflict to formulaic prescriptions for resolution, and providing no incentive to examine reality for the complexity of contradictions and alternative forms of resolution. The writer who does the "work" Lukács requires of the realist organizes a portrayal of reality that has the potential to become a source of a movement against a static vision of reality.

### ***The moral and intellectual work of the reader***

If the category of *specialty* is a space for movement within a field of mediations, it is relatively open to writer and reader

alike. The content of specialty achieves its height in meaning only through the combination of a comparison with reality and as a guide for praxis. A literary method or style of narrative that does not realistically portray possible mediations of reality offers little invitation to the reader for reflection on reality. A reader's reflection, of course, can generate many possibilities for thought and action. The question arises: With the range of possible responses, how can a reader's contemplation and response to a novel be directed to encourage the investigation of possibilities for participating in socially transformative actions? The answer lies, in part, in the strength of mediating factors, such as political perspectives competing for the development of consciousness and knowledge. But the response to the field of mediations within the work of art also lies with the individual.

The typicality of literary characters must also, as noted above, be relevant to actual human beings. Very early in their development of historical materialism, Marx and Engels clarified the dialectical relation between the ideal of socialism and its objectively possible realization. Their argument in *The Holy Family* considered what, "in accordance with [its] *being*," the proletariat "will historically be compelled to do" (1975, 37). Two conditions are necessary. The future of socialism is based on the correlation of the rise and entrenchment of certain forces and relations of capitalist production, and the opportunities and possibilities of individual development taken up on that economic ground. The second condition is their conception of the proletarian class as *typical*—that is, capable as a class of developing the universalizing elements of its social character that would bring about the conditions for socialism. The development of a proletarian consciousness amid these new relations (capitalism and class struggle) implied an increasing quantity and quality of knowledge available to historical subjects along with a greater relative autonomy for the individual and the working class itself. Hence, the qualitative development of knowledge had an objectively valid basis. It was from this realization that a concept of *imputed class consciousness* was derived, distinguishing Marx's revolutionary theory by placing greater emphasis on class and individual responsibility for



the development of knowledge capable of penetrating the enduring effects of capital's domination. This is the greatest import of the concept of *imputation*.

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács used "imputed class consciousness" as an organizational principle for the development of political cadre. Imputed class consciousness also has implications for the attitude required to assert a strategy of human progress that permeates the major institutions of socialization. Lukács affirmed Luxemburg's position that the Communist Party was the form of the "class consciousness of the proletariat" (1971a, 41), but the argument was hardly the "ideological ground for a gnostic tyranny" as Cogdon has argued (1983, 181). Lukács's initial point was to emphasize that the Communist Party did not itself constitute the proletariat's body of knowledge; rather, it was the most important organizational means at that historical moment for developing the proletariat's knowledge of reality into a strategy for socialist struggle. It was not the *imposition* of the Party's knowledge upon the masses, but the Party's active stressing that its political strategy was grounded in an understanding of historical necessity that could be known and understood by anyone. Thus, class consciousness is not merely something the party "ascribed" to the working class, as Arato and Breines (1979) transcribe the term "imputed." Löwy's emphasis on the "possible" in his discussion of "objective possibility" in *History and Class Consciousness* offers a more critical understanding of the term (1979, 175–76). Imputed class consciousness consists of the ideas and knowledge that can be discovered or created by people "if they [are] *able* to assess" their particular historically produced circumstance "and the interests arising from it in their impact on the immediate action and the whole structure of society" (Lukács 1971a, 51).

The phrase "if they were able" may misdirect a reader to an undue emphasis on the structural constraints of capitalist society. Analyses of such structural barriers to development have become standard fare in sociological studies of differential educational opportunity among classes and ethnic groups, women's position under capitalism, and so on. Because Lukács was concerned with

consciousness as an organizational necessity, he brought the issue back to the problem of reification, the acquiescence by workers and others to the inward “barrier imposed by immediacy” (1971a, 164). The context in which he makes this statement is a methodological and organizational one, meant to negate bourgeois methodology that “arises directly from . . . social existence.” Such a methodological orientation adopted by the working class as a point of view suitable to its *immediate* interests is antithetical to what Marx and Engels argued the working class was historically “compelled to do.” What is only apparent and, therefore, underdeveloped in historical subjects, including the Party itself, must become objective knowledge—developed and analyzed—upon which action takes place, to complete one’s full experience of reality.

In Lukács’s *Defence* (2000), the meaning of *imputation* has to do with knowledge that is available in a society at any given historical moment and the level of consciousness capable of being developed from it. Its meaning was derived in part from its historic use in jurisprudence, where it referred to the objective and logical occurrence of events and their projected consequences.

For example, an object falls out of a window and kills a passerby on the street below. From a juristic perspective, who caused the death, and *what* did those concerned do wrong? In the first instance, what is important is not what the person concerned thought or intended, but whether he *could* or *should* have known that his action or failure to act in a normal way *would* have lead to these consequences. (Lukács 2000, 64)

Commenting on recent judicial decisions, Verdun-Jones points out, “Objective liability does not take into account what was actually going on in the head of the accused at the time of the alleged offence; rather, it is concerned with what the reasonable person *would have known* if placed in exactly the same circumstances as the accused (1999, 93).” Engels, too, referred to this juristic principle in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, where he contrasted the existing legal determination of murder—“when the assailant knew in advance that the injury

would be fatal"—with what ought to be included in the category of murder: the conscious construction by ruling powers of conditions that lead members of the working class to "a too early and an unnatural death" (Engels 1975, 393–94).

The meanings proposed by Lukács and Engels clarify the concept of *imputation* as one of consciousness integrated with the interrogation of social forces and relations. Given the extent of social development in Europe and North America, at least, this clarification offers an important contribution to the contemporary problem of reification. While Communist parties were among the few comprehensive and critical sources of knowledge for the masses in the revolutionary period, radical and progressive social movements are presently more justified in basing their efforts on a presumed body of critical knowledge of reality, the groundwork of which is widely available even in bourgeois institutions.

With regard to the historical subject, the concept of imputation is one that, more than implicitly, demands that the subject become knowledgeable by "experiencing" his or her social reality, and developing that experience through analysis. In Lukács's original definition, imputed class consciousness included the necessity of going beyond "what men *in fact* thought, felt and wanted" as "merely the *material* of genuine historical analysis," and he acknowledged the difficulty of generalizing such a level of consciousness. The character and quality of imputed consciousness, or what can be known of reality, is understood partially, through the concept of the typical, "whose characteristics are determined by the types of position available in the process of production" (Lukács 1971a, 51), and who, by implication, carry a heavier responsibility because of their proximity to the economic motor of capitalism. But responsibility of this kind is not confined to sites of economic production, for this would imply that the structure of labor itself spontaneously develops class consciousness. Neither does one's position in the system of production need to be the dominant means by which knowledge about the total system is possible. In fact, in the contemporary period especially, it is increasingly possible to generalize a level of consciousness based upon the growth of institutionally based knowledge and access of the masses to it.

Until recently, Lukács's most visible correction to his original discussion was found in the 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, where he cites Lenin's principle of bringing class consciousness to the proletariat from *outside* (1971a, xviii–xix). But he had made an earlier correction that set up the concept of imputation as important to issues of literature.

[A] mere analysis of the objective economic situation, even if theoretically correct, is not enough. The correct *guidelines for action* must be developed out of the analysis. If . . . the objective economic situation is not immediately apparent in its *objective* correctness, then the guidelines, and the slogans that follow from them, must be *found* deliberately. (2000, 71)

Immediate reality is a source within which these “guidelines” can be found. Reification of that reality is a significant but not insurmountable inhibitor of correct analysis. The “solution” to this dilemma for the working class is the self-development of its individual members. Thus, the other side of “if they were *able*” is, then, whether they are *willing* to fully experience reality and to explore the alternatives to make choices that may lead toward a fuller experience of reality and human betterment. It is in the characters of realist literature that we can find varied levels of tension between “willing” and “able” that has as its object the equally tension-filled complex of what can be and what ought to be known about reality.

In the face of the normative and unproblematic appearance of reality, it requires little energy and thought to be drawn into the reductionist clutches of everyday life. Its negative character and the unreflective consent to oppressive social forces are what *typical* characters, as we have seen with O'Brien, expose as important social contradictions, or the conditions they are able to transcend. For example, when another of Seghers's characters, Frau Feidler, runs an errand as a cover to obtain information about Heisler's situation, she returns home feeling suddenly liberated from the fascist repression of political activity. The same inanimate objects of the city are now seen in the aura of their old meanings.

She drew a deep breath. This was the old air again, cool with danger, that touches one's brow as if it were laden with frost. The old darkness, too, under whose protection bills were posted, slogans painted on board fences, handbills slipped under doors. . . . Everything was possible in the time that had just now begun; a change in all relations, her own included, quicker than anyone dared to hope, while one was still young enough jointly to partake of some happiness after so much bitter suffering. (Seghers 1987, 305–6)

None of Seghers's characters engages in heroics; their reflections are of actions that make social relations transparent and in some measure transform them. Her narrative exhibits a space for possible alternatives that may be developed *outside* the novel but framed by its realist inquiry. If the essence of a solution to a social problem exists within a work of literature, it should be there only to the extent that a reader is willing to explore the range of possibilities somehow related to social reality that can be drawn from it. The possibilities for transformative knowledge that Seghers constructs are what Lukács had seen in the way *imputation* was "continually being used in the humanities."

That is to say, from the facts that are presented to us, the attempt is made to reconstruct the objective situation and "subjective" moments are explained from this (and not the other way round). By leaving out the inessential details of an objective situation, one can distinguish what people acting according to normal and correct knowledge of their situation were able to do or to allow. (Lukács 2000, 64)

This can be achieved in literature in a number of ways, of course. In the indirect approach of realism, the posing of historical circumstances and individual dilemmas is intended to move readers to question reality as it appears to them. The approach is no less indirect and legitimate when it is evident what moral lesson the writer wishes to achieve. For example, in Arthur Miller's novel *Focus*, when Lawrence Newman is confronted with anti-Semitism, his reactions are ambivalent. It is not Newman, but Mr. Finkelstein who frames the problem as one for Newman's own interrogation, and that of any ill-informed reader.

First, I'm asking you to understand me; to you I ain't pleading for anything. I'm out for information. What'll happen is going to happen, and I myself can't stop it. I am a man who reads every day several newspapers. All kinds, from the Communist to the utmost reactionary. It's my nature I shouldn't be happy unless I shall understand what is going on. (Miller 2001, 165–66)

Finkelstein does not proceed to tell Newman what he should know about Jews to change Newman's anti-Semitism. Rather, he asks Newman to explain his personal dislike of Jews. His questions and imperatives are not meant to shape precisely how Newman should think, but to get him to question his appropriation of a body of knowledge founded on falsehoods. Thus, Newman cannot answer Finkelstein's questions, except to drag out time-worn accusations that signify his narrowness of experience, vision, and will. Newman is typical of the person with too much comfort and too little knowledge, a commonality perhaps shared with the men with whom Miller worked at the Brooklyn Naval Yard during World War II (2001, v). In his acts of apparent courage at the end of the novel, Newman evokes an interest in justice that is more important for the reader to consider than for Miller's character to complete.

### ***Conclusion***

Miller, Semprun, and Seghers have done their work as writers; they have portrayed the historical ground upon which social conflicts take place. As realists they illustrate what they believe they are required to know about the central issues of their socio-historical circumstances; in their work they impute what possibilities for knowledge and action readers might search out in their own reality. The ethical influence of literature may be delayed, but it may still draw the interested individual gradually toward a consciousness of what it means to be a typical human being. The ethical effect of the aesthetic experience "is a socio-historical effect of awakening man's consciousness to the fact that he 'makes himself' and to the broadening of the concept of the individual man as a member of ongoing humanity" (Királyfalvi 1975, 116; cf. 82).

If we accept that literature should not be simply illustrative or prescriptive, and yet have argued that realist literature imputes a knowledge of reality that ought to be taken up by the reader, how is this imputation of knowledge to be managed? There is no way around the difficult passage between these two problems of realism. The knowledge the writer uses to construct a work of art contains a suggestive guide to issues in everyday life. Individual readers may develop that knowledge for themselves, more or less strongly mediated (developed and analyzed), whether through established, normative institutions or oppositional organizations. The public sphere is where the tensions and perspectives first revealed in a narrative continue to be a subject of dialogue. It is such public debate that directs, pressures, influences, and encourages the fuller development of the social and the personal that are the subject of realist literature.

The underlying argument here has been that realist literature is a means of political socialization, that its basis in historical reality illuminates much about the contradictions and collisions of powerful and minor social forces that influence the formation of a critical self-consciousness. If literature is as much political as other issues of capitalist society that require the analysis and programmatic attention of historical materialism, then literature can also be seen as an organizational problem within the class struggle. The task is to delineate the space for realism in which the work of the writer and reader alike can be discussed in relation to the requirements of the struggle for human betterment.

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# **British Intellectuals and the Communist Ideal**

**Edwin A. Roberts**

## ***Introduction***

The year in which I began this essay on British intellectuals and the communist ideal marked the centenary of the birth of J. D. Bernal (1901–1971), pioneer physicist and influential Marxist theorist. At the height of his renown, from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s, Bernal was known for championing the idea that science should be directed toward human needs rather than private profit or personal hubris. Throughout his career, Bernal combined scientific research with political activism on behalf of world peace, nuclear disarmament, and social justice. Living through two important periods of worldwide political and social revolt, he was a major figure of the Communist Left who was respected even by the mainly ex-Communist “New Left.” In fact, two generations hailed him as an example of an engaged and committed intellectual, fortified by a vision of a better world.

Today, in this period of what the historian Robert Brenner has termed “the economics of global turbulence” (1998, 1), we are again witnessing the rise of a major left-oriented worldwide protest movement. We may lament that the protests from Seattle to Genoa against corporate globalization lack any cohesive worldview that envisions a future beyond the present crises. If such a worldview is to emerge, it seems certain that it must take into

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account the experiences of previous generations inspired toward social change by a convincing vision of a postcapitalist world.

J. D. Bernal represents a generation that, in the face of devastating global economic and political turmoil, believed it had found in the communist ideal an effective postcapitalist vision. It is timely and instructive to look back on the period (the 1930s) and the place (Great Britain) where this vision took shape, in the hope that those on the Left today may better understand what they have inherited from the past and fashion a better future.

It may be objected that in this post-Soviet era, the communist ideal is no longer a subject of serious consideration. Yet although immediately following the fall of the Soviet Union and other East European socialist regimes, it was commonplace to write off communism as both a movement and an ideal, the growth of crime, corruption, and inequality in these countries has somewhat tempered this judgment.<sup>1</sup> A pair of influential left intellectuals has recently gained serious attention with a call to rethink the communist ideal as a possible unifying outlook for the movement against corporate globalization. In their book *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri refer the forces against global capitalism to a communist tradition going back beyond Marx and Engels to include the thoughts of such figures as Spinoza and St. Francis of Assisi. They remind readers that communism has always been a multifaceted ideal that has deep roots in world culture and continues, regardless of the Soviet experience, to inspire those seeking a better future for the whole of humanity (Hardt and Negri 2000, 411–13). Therefore, although it would certainly be premature to predict a full-scale revival of mass interest in the communist ideal in the near future, it is surely not beyond a reasonable possibility.

### ***The rise of the Communist challenge***

In histories of Britain in the 1930s, the period is often referred to as the “Red Decade,” with the term *red* referring to communism and the Communist movement. Chief among reasons for this designation has been that communism has played a significant role in the memoirs of many important and gifted artists and intellectuals of the time (Croft 1990). Yet the importance of communism in

Britain of the 1930s is more than a matter of the nostalgic memory of prominent intellectuals. The historian James Jupp makes a good case that the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) played a major role in the consolidation of a radical left presence within British politics that, despite electoral isolation, would have a significant impact on political ideology in Britain from the 1940s onward (1982, 6–7).

Key to Jupp's case is the argument that the Great Depression was actually a final crushing humiliation, rather than a catalyst, for the rise of a political Left that had seen a decade of highs and lows centered around the growth of the Labour Party. This began with the expansion of working-class militancy after the First World War,<sup>2</sup> sparked by the decline of basic industries, such as coal, textiles, and engineering. The leadership of the main political parties (the Tories and Liberals) was stuck under the sway of Victorian ideology and proved unable to respond to this crisis. Thus the Labour Party became the main vehicle for expressing working-class discontent through its vision of a gradual transition to socialism by electoral means (Jupp 1982, 1–3). The coming decade, however, would see the Left in Britain suffer three major political setbacks: the fall of the first Labour government in 1923, the failure of the general strike of 1926, and the fall of the second Labour government in 1931.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these failures, opinion started germinating on the Left that the leadership of Labour and the main trade unions had betrayed the real potential for a social revolution in Britain. This opened the field for the articulation of a new vision of the road to salvation for the beleaguered British working class.

There is no doubt that the Depression was a major crisis for an industrial working class that had long been on the defensive. Unemployment became *the* issue, with three million out of work by 1933, and never less than a million unemployed until World War II. Historians of the period have emphasized two issues connecting the Depression with the rise of the Communist Left. First, after Labour's representation in parliament was decimated by the general election of 1931, extraparliamentary activity became a more significant element of British politics, with Communists

playing a profound role through their control of the influential National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM). Second, the doctrine of gradualism, which dominated Labour's ideology, came under severe attack within the Labour Party itself as left-wing Labourites began to push for a program that would spell out how governments could obtain the power necessary to control finance and industry, thus making socialization possible (Jupp 1982, chap. 12; Thorpe 1997, chap. 2; Thompson 1992, chap. 3). These trends were fought by conservative elements within the leadership of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), which were a strong controlling force within the Labour Party. Still, the lack of concrete measures for dealing with the Depression on behalf of Labour led to a real growth in the demand not only for a new type of society, but a new type of socialism as well.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of the CPGB in the 1930s can be established on a number of levels. There are the usual statistics about its growth and the spread of its message. The years 1934 to 1939 saw a significant growth in Party membership, from about 6,000 to 20,000. From 1935 to 1937, the circulation of its paper, the *Daily Worker*, went from 30,000 to 80,000. Finally, by 1939 fifty-four Communists were elected to local councils and one M.P. (Jupp 1982, 93).<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the strongest case for expanding Communist influence would be to prove that it spread beyond its own members and traditional supporters. Jupp makes such a case when he argues:

The spread of Communist ideas and influence among the middle classes and among the steadily expanding Constituency Labour Parties was achieved more rapidly than in the past. The tide of ideas on the Left was flowing in the Communists' favor, and they did not have to resort to the often artificial tactics of "penetration" used since the early 1920's. Many on the Left positively sought out Communists and espoused Communist ideas without being enticed, misled, or coerced. (96)

If we accept the contention that by 1939 the Left in Britain could be described, ideologically, as essentially a "Communist Left," then the next important question concerns the nature of the

ideals that solidified this Left. What did communism mean to this Communist-led movement?

Here Jupp and many other historians of the communist movement in Britain have come up short. When Jupp states, "The Communist Party so dominant in other spheres offered little in the way of visions of the future" (156), I believe he is plainly wrong. Although Jupp's statement that British Marxism in the 1930s was "a relatively unsophisticated ideology" is debatable, when he adds "Marxism came to mean what the Soviet Communist Party said it meant and what T. A. Jackson, John Strachey, Emil Burns and Palme Dutt presented it as meaning to the English-speaking world" (132), he is clearly begging the question. It is incumbent upon him at this point to explain exactly what it was that these and other British Marxists presented as communism. Then scholars can evaluate how interesting or significant these ideas were for the times and special circumstances of the period.<sup>6</sup>

With the recent opening of Party archives in Manchester and Moscow, a major reevaluation of the nature of the Communist movement in Britain has unfolded. In his path-breaking essay, "Reflections on Recent British Communist Party History," Matthew Worley argues that the preponderance of scholarship on the CPGB shows that we must understand the development of Communist ideology as controlled by particularly British characteristics (1999, 245). He argues that despite undoubted loyalty to the Comintern and the USSR, the CPGB was "largely the master of its own fate" (249). On the matter of the exact nature of communist theory in Britain, Worley claims that this is an evolving area open to fruitful study.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of communism that emerged in Britain in the thirties attracted a variety of types of thinkers, who had differing backgrounds and ways to envision a communist future. They were influenced in common by the perceived economic, political, and cultural failure of the old order, and by their fear for the future, with fascism and war looming on the horizon. Disaffected Labourites sought a form of salvation for the socialist ideal betrayed by their party's leadership; former liberals saw in communism the only real or practical means of preserving the liberal heritage within a dying civilization; writers and other artists sought in communism

a political realization of the aesthetic ideal of personal fulfillment, and, finally, a highly influential group of scientists, such as J. D. Bernal, saw in communism the embodiment of scientific experimentation, as they reinvisioned a communist society as an organized laboratory of creative intelligences.

We shall begin our exploration of the evolution of the communist ideal in Britain by looking at one of the decade's first and most influential exponents of that ideal, the Labour M.P. and political theorist John Strachey.

### ***Communism as a coming salvation***

John Strachey is a paradigmatic figure of the Red Decade, a middle-class intellectual attracted to the CPGB when its base among traditional supporters had actually collapsed. In the period 1929–33, the Party was working under a program called “Class-against-Class,” which fostered a preoccupation with tactical questions and a downgrading of intellectual work (Thompson 1992, 48). Yet Strachey, acting outside the Party structure but in sympathy with its views, was able to speak to wider concerns than those focused on by the Party leadership, and helped to begin the process of spreading the communist message to a greater audience. Strachey was important for three reasons. First, he turned to communism out of disgust with the failure of Labour as the party in government from 1929 to 1931. Second, he developed a sophisticated theory of the Depression and the rise of fascism as symptoms of capitalist crisis, which convinced many wavering Labour socialists of the power of Marxian analysis. Third, he presented a vision of the communist future in a way that brought into focus specifically British concerns, while staying connected to the wider world movement.

The fundamental text for understanding Strachey's case for communism is his debut work of Marxist theory, *The Coming Struggle for Power* (1933). In chapter 19 is a well-reasoned and articulate explanation of what communism is and why it is necessary, all presented in the common-sense manner so typical of British Marxists of Strachey's generation. Strachey states his case for communism in apocalyptic terms, explaining that capitalism



not only is obsolete, but has become a threat to civilization itself—civilization being defined as any system that allows for the growth of leisure, the expansion of culture, and the control over nature. According to Strachey, communism will allow us to do these things better than any other form of civilization by freeing production from class control, freeing communities from the dictates of the market, and basing society on planned production and collective ownership (344). All of this is fully in line with the most basic Marxian orthodoxy; however, Strachey's focus is on the key issues of the day. He claims that communism would address such pressing concerns as the organization of idle labor, the proper application of scientific knowledge to social and technical problems, and, most importantly, the antagonism of nations (348–49).

In a very interesting discussion, Strachey presents communism as the negation of national boundaries. “Two communist nations in the world at the same time is impossible,” said Strachey, because communism entails one expanding republic in which the most developed and newest converts will always be central. Thus in Strachey's view, a communist revolution in Germany would shift the center of the world communist movement from Moscow to Berlin (350). One wonders what Stalin might have made of the statement, if he was ever aware of it, but the implication is clear. A communist revolution in Britain would become the vanguard of the movement, not just a subordinate to the USSR.

Strachey further fleshes out his point by stating that communism is not a utopia for which there is a blueprint, but is instead a *vision* of the future based on the problems of the present. In this sense, a society like the Soviet Union may provide a model for a road to communism, but communism itself was for Strachey “a method by which human civilization can be maintained and developed, therefore, its natural constituents are intellectuals capable of mapping the road to the future” (357). This last point is central, for Strachey did not hold up the USSR as a model society, but rather what he called a functioning workers' dictatorship (356).

Strachey does make a specifically Leninist argument that a communist revolution in Britain hinges on the development of a

mass communist party. More significant for his general case is his insistence that communism is a matter of vision—hence the title of the book’s final chapter, “The Salvation of the British People.” Displaying a somewhat elegant dialectical rationality, Strachey connects the possible difficulties on the road to achieving communism to the “deep emotions of personal identification with their nation which most men feel” (384). He points out that capitalism plays a nefarious role in appealing to national pride and vanity in pursuit of wealth, while making sure “the love of country is a characteristic to be stamped out by wholesale massacre if it happens to interfere with capitalism’s search for markets”(385). In contrast, to defeat capitalist imperialism, communist-backed wars of national liberation may legitimately invoke national or cultural identity. Strachey argues that Britain’s own national identity is tied to its decaying capitalist empire. In one of his most profound passages, Strachey explains, “An empire on the defensive must always find its allies amongst the friends of what is, or what has been, all over the world.” Thus he concludes that the British people can be an agent “of reaction, of superstition, of prejudice, of every old possessing frightened and reactionary class on earth” (392). Or they could join the oppressed, especially in the British empire itself, and work for world communism.

Therefore, Strachey’s vision of communism as the salvation of the British people is a dialectically inverted patriotism in which the natural pride people had learned to invest in the empire is transformed into a pride in their ability to liberate the subjects of that empire. “The immediate future of humanity rests to no small degree in the hands of the workers of Great Britain” (Strachey 1933, 396).

Strachey’s book proved to be one of the major intellectual events of the early thirties, and many of its arguments became central to the articulation of the communist ideal throughout the decade. Nonetheless, inside the CPGB, official Party theoreticians showed little concern for the communist ideal of a future society. Instead they remained concerned, for the most part, with technical problems of the movement and with promoting the classics of Marxist thought.

The leading theorist of the CPGB, Rajani Palme Dutt, set the tone in these matters. His specialty was journalistic reporting on current politics and world affairs. In the period of Class-against-Class, Palme Dutt took the lead in vigorously downgrading intellectual work as of no great importance to the Communist cause. Yet we now know through their private letters that Palme Dutt played a somewhat contradictory role, acting as a mentor to Strachey, encouraging him to spread the communist ideal to a wider audience than most Party intellectuals could command at the time (Callaghan 1993, 147–49). However, even when he dealt directly with the subject, as in his book *The Social and Political Doctrine of Communism* (1938), Palme Dutt still denounced passive speculation about the communist future in the name of getting down to the concrete task of combating fascism and imperialism (Callaghan 1993, 172–73). Still, not long after Strachey's book started gaining in popularity, fascism was the very issue that put new life into the Communist movement and encouraged many to look to communism for a vision of a future beyond the barbarism that seemed just around the corner.

### ***Communism and the Popular Front***

In line with the Comintern, the CPGB in 1935 adopted a new program known as “the Popular Front against War and Fascism.” This proved to be one of the most successful policies the Party ever adopted. By calling for an open alliance of all progressive forces, this new program renewed the opportunity for those inside the Party to make a broad appeal to those outside of it, on behalf of its ultimate goal of a revolution for a new society. A classic example of such an attempt is found in Ralph Fox's *Communism and a Changing Civilization* (1935). The book was especially commissioned for a series titled *The Twentieth Century Library*, designed to provide simple introductions to major topics of public concern by noted experts. Fox, who spent most of the 1920s working in India for the Comintern, was known as something of a polymath on subjects related to Marxist theory; by the midthirties, he was gaining respect for his work in the field of literary criticism. His work was cut short by his death in the Spanish civil war (Kiernan 1989, 186).

In *Communism and a Changing Civilization*, Fox followed the path laid down by Strachey and Palme Dutt in regard to communism's general outlook, but he added a detailed explanation of what a communist Britain might look like, very much more in line with Popular Front ideas. He maintains the internationalist belief that communism in any form will only be possible when capitalism is defeated on a world scale, thus leading to what Fox called "the adult stage of history, the world commonwealth of free labour" (86).

The picture of communism drawn by Fox seems influenced mainly by Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, emphasizing communism as releasing the fullest flowering of individuality and initiative, which, in turn, opens the possibility for the fullest flowering of productive forces. Fox also brought into focus, more than previous British Communist writers, the idea that communism would make the bourgeois revolution complete by ending class prejudice and reorganizing productive relations (86–87). These notions were very attractive to disillusioned liberals who feared their contributions to civilization might be wiped out in a future revolution. Interestingly, Fox also addressed a major concern of conservative critics, who argued that a communist revolution would mean the destruction of Britain's rural population (where the Tory party enjoyed wide support even among the lower classes). Here Fox quoted Lenin in arguing that the communist ideal of modernization does not entail the exploitation of the peasantry by the workers, but instead results in cooperation between the two for the purpose of industrializing the countryside (87). To this Fox added an assurance that a workers' dictatorship is not a permanent condition but a transitional state leading toward the end of the state as such (100).

This last point is important in understanding how the articulation of the communist ideal evolved during the Popular Front period. Fox and other Communist writers emphasized the positive, though not essentially utopian, elements of the communist vision. This was important because many non-Communist writers newly sympathetic to Marxism were more and more taking it on themselves to describe their version of what a communist

revolution might involve. Many, such as the socialist historian G. D. H. Cole and the ex-liberal political theorist Harold Laski, tended to emphasize an often-apocalyptic revolutionary scenario. For them, the decay of capitalist civilization was akin to the fall of the Roman empire, with the immediate postcapitalist period being depicted as a brutal, dictatorial, definitely illiberal, but necessary, era of readjustment and reorganization of civil order.

Fox rebuked such depictions. Taking on Cole specifically, Fox argues that Cole had misread Marx in claiming that a workers' dictatorship would entail a harsh and vengeful regime born out of immiseration and class polarization. Instead, Fox argues that the revolution would result not from the polarization of classes, but from nonproletarian elements, such as the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie, joining forces with the working class against the capitalist ruling classes. Explaining the dictatorship of the proletariat, Fox reasons that it would not be a dictatorship as such, but instead would be the first realization of authentic democracy in British history (1935, 124–25).<sup>8</sup>

Much like Strachey, Fox argues that the actual conditions for the transition from socialism to communism must remain an abstraction for the present time, but he still thinks it possible to speculate on the nature of a future communist Britain. In fact, he claims that the ability to move the communist ideal from the abstract to the concrete depends on its being applied to specifically British conditions (128). This was important because British Communists encountered many “it can't happen here” objections when they advocated revolution. It was the official view of the Labour Party and many other non-Communist socialists that British conditions defied the necessary prerequisites of a social revolution. Fox responded to this on two levels; first, he dealt with the issue of the material conditions for revolution, and second, he addressed the issue of the actual need for a revolution.

On the subject of material conditions, many argued that the British class structure was too complex for the workers to establish a vanguard role and rally other classes to their cause. Next, it was argued that Britain was not a materially self-sufficient nation, and that without its imperial and colonial holdings, it would starve

and collapse. Fox objected that the class system in Britain no longer represented nineteenth-century images of a lower class dependent on the ruling classes for direction and charity. In addition, he argued that the Depression was already creating a new system of class antagonisms in which workers were playing a leading role, and a growing rejection of paternalism and reformism (132). On the subject of material self-sufficiency, Fox took the opportunity to make the classical Leninist critique of imperialism, pointing out that the reorganization of the empire into a democratic union of equal and interdependent republics would solve this problem better than the empire ever did (139).

In dealing with the issue of why Britain needed a revolution, Fox outlined one of the most detailed conceptions to be found in the thirties of what a communist Britain would look like. It is interesting that Fox deals with specific problems suffered by a majority of the population at the time. In this sense, Fox's argument seems more like a diagnosis than a utopian scheme. What is also striking, looking back at it today, is how similar Fox's picture of the problems of Britain in the 1930s is to the issues of political and economic development we find today in the third world (an area for which the communist ideal had great attraction after World War II).

A Soviet Republic of Britain, we are told, would construct gas and water grids, set up networks for road and bridge construction, bring hydroelectric power to Scotland and Wales, rebuild antiquated towns into modern cities, and distribute a healthy diet to the majority of the population for the first time ever (Fox 1935, 144). Today, these proposals may not seem very radical to most readers, but Fox provided ample statistics to show that every such suggestion he made would satisfy a dire need at the time. As to why the majority of Britain's population seemed to lack basic material necessities, the blame was put on its corrupt imperial ruling class, which, we are told, was disinclined to sacrifice its profits to achieve these improvements. Hence, ruling-class power over the nation needed to be broken once and for all.

On political aspects of the revolution, Fox comes across as much more radical, even by the standards of contemporary

Britain. Soviet Britain, as Fox explains it, would for the first time be a real democracy. The court system, monarchy, and House of Lords would all be abolished. In their place would come administrative councils of technicians, inventors, teachers, artists, and writers interested in dealing with issues of justice and checks on the abuses of power. Plural voting and property qualifications would be replaced by a universal, direct, equal, and secret franchise, in which all officers would be open to recall and direct public criticism (145–46). These suggestions went to the very heart of the British system as it had developed since at least the liberal reforms of the 1830s and 40s. For many, not just Communists, but socialists and liberals as well, that system seemed to be on its last legs, and revolution, not reform, was in the air.

It is important in understanding the evolution of the communist ideal in Britain in the 1930s to know that the vision of Communists like Fox was based to a large extent on how they pictured the reality of what they called “Soviet democracy” in the USSR. The idea of the Soviet Union as a harsh and paranoid dictatorship, whether out of necessity or design, was never part of the CPGB’s conception of the transitional society they envisioned. More significant is the fact that at the hands of its more talented exponents, the communist ideal in Britain was presented as a direct and practical solution to real problems faced by a civilization in crisis. Thus, as Fox concluded, “communism is not an abstract idea, but a political movement of millions for bread and life” (148).

***Forward to communism: A convert’s case***

The importance of the Popular Front was not simply that it encouraged a wider public to accept the CPGB or Marxist-Leninist ideas, but that it created an atmosphere in which thoughtful people of the center-left, whatever their backgrounds or personal beliefs, accepted the idea that communism represented a future worth considering. In fact, by the middle of the decade, many essentially non-Communist intellectuals, faced with the prospects of war and fascism, were arguing that communism represented the best “practical” alternative for those with true humanitarian concerns.

A major figure in this camp was the poet and critic Stephen Spender, whose book *Forward from Liberalism* (1937) is one of the best-remembered of the Red Decade. A very popular selection from Gollancz's Left Book Club, Spender's book epitomized the ideology of the Popular Front by making an appeal for a communist revolution on behalf of all fair-minded progressives, liberals, socialists, and Marxists who feared for the future of humanity. Every fiber of the book rings with the fear of fascism and the belief that civilization was rapidly descending into chaos and brutality.

Like a number of literary figures from his generation, Spender was motivated by the belief that artists must become political to be significant. He represented the thinking of one who had been outside both the Communist Party, and left activism in general, who now believed the times were forcing him to take a stand and make a choice. Spender made clear his basic commitment to the liberal vision of a free society rooted in general political and civil liberties. Still, he argued that he had come to realize that real freedom could only be brought about in a classless society. Influenced by Harold Laski's *Rise of European Liberalism* (1936), Spender came to believe that liberal democracy was an illusion, for the democratization of liberal societies was always hindered by the intrinsic liberal commitment to private property (1937, 85).<sup>9</sup> Thus, liberal reforms or humanitarian laws proposed by liberal parliaments were, according to Spender, always acts of higher hypocrisy, because liberals know that such acts will never challenge the foundations of the class system that makes them necessary in the first place. This for Spender was the dilemma of the liberal idealist (85).

As capitalism fell deeper and deeper into economic crisis, Spender concluded that reformism would be even more hindered by the inherent tendency within liberalism to equate freedom with freedom for the ruling classes. As bourgeois democracy faced greater and greater pressure from the masses of ordinary people for real democracy and real freedom, there would therefore be a tendency for the ruling classes to surrender to fascism (134–46). Thus, for Spender, communism was the next best option for the



thoughtful and humane liberal. Spender's commitment was in no way half hearted, as he said, "I do believe a communist world will be a progressive society in which each generation will produce more individuals of imagination, intelligence and creative genius" (137). This he contrasted with a compromise liberal democracy "allied to the ethics of financial success through brutal physical struggling and grabbing that will produce standards of unprecedented ugliness and vulgarity." In a section of the book titled "Questions and Answers," Spender addresses an imaginary critic to whom he admits that he is essentially a liberal individualist who turned to communism, which he called a shift from idealism to a hard-headed realism.<sup>10</sup> According to Spender, anyone who wants the benefits of liberal civilization has only one hope, and that is a communist revolution (171). Spender also claimed that his vision of communism was inspired by the fact of his being a writer. In saying this, Spender indicated that the present might be bleak, but the future, as he saw it, could be very bright, for his model of communism was the artist's life and the creative process writ large. This essentially aesthetic ideal of communism would be developed by others and play a major role the shaping of the British communist vision.

Inside the CPGB, sympathetic converts like Spender were significant, but not unproblematic. This can be seen in a review of *Forward from Liberalism* that was published in Palme Dutt's influential Communist journal, *Labour Monthly*. The reviewer was none other than the CPGB general secretary, Harry Pollitt, who was never known for intervening in intellectual disputes over the finer points of Communist theory. In fact, despite the title of the review, 'Liberalism and Communism,' Pollitt did not venture far into the ideological issues the title implied. Instead, what he did was to use the review to note a trend, that of "young public school and university educated men and women from middle class backgrounds and liberal families embracing the communist cause" (1937, 187).

Pollitt, as much as Spender, took the book to be a watershed in the developing capitalist crisis that was the Depression. He did sound a note of caution, however, explaining that many

middle-class and professional people moving toward communism might lack a full understanding of liberalism's real failures. In fact, Pollitt argued that Spender was such a person, pointing out that Spender was still under the illusion that liberal idealism was itself something other than a sham to protect ruling-class interests. His main objective was to argue that liberal reformism was not the result of well-intentioned ideals, but was the result of mass struggle from below, forcing liberals into a tactical shift for survival (188). The half-heartedness and ineffective nature of most liberal reforms were not, as Spender believed, due to limitations within liberalism, but, Pollitt maintained, were due to the very nature of liberalism, which would never introduce them without the force of the class struggle. Going back to Marx and Engels, Pollitt argued that "communists have always known that liberalism is the mortal enemy of the working class majority and not its half-hearted friend" (189).

What Pollitt's intervention shows is that, even in the Popular Front period, major differences existed among those who embraced the communist cause, and that within the CPGB, at least, resistance was strong to what many others saw as the major attraction of communism; i.e., that it was somehow an extension of the liberal ideal for a new age.

### ***Communism and the aesthetic ideal***

The idea that liberal civilization had decayed beyond repair was a strong current in one of the most visible areas of communist sympathy in the 1930s, the so-called "literary Left." The period 1935–40 saw a number of very talented poets, playwrights, and novelists express their solidarity with either the communist ideal or the CPGB or both. They included such figures as W. H. Auden, E. M. Foster, Christopher Isherwood, as well as Stephen Spender. As the historian V. G. Kiernan explains, what drove the literary Left was a commitment to the idea that one must combine politics with imagination, and that art without action is an impossibility (1987, 187). For this group, communism was the only political vision that understood this truth, and thus communism was the aesthetic ideal brought to life.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, one of the most important formulations of the aesthetic conception of the communist ideal came from an intellectual at the very fringes of the literary Left, Christopher Caudwell. One of the most controversial figures in the history of British Marxism,<sup>12</sup> he is best known for his study of poetry *Illusion and Reality* (1937). In this work, Caudwell set out to establish that art reflects humankind's inner struggle both to understand and to control its environment. Only when art is coordinated with the ever-shifting relations of production does it advance, and only under communism, the highest mode of social relations, can art reach its full potential (Caudwell 1937, 54).

In a posthumous collection of essays, *Studies in a Dying Culture*, we find Caudwell presenting the aesthetic conception of communism more directly.

Communism seizes hold of a higher degree of self-determination, to rescue man from war, starvation, hate and coercion, by becoming conscious of the causality of society. It is communism that makes free will real to man by making society conscious of itself. (Caudwell 1971, 227)

It was Caudwell's main assertion that bourgeois thought traps humanity under the illusion that freedom and liberty are purely negative qualities, involving absence of restraint. The value of communism is that it restores the essence of liberty and freedom as platforms for people to engage in acts of creative overcoming of historically imposed limitations. Hence, in Caudwell's view, the communist revolution would be an inherently creative (artistic) act.

It was, however, not an intellectual with an artistic or literary background who made the most influential case for communism as the freeing up of human creative intelligence. This vision would instead find its greatest expression at the hands of a scientist, J. D. Bernal.

### ***Communism as organized science***

As the Red Decade came to a close, there emerged one of the most profoundly influential versions of the communist ideal

in the history of the British Left—that of the pioneer physicist J. D. Bernal. With the possible exception of John Strachey, no one acting outside the ideological guidelines of the CPGB had a greater influence on Communist theory in Britain than did Bernal. In fact, his views had such a major impact on the entire landscape of intellectual life in Britain that the term *Bernalism* became a popular coinage of the day.<sup>13</sup>

It has long been noted in the scholarly literature on British Marxism that an exceptional element of the 1930s was the influx of a large number of influential scientists into the communist movement. This shift of respected members of the scientific community toward Marxism began in 1931, when a delegation of Soviet scientists and philosophers dazzled the attendees at the International Science and Technology fair held in London (for details, see Werskey 1978; Sheehan 1985; and Roberts 1997). The movement this inspired was known as the Social Relations in Science (SRS) movement or, alternatively, as “Red Science.” It reached its high-water mark in 1939, when its supporters took control of Britain’s Association of Scientific Workers. Also in 1939, J. D. Bernal published his seminal *Social Function of Science* (*SFS* hereafter), a book that cemented the connection between scientific advance and Marxist theory for a generation of scientists and intellectuals. The book would also reshape the theoretical direction of the CPGB, a point of some irony, since Bernal, a member of the Party from 1923 to 1933, left it as a result of its then Class-against-Class line, which rejected the idea that Party members could contribute to the movement through intellectual work (Steward 1999, 64). By 1939, however, the Party’s leadership was promoting the writings of intellectuals like Bernal as among the major achievements of British communism.<sup>14</sup>

Bernal was gifted with an encyclopedic mind, and the main purpose of *The Social Function of Science* was to show that in virtually every aspect of its practice, science could not be viewed as a neutral or apolitical endeavor, as many both inside and outside the scientific community believed. Instead, Bernal maintained that science, as a thing-in-itself, was intimately related to the theory and practice of socialism and thus formed the basis for a communist future. Like other key communist texts, the *SFS*

presented an extremely optimistic outlook for a pessimistic age. The historian E. J. Hobsbawm, explaining the tone that Bernal's book set, sums it up in three points. The book promotes (1) the belief in the unlimited potential of science for humanity; (2) the employment of science by progressive governments for social use; and (3) the defense of reason, theory, and experiment over ignorance and obscurantism (Hobsbawm 1999, xv). In a wider context, Bernal was enlisting science on behalf of the Popular Front against depression, war, and fascism.<sup>15</sup>

The central theme of the *SFS* is that scientific research requires planning and organization, and that the more rationally and democratically planned this research is, the more science and society will progress. In defense of this claim, Bernal collected an astonishing amount of empirical evidence on the conduct of scientific research; the heart of his case, however, was theoretical. As I have argued elsewhere, Bernal's understanding of Marxism amounted to a reconception of the orthodox view that it constituted a scientific outlook. For Bernal, Marxism was like a scientific "system" used as a means for understanding the organizational practice of scientific analysis. In this way, it was much like Thomas Kuhn's famous theory of the paradigm (Roberts 1997, 165).

By 1939, Bernal had been arguing for about a decade that scientists were in an anomalous position in that their social relations put them in the camp of the bourgeoisie, while their objective productive relations were essentially proletarian. This made scientists highly subject to the illusions of liberal, individualist ideology, which did not replicate the realities of scientific work (Bernal 1949, 349). In order to shift the majority of scientists into an alliance with the working class, Bernal believed it was necessary to demonstrate the true affinity of scientific work with the ideal of a classless society.

In the *SFS*, Bernal makes a powerful case that all scientific advances come from scientists respecting the reality of science as a cooperative endeavor, but, he added, the future of progressive science lies in "the appropriate combination in the laboratory of intelligent and personal direction with democratic control" (Bernal 1939, 267). Thus, Marx's free association of associated producers becomes in Bernal's vision a "voluntary association of

free research workers.” This “laboratory democracy,” as he called it, is one in which great minds are cultivated and allowed to flourish, but are only rewarded for acknowledging their debt to their fellow workers with whom they share equal power and responsibility. Nonetheless, the chief responsibility of scientific workers is to the society from which they receive funds and to whom they provide benefits. This is key to understanding Bernal’s association of science with socialism and communism. Bernal regarded the ability to unite science with society as a problem of organization.

No organization however well thought out and however integrated with the general social scheme can be of any use if it does not represent the effective desires of the people who are to work the organization. (Bernal 1939, 323)

To this Bernal added that the organizational model for science was neither that of business or civil administration, but was a new type of democratic organization directed toward human betterment.

There is no doubt that the model of scientific organization that Bernal had in mind was the form he believed was being put into practice in the USSR. Still, for Bernal, the key word was “practice.” Like many of his contemporaries, Bernal argued that the Soviet Union was the result of a number of unique and specific historical and social developments. It was their great hope that the USSR would demonstrate an effective means for the transition from socialism to communism, but they argued time and again that no specific blueprint existed for how Britain specifically would make the transition to a communist society. In Bernal’s mind, it would be a matter of experimental trial and error in which Marxism was to be a guide to practice and a method of analysis, not an infallible “creed and cosmogony” (415).

Quoted most often from the *SFS* is Bernal’s claim that “science is communism.” How should we read this statement? I believe it is not the vision of a type of society or a scientific civilization. Instead it represents the belief in a mode of organization, a democratic association for a scientifically educated citizenry. In Bernal’s vision, only such an organization could be capable

of building the foundations for the classless society of the future called communism.

### ***Conclusion***

In many ways, Bernalism represented the apotheosis of the communist ideal in Britain in the 1930s. With the Labour Party wavering from near oblivion to slow recovery throughout the decade, Communists were able to play a significant role in advancing the frontiers of left thinking. Although they lacked the prestige of a mass party behind them, Communist intellectuals could be daring in their criticisms of current realities and visionary in their demands to remake society. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this did not amount to mere cheerleading on behalf of the Soviet Union. In addition, we can say that in a world that seemed overwhelmed by the political, social, and economic crises of depression and fascism, many intelligent and committed people were open and prepared to listen to what Communists had to say. It may even be argued that by the end of the decade, British communism was linking up with a growing consensus among dissidents from all sectors of political opinion in Britain arguing for a radical restructuring of the nation. This can be seen in the fact that by the late thirties, a growing number of Liberals, left-wing Labourites, and even the Conservative M.P. Harold Macmillan were arguing, in defiance of party leadership, that Britain's only salvation lay in a system of scientifically organized socioeconomic planning (Thorpe 1997, 93; Hobsbawm 1999, xiii).<sup>16</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, the crisis many had feared came to a climax, beginning with the Munich Agreement of 1938 and the seeming surrender of Britain's ruling class to fascist aggression. From this point into the war years, the forces that had been allied against fascism and depression turned their energies toward building the foundations of Britain's problematic postwar welfare state. With this, the more radical elements of the British Left began to lose their prominence on both the political and intellectual landscape. With the coming of the Cold War and then the Khrushchev revelations of the horrors of the Stalin period, the communist ideal in Britain went into near eclipse. Marxist intellectuals (both

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Communists and non-Communists) would again achieve influence in the coming decades, but more often for their analysis of Britain's past and present, than for their visions of the future.

In the last half decade, there has developed a significant renewal of interest in the legacy of the communist movement in general, and of the influence of figures like J. D. Bernal in particular. It cannot be ignored that some of this interest has been stimulated by a desire to understand how today's global unrest against capitalist domination of the world economy compares with movements of the past. Many of those today searching for a vision of the future are asking what, no matter how problematic, can be learned from those who were visionaries in the past.

To summarize, the communist ideal in the 1930s was shaped by the failure of the major British political parties either to explain or deal with the twin crises of depression and fascism. Many creative and committed activists and intellectuals began to push for solutions beyond the status quo both inside and outside of government. British Communists were able to explain their vision of the future in a way that seemed to address the nation's most pressing problems and connect them to specific solutions that for many seemed quite plausible. Although some of the logistics for carrying out their ideals may have been problematic, they were not so problematic that they shook the confidence of even the cautious sympathizer. One might even say that British Communists and their fellow travelers went too far in attempting supplant utopia with realism. Thus perhaps they should have emphasized more the visionary political elements of their program for radical democracy (which contemporary Britain still lacks) rather than the concrete technical elements of their program (for example, the large-scale construction projects and plans to update the health system), which the postwar Labour Party easily coopted.

Toward the end of the 1930s, the communist ideal became not simply a vision of salvation from a current economic crisis, but began to root itself in issues of how creative intelligences, be they artistic or scientific, overcome the problems of social organization in a modern class-divided civilization. Although the fortunes of the communist movement have waxed and waned over the decades, this vision, if well articulated and understood, might



again inspire a new generation looking for a more progressive way of life. It is a tribute to the legacy of British intellectuals like J. D. Bernal that their vision of a postcapitalist future continues to be worthy of our consideration and review.

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#### NOTES

1. Chapters 4–7 of Parenti's *Blackshirts and Reds* (1997) provides an informative and balanced comparison of the limitations of the former Communist regimes with the outright failures of their "free market" successors to provide even minimum stability and a decent lifestyle for the majority of the population. Also of interest has been the recent work of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek. As one fully enmeshed in the dissident culture of Eastern Europe, he argues that too many in that culture have been deluded by the ideology of liberal democracy. Žižek has also called for a rigorous reaffirmation of the differences between the Leninist revolutionary project and Stalinist practices (2001).

2. A fine study of this militancy is Challinor's *Origins of British Bolshevism* (1977).

3. Although a number of factors contributed to these failures, it is interesting to note that Labour's ascendancy to power was profoundly hampered by Britain's archaic electoral system, which actually gave the working class less representation than their numbers warranted. This was accomplished through a combination of poll taxes and the use of a weighted vote. These practices were not abolished until 1945, the year of Labour's first landslide electoral victory (for details, see Thorpe 1997).

4. In pre-welfare-state Britain, the only acceptable approach to the problems of unemployment and depression was a punitive and means-tested form of poor-relief. Rooted in Benthamite premises, this "relief" was based on desperation rather than need (Jupp 1982, 126).

5. Though important, these figures do not reflect the CPGB's greatest achievements in either membership or electoral strength. Its high point in membership was 1942, when it stood at about 60,000. Its electoral high point was 1945, with 200 Communists on local councils and two members in Parliament (Thompson 1992, 73–74).

6. I have already written what I consider to be a refutation of the claim that British Marxism in the 1930s and 40s lacked intellectual significance. See my *Anglo-Marxists* (1997).

7. Worley cites my own work and that of Andrew Croft as the best places to begin for those interested in the study of Marxist theory in Britain. See Croft 1990 and 1998.

8. This point might be better understood when one remembers that Marx

and Engels referred to what we call “liberal democracy” as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. This was because under it, all the mechanisms of state power are under the control of the capitalist class. Under a workers’ dictatorship, these mechanisms would be put into the hands of the majority for the first time in history.

9. This argument would later be developed with much greater sophistication by the Canadian political theorist C. B. Macpherson. See his *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (1962) and *The Real World of Democracy* (1965).

10. Ironically, Spender later abandoned communism on virtually the same grounds. See his essay in *The God That Failed* (1949).

11. Kiernan also states that like the Romantics at the time of the French Revolution, the literary Left proved to be more unstable than any other group of left intellectuals, and in the end “a flash in the pan” (187).

12. An excellent overview of the controversy surrounding Caudwell and his work is E. P. Thompson’s essay “Christopher Caudwell” in *Making History* (1994).

13. On the origins and impact of Bernalism, see chapter 6 of Roberts 1997.

14. Although Bernal suspended active membership in the CPGB in the early 1930s, he remained closely associated with the movement for the rest of his life.

15. In a perceptive essay on the connection between Bernal’s views of science and politics, Hillary and Steven Rose argue that Bernal’s views contrast dramatically with those of today’s radical scientists, in which the fear of the effects of science on the environment and the genetic future of the species predominate (1999, 137).

16. Ironically, it was only the left-Labourites, led by Sir Stafford Cripps and Aneurin Bevan, who faced the wrath of their Party, both being expelled until the period of the Second World War and the United Front (Thorpe 1997, 94, 99).

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## Commentary

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### Refining the Concepts of Motion and Rest

Irving Adler

I was pleased to read in *Nature, Society, and Thought*, volume 13, no. 3, Erwin Marquit's essay "Tasks of Materialist Dialectics." I agree wholeheartedly with his rejection of the idea that dialectical contradiction implies logical contradiction, and his appeal for "further elaboration of the contradictory character of dialectical contradictions." His essay prompts me to make some remarks based on some notes that have been sitting in my files unpublished for years.

In his Paradox of the Flight of the Arrow, Zeno of Elea sought to show that motion is impossible by asserting that at any particular moment of its flight the arrow is in only one place, and to be in one place is to be at rest. Engels, who believed in the reality of motion and change, instead of refuting Zeno's argument, reformulated it as follows: "Motion itself is a contradiction: even simple mechanical change of position can only come about through a body being at one and the same moment of time both in one place and in another place, being in one and the same place and also not in it."

Both arguments are wrong and are based on a failure to define precisely what is meant by *motion* and *rest*. Marquit tries to refute

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Zeno and Engels by citing the Heisenberg Principle of Uncertainty. This is neither necessary nor relevant. We observe first that there is no absolute motion or absolute rest. Motion and rest are always with respect to a particular frame of reference. What is required to begin with is the distinction between an instant of time and an interval of time. *Motion* is defined first for an interval. An object has moved during an interval of time  $(t_1, t_2)$  if its position at the instant  $t_2$  is different from its position at the instant  $t_1$ . To define what is meant by *moving* during an interval, we must take into account that while moving it may return to its original position. This is done as follows: We say the object was moving throughout the interval  $(t_1, t_2)$  if there is a small length of time  $\varepsilon$  such that in every subinterval of duration less than  $\varepsilon$  the object has moved during that subinterval. To extend the concept of *moving* from *moving during an interval* to *moving at an instant*, we first define the concept of speed. The *average speed* of an object that moves during an interval  $(t_1, t_2)$  is the total distance it moves divided by  $t_2 - t_1$ . The (instantaneous) speed of the object at the instant  $t_j$  is the limit approached by this average speed as  $t_2$  approaches  $t_1$ . An object is moving at an instant if its speed at that instant is greater than zero. An object is at rest during an interval if the interval contains no subinterval during which it is moving. An object is at rest at an instant if its speed at that instant is zero. With the concepts *moving* and *rest* made precise in this way, there is no contradiction in the fact of motion, and Zeno's paradox is refuted.

*North Bennington, Vermont*

## ***NST* Conference and Study Tour in Vietnam: “The Global Economy and the National State”**

In cooperation with the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, *Nature, Society, and Thought* sponsored a Conference and Study Tour in Vietnam with arrival in Hanoi in the north on 5 January 2003 and concluding in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in the south on 17 January. Presented here are a report on the study tour and a selection of papers from the two-day conference in Hanoi, 9–10 January 2003. Additional papers from the conference will be included in *Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 15, no. 3

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Vietnam



# The *NST* Study Tour in Vietnam

Erwin Marquit

Following two separate but overlapping itineraries arranged by the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy and Peace Tours—a travel organization operated by the Vietnam Women’s Union—thirty-six persons from the United States, two from Ireland, and one each from Canada, Greece, and Mexico participated in the study tour, the focus of which was the consequences of globalization for the economic development of Vietnam. Two papers of particular interest by persons who were unable to attend, one from the United States and the other from Germany, were also read at the conference.

It will be useful for this report to provide first some background information on Vietnam.

## *Historical background*

Vietnam today has a population of eighty-one million. It extends 1025 miles (1650 km) from its border with China on the north to the South China Sea on the south, with a coastline of 2150 miles (3444 km) running from its border with China on the Gulf of Tonkin in the northeast to its border with Cambodia in the Gulf of Thailand in the southwest. In 2002, rural families constituted 77% of the population, 70% of whom were engaged in agriculture.

Under the combined name Indochina, the countries of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were colonized by France in the second half of the nineteenth century. After the fall of France

during World War II, Indochina was occupied by Japan, initially under the administration of the Vichy government, and used as a base for Japan's military expansion into Southeast Asia. In 1941, a broad national alliance—League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh)—was formed on the initiative of the Communist Party of Vietnam led by Ho Chi Minh, who had been the principal founder of the Party in 1930. The Viet Minh conducted guerrilla warfare against the Japanese forces. Immediately after the Japanese surrender to the Allies in August 1945, the Viet Minh proclaimed the independence of Vietnam as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

The British Army, which had occupied the southern region of Vietnam at the end of the war, restored French control to that region. The French thereupon negotiated an accord in March 1946 with the Viet Minh for gradual peaceful transition to an independent state within the French Union. This accord was accepted by the Viet Minh in the expectation that it would lead to a united, self-governing Vietnam.

In November 1946, the French government, determined to restore full colonial status to Vietnam, treacherously attacked the Viet Minh, killing 6000 civilians in a bombardment of the port of Haiphong. The national-liberation war then began with a Viet Minh counterattack against the French forces that had returned to Hanoi under the March accord.

With the French defeat in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam was divided in two, with the reestablishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and a neocolonial regime in the south. The United States, which had provided over 80% of the French war costs by 1954, replaced France as the real power behind the South Vietnam regime. According to the 1954 armistice, the division was to be only temporary, pending an election to be held throughout Vietnam in 1956. The U.S. neocolonial rulers, however, did not allow the election to take place, knowing full well that the Viet Minh would be the victors. A National Liberation Front was then formed to resume the guerrilla war in the southern part of the country with the support of the north.

In 1964, as the guerrilla forces gained strength, President

Lyndon Johnson, claiming that North Vietnam had attacked U.S. naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin, asked the Congress to authorize military action against North Vietnam. It was subsequently acknowledged that it was the United States that had attacked Vietnam. The dispatch of land troops to Vietnam in 1965 heralded the massive U.S. involvement.

With mounting battlefield losses and a mushrooming antiwar movement at home, the United States withdrew ground forces from Vietnam in 1973. The puppet regime it left behind collapsed in 1975 with the fall of Saigon. Vietnam was finally reunified in 1976 and adopted the name, *Socialist Republic of Vietnam*.

### ***The model for a socialist planned economy***

Embarking upon the path of socialist transformation, Vietnam quickly moved to the development of a socialist planned economy guided by the experiences of the state systems in the USSR and the European socialist countries. According to this theory of social development, the process of transition to a communist society is seen to consist of two stages. The first goal is always the completion of the socialist stage, whereby all means of production of goods and services are provided by the state or cooperative sectors. (No country has actually completed this first stage.) The second stage ends with the transformation of cooperative property into property of the people as a whole, a level of development of the productive capacity that would allow the replacement of distribution based on the quantity and quality of labor by consumption as needed.

During the first stage, outside of agriculture, the basic form of ownership of the means of production of goods and services is state ownership (as property of the people as a whole). A secondary form of ownership of productive resources is cooperative property. In practice, private-sector hiring of wage labor was either completely prohibited in some countries or allowed but severely limited in others. Members of the independent professions, such as artisans, lawyers, and artists, were encouraged to form cooperatives.

Retail trade and services were generally carried out through state enterprises or cooperatives, although in some countries

private family-owned shops were permitted to supplement the state and cooperative sectors.

The forms of property ownership in agriculture actually adopted in this first stage in the European socialist countries were varied. In the Soviet Union, where all land was nationalized, the right to use of the land was split roughly equally between state farms and cooperative (collective) farms. In other socialist countries, almost all agricultural activity was carried out by cooperative farms. In Poland, however, small privately owned family farms provided the bulk of agricultural production.

The theory for the political process under which these economic practices were adopted and put in practice has the following principal features:

1. The leading political role is played by a Marxist-Leninist Party in a state structure based on a one-party or a noncompeting multiparty parliamentary system.

2. The interests of various social strata in the population are represented through participation of members of these various strata in the so-called mass organizations—trade unions, peasant organizations, women’s organizations, cultural workers associations, sports federations, etc.

3. Legislative bodies (national, regional, local) are based on a combination of representatives of the political parties and representatives of the mass organizations.

4. A five-year economic plan drawn up by a state planning commission is adopted at a Communist Party congress and then put out for several months of national public discussion, after which it is amended and adopted as law by parliament.

3. Planning policy is guided by goals of full employment, free health care, free education, pensions for the elderly and disabled, and easy access to culture and recreation.

4. The culture and rights of national minorities are respected in the spirit of self-determination.

### ***Implementation of the socialist planned economy model in Vietnam, 1976–1986***

The first constitution adopted in Vietnam after unification, the constitution of 1980, described the economic system as follows:

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is advancing directly from a society in which small-scale production predominates to socialism, bypassing the stage of capitalist development, to build a society with a modern industrial-agricultural economy, advanced culture, science and technology, a strong defense potential and a civilized and happy life. (Article 15)

The central task throughout the period of transition to socialism is the socialist industrialization of the country. (Article 16)

The State conducts a revolution in the relations of production, guides, utilizes and transforms the nonsocialist sector of the economy, institutes and consolidates the system of socialist ownership of the means of production, with the aim of building a national economy with two essential components—the State sector under the ownership of the entire people, and the collective economic sector under the collective ownership of the working people.

The State sector plays the leading role in the national economy, and is given priority for development. (Article 18)

The land, forests, rivers and lakes, mines, natural resources in the ground, in the territorial waters and on the continental shelf, industrial, agricultural, forestry, fishery and State commercial undertakings; banks and insurance organizations; public utilities, the systems of transport by rail, road, river, sea and air; dykes and important irrigation works, defense installations; the systems of information and communications, radio, television and cinema; institutes of scientific and technological research, and cultural and social establishments and other property defined by the law as belonging to the State are under the ownership of the entire people. (Article 19)

Land is put under State management according to general plans, to ensure its rational and economical use.

Collectives and individuals who have the use of land are allowed to continue to do so and to enjoy the fruits of their labor according to the law.

Collectives and individuals who use the land have the responsibility to protect, replenish and exploit it in keeping with State policies and plans.

Land reserved for agriculture and forestry may not be used for other purposes unless authorized by competent State organs. (Article 20)

Toward the end of the 1970s, it became increasingly clear in Vietnam that the cooperative form of agriculture, in the absence of a high level of mechanization, was frequently proving to yield less output than family farming. The results of the labor intensity arising from the cultural traditions of the peasant nuclear family generally proved to be greater than that associated with the collective organization of agricultural labor. The decision whether to farm collectively or individually was thereupon left to the individual families. The same was also observed in China, and similar steps were taken there, resulting in a corresponding shift in China from cooperative farming to family farming.

In 1986, another fundamental change in economic policy was made after it became clear that the industrial output targets of the five-year plans were not being achieved. Recognition of the problem came on the background of similar problems in the USSR and European socialist countries, signs of which had begun to appear in the mid-1970s.

These problems foreshadowed what would turn out to be in the USSR and the European socialist countries a system-wide noncyclical economic crisis of the socialist planned economy. The characteristics of this crisis were quite unlike the cyclical crises of capitalist economies.

The principal economic consequence of this crisis was the increase in the gap in technological development between the socialist and capitalist economies so that the socialist economies were increasingly at a disadvantage in competing with the capitalist countries in international trade. The growth of this technological gap also meant that the gap between the standard of living

in the socialist countries and the developed capitalist countries widened rather than narrowed. These developments subsequently turned out to be ideologically disastrous for the political stability of these socialist countries, since their populations had been raised with the conviction that the socialist planned economy of the East would prove to be economically superior to the capitalist economies of the West. The signs of the oncoming crisis were manifested most strongly in the USSR, where, by the beginning of the 1980s, the population was increasingly plagued by shortages of meat and basic consumer goods and services. I first noted the problem in the late seventies when comparing infant mortality rates; I found that the infant mortality rate in the USSR had nearly stopped declining, whereupon it vanished from subsequent Soviet statistical yearbooks.

A major factor contributing to the economic difficulties was the deliberate effort by the U.S. government to strain the economies of the socialist countries by escalating the arms race in order to force the socialist countries to divert to their military research and production much of the resources needed for economic development. This tactic did in fact place a considerable strain on the Soviet economy, which bore the principal burden for the defense of the socialist community of nations. Another factor was the embargo on the commercial transfer to socialist countries of highly developed technologies by the United States and its military and political allies.

Most important, however, was the absence of an adequately developed political-economic theory of commodity relations in a socialist planned economy. Such a theory is needed as the basis for efficient economic management of the productive resources. For example, no adequate theory of price formation for exchanges of products between two enterprises in the absence of a competitive market had been developed.

Why is this important? According to Marxist political economy, the exchange value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labor time embodied in its production. Marx also pointed out that, in a competitive capitalist economy, the rate of profit will, on the average, have the same level across all branches of industry. In order for this to occur, the price of goods

in a labor-intensive industry will be less than the value added in production, while the price of goods in a machine-intensive industry will be greater than the value added in production. If this were not the case and the labor-intensive branch were to have a higher profit—exploitation of labor being the ultimate source of capitalist profit—then the market forces at work would produce a shift of capital from the machine-intensive branches to the more profitable labor-intensive branch. This shift would create an oversupply of production that would eventually force the price down and consequently bring the rate of profit back in line. It is on the background of the interplay of such market forces that the drive for technological innovation occurs. In the absence of comparable market forces, a socialist planned economy in competition with a capitalist economy on the world market has to have a theoretical basis for consciously relating prices to exchange values in order to reproduce a comparable stimulus for technological innovation. Despite attempts by Soviet economists to do so, for example, by calculating cost of production in units of socially necessary labor time, this theoretical task was never completed. Not only was the seriousness of the problem not recognized by the political leadership of the socialist countries, but the material knowledge base for applying the results of such a theory, had it been developed, did not yet exist. In this situation, the provisions for technological development in the five-year plans through the adoption of targets for economic efficiency of individual enterprises or branches of industry amounted merely to *desire*, owing to the inability to coordinate such targets with developments in the world market and the lack of serious economic consequences to an enterprise for a failure to reach its productivity targets. In a market economy, on the other hand, technological advance is a matter of life and death for the enterprise.

Planning was being attempted in the socialist countries, therefore, with a totally inadequate technological base. Adequate exchange of information proved impossible, as did control of its reliability in order that the central planning authority could project correctly the productive capacity of every production unit in the economy. Instead of scientific socialism, one was dealing with a kind of utopian socialism, a socialism that came from abstract



thinking and desire, in the absence of adequate theoretical understanding, and without the material conditions for sustaining the planned economy.

***Vietnam's socialist market economy***

The principal features of the present economic system of Vietnam are set forth in its constitution adopted in 1990.

The State promotes a multicomponent commodity economy functioning in accordance with market mechanisms under the management of the State and following a socialist orientation. The multicomponent economic structure with various forms of organization of production and trading is based on a system of ownership by the entire people, by collectives, and by private individuals, of which ownership by the entire people and by collectives constitutes the foundation. (Article 15)

The aim of the State's economic policy is to make the people rich and the country strong, satisfy to an ever greater extent the people's material and spiritual needs by releasing all productive potential, developing all latent possibilities of all components of the economy—the state sector, the collective sector, the private individual sector, the private capitalist sector, and the state capitalist sector in various forms—pushing on with the construction of material and technical bases, broadening economic, scientific, technical cooperation and expanding intercourse with world markets. (Article 16)

The land, forests, rivers and lakes, water supplies, wealth lying underground or coming from the sea, the continental shelf and the air, the funds and property invested by the state in enterprises and works in all branches and fields—the economy, culture, society, science, technology, external relations, national defense, security—and all other property determined by law as belonging to the State, come under ownership by the entire people. (Article 17)

The State manages all the land in accordance with the plan and the law, and guarantees that its use shall conform

to the set objectives and yield effective results.

The State shall entrust land to organizations and private individuals for stable and lasting use.

These organizations and individuals are responsible for the protection, enrichment, rational exploitation and economical use of the land; they may transfer the right to use the land entrusted to them by the State, as determined by law. (Article 18)

The State sector shall be consolidated and developed, especially in key branches and areas, and play the leading role in the national economy.

The State-run enterprises enjoy autonomy in production and trading and shall guarantee that production and trading are to yield effective results. (Article 19)

The collective sector growing out of the pooling by citizens of funds and efforts for cooperative production and trading shall be organized in various forms following the principles of free consent, democracy, and mutual benefit.

The State shall create favorable conditions for consolidating and broadening the cooperatives and allowing them to operate efficiently. (Article 20)

In the private individual and private capitalist sectors people can adopt their own ways of organizing production and trading; they can set up enterprises of unrestricted scope in fields of activity which are beneficial to the country and the people.

Encouragement shall be given to the development of the family economy. (Article 21)

The State encourages foreign organizations and individuals to invest funds and technologies in Vietnam in conformity with Vietnamese law and international law and usage; it guarantees the right to lawful ownership of funds, property and other interests by foreign organizations and individuals. Enterprises with foreign investments shall not be nationalized. . . . (Article 25)

The State manages the national economy by means of

laws, plans and policies; it makes a division of responsibilities and devolves authority to various departments and levels of the administration; the interests of individuals and collectives are brought into harmony with those of the State. (Article 26)

State organs, units of the armed forces, economic and social bodies, and all individuals must abide by State regulations on the rational use of natural wealth and on environmental protection.

All acts likely to bring about exhaustion of natural wealth and to cause damage to the environment are strictly forbidden. (Article 29)

Under the socialist market economy, the state-owned enterprises function as independent enterprises, providing income to the state through taxation. They can compete with each other as well as with privately owned enterprises. Through its regulations, laws, and economic policies, the government guides and stimulates the direction of economic development along the lines of the five-year plans for national economic development, but no longer determines the activity of individual enterprises, whether they be privately or state owned.

After thirty years of war, its countryside devastated by carpet bombing by U.S planes and the effects of Agent Orange, Vietnam is still one of the poorest countries in the world, even after more than doubling its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since 1990. It has maintained an annual GDP growth rate of over 7% a year (including an average 13.5% annual increase in industrial production) between 1995 and 2000. Nevertheless, Vietnam's present GDP is only \$435 per person—that is, only \$1.27 a day—still among the lowest in the world (estimate of General Statistics Office of Vietnam for 2003, cited by Vietnam Trade Office 2003).

The shift to a market economy entailed many negative effects. Vietnamese officials acknowledge that gaps continue to widen in income and living standards between urban and rural areas, between mountainous and plains areas, among different population strata, and between rich and poor regions in the country.

Other socially negative developments associated with a market economy have developed. Addressing the members of our study tour, the deputy mayor of Ho Chi Minh City began: "Before I tell you about the good things, let me tell you about the bad ones. We have 12,000 drug addicts and 8,000 prostitutes in Ho Chi Minh City." Highlighting another problem, he added that Ho Chi Minh City has no sewerage-processing facilities, the sewerage being buried in land dumps.

Some socialist-oriented progressives visiting Vietnam, including some of those in our study tour, are disappointed with the turn to a market economy—the existence of unemployment, charges for social services that were formerly free, consumerism generated by the display of advertisements for brand-name products from North American, Japanese, and Western European firms, Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets, the presence of prostitution, and the visibility, especially around hotels, of wealth polarization. This is not what they expect to see in a socialist country.

To understand the complexities of the process of transition to socialism in Vietnam, one must remember that the term *socialism* is used in two contexts. In the strictly political-economic sense, a society can be said to have completed its transition to socialism when the productive resources of the country have been transformed into some combination of two socialized property forms: property of the people as a whole (state sector) and cooperatively owned property (cooperative sector). The term *socialism* is also used in a more general political way to characterize a state system that is being consciously guided toward the goal of full realization of socialist relations of production, in which case the characterization of a state system as *socialist* conveys a process that is underway, rather than a complete stage of economic transformation. In this sense, *socialism* cannot even be reduced to a superior type of welfare state, but must be viewed as a process in which the interests of the working people are paramount in the way the state guides the national development toward the goal of fully meeting the needs of the people, toward a society free of exploitation of the labor of one person by another. To maintain the socialist character of economic development in the case of a mixed economy, the working class must exercise its dominant position in the state to

ensure that the socialist sector remains economically dominant as production expands. Although a capitalist investor is only interested in production for profit, the type of foreign and domestic capitalist investment that Vietnam solicits and facilitates with its contractual and fiscal policies is guided solely by the country's needs. Here is how the Communist Party of Vietnam at its 9th Congress in 2000 formulated the character of the process unfolding in Vietnam:

The path forward of our country involves the transitional development to socialism bypassing the capitalist regime, i.e. bypassing the establishment of the dominating position of the capitalist production relations and superstructure, but acquiring and inheriting the achievements recorded by mankind under the capitalist regime, especially in science and technology, to develop rapidly the productive forces and shape a modern economy.

To build socialism bypassing the capitalist regime, thus engendering a qualitative change in all fields of society, is a very difficult and complicated undertaking that *inevitably requires a long period of transition with many transitional stages and forms of socio-economic organization. . . .*

In the period of transition, there are many forms of ownership of the means of production, many different economic sectors, social classes and strata, but the structures, characters and positions of the classes in our society have changed markedly along with the great socio-economic changes. The relationships among the social classes and strata are relations of cooperation and struggle among the population, characterized by a long-lasting unity and cooperation in national construction and defense under the Party's leadership. The interests of the working class are identical with those of the entire nation in a common goal: *national independence closely linked to socialism, a prosperous people, a forceful country, and an equitable, democratic and civilized society.* The main substance of class struggle at the present stage consists in successfully carrying out industrialization and modernization along the socialist line

and overcoming poverty and underdevelopment; achieving social equity, fighting oppression and injustice; preventing and surmounting negative and erroneous ideas and actions; foiling all destructive schemes and actions of hostile forces; defending national independence, and making ours a prosperous socialist country and a happy people.

The main driving force for national development lies in the great unity of the entire people on the basis of the alliance of workers with farmers and intellectuals, combining harmoniously the interests of the individual, the collective and the society, and bringing into play all potentials and resources of the various economic sectors and of society as a whole.

Our Party and State stand for the consistent and long-term exercise of the policy on developing a multisector commodity economy operating under the market mechanism, with State management and along the socialist line, in short *a socialist-oriented market economy*.

The socialist-oriented market economy is targeted at developing the productive forces and the economy, with a view to laying the material-technical foundations of socialism and improving the people's living conditions. The development of modern productive forces is to be linked with the shaping of new and corresponding production relations, in terms of ownership, management and distribution alike.

The socialist-oriented market economy involves many ownership forms and economic sectors, in which the State economic sector assumes the leading role; and the State economic sector together with the collective economic sector constitute an ever more solid basis.

*Public ownership of the key means of production* is the outcome of a developed economy with highly socialized modern productive forces; it is to be established gradually and will hold absolute superiority once socialism has been basically built. The building of such a system involves a long process of socio-economic development through many steps and forms, from lower to higher. From practical

realities, probes and experiments are to be conducted to form public ownership in particular and the new production relations in general with assured steps. The fundamental criteria for evaluating performance in the formation of socialist-oriented production relations reside in the development of productive forces, improvement of the people's life, and achievement of social equity.

The socialist-oriented market economy is placed under State management. Ours is a socialist State; it manages the economy by means of laws, strategies, schemes, plans and policies; it utilizes the market mechanism and applies economic forms and managerial methods of the market economy to activate production and release productive forces, promoting the positive aspects of the market mechanism while limiting and overcoming its negative aspects, and protecting the interests of the working people and the population as a whole.

The socialist-oriented market economy effects distribution mainly according to labor outcome and economic efficiency, coupled with distribution according to contributions in capital and other resources to production and business, and through social welfare.

Economic growth should be closely associated with assured social progress and equity right in each development step.

Economic growth should go along with cultural and educational development, and shaping of the Vietnamese culture which is advanced and profoundly imbued with national identity, to ensure for Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's Thoughts the leading role in the people's spiritual life, to raise the people's intellectual standards, to educate and train human beings, to foster and develop the country's human resources.

Our Party's policy to shape and develop a socialist-oriented market economy reflects its thinking and concept on the correspondence between the production relations and the character and standard of the productive forces. Such is the overall economic model of our country in the period of

transition to socialism. (Report of the Central Committee to the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2001)

In the period 2001–2010, the goal of economic development is to double the GDP again through an increase in industrial and agricultural production (CPRGS 2002). The experience with the socialist market economy put into practice in the 1990s showed this to be possible despite the occurrence of negative international developments such as the Asian financial crisis.

Vietnam's achievements in the social sphere have been quite impressive. It has attained the highest literacy rate of any poor country—over 96% for adults in the age group 15–35, higher than in many of the more developed countries. Primary education remains free and compulsory, and now fully embraces the school-age population. A goal has been set to provide all children with secondary school education by 2010.

Health care is no longer free, although state and private employers must provide health insurance to their employees. Families below the poverty line are issued insurance cards by the government. However some peasant families and self-employed have restricted access to health care because their incomes are too high to be entitled to free care, but not high enough to pay for all health services needed. The goal for the decade is to extend the coverage. An important indicator for health care is infant mortality rate, which was 44 per 1000 live births in 1994 and fell to 34 in 2000. It is to drop to 30 by 2005 and 25 by 2010 (Infant Mortality Rate 1998; CPRGS 2002). The infant mortality rate in comparably poor countries in 1998 was 68 (Vietnam Poverty Analysis 2002). It is interesting to note that the change from free medical care to the present mixed system of health did not adversely affect the health statistics. The infant mortality rate in the period 1979–1983 averaged 55 per 1000 live births (Infant Mortality Rate 1998).

A principal social need of Vietnam today is embraced in its officially designated plan entitled “Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction” (HEPR). Using international criteria for the general definition of poverty (covering food and other basic needs), 70% of the population in 1990 lived in poverty; of this number 90% were in rural areas. By the year 2000, the number



of people below the general poverty line was reduced to 32%. The goal for 2010 is to reduce this to 19%. The percentage of Vietnamese with a daily calorie intake below the “food-poverty line” (2100 cal per day for adults)—resulting in malnutrition that manifests itself in poor health and stunted growth—was 25% in 1993; by 1999, the percentage of the population living below the food-poverty line was reduced to 15%. The HEPR program goal for 2010 is to reduce this to 4% (CPRGS 2002).

To meet these targets, the goal of doubling the GDP in the period 2000–2010 envisages increasing output in industry and construction by 10–10.5% annually and in agriculture, forestry, and fishing by 4–4.5% annually. Vietnam will encourage foreign and domestic private investment in areas that will contribute to the achievement of these goals for economic development while ensuring the dominant position of the state and cooperative sectors in the economy.

In this decade, Vietnam will be stressing reduction of the gap between rural and urban areas by reforming, upgrading, and expanding the existing essential infrastructural facilities and developing new ones (small irrigation schemes, schools, commune health clinics, rural roads, electricity for lighting purposes, clean water, markets, commune cultural and postal offices, meeting rooms, etc.) to ensure that 80% of poor communes (local administrative areas) are provided with adequate essential infrastructure by 2005 and 100% by 2010. Slums and makeshift housing are to be eliminated by 2010. All cities and towns will be ensured of safe solid waste disposal. The incomes of the lowest 20% of the population are to be raised by 90% by 2010. This is particularly important because the many people with incomes barely above the poverty line are vulnerable to falling back into poverty in fluctuations of life situations under conditions of a market economy (CPRGS 2002).

The need for the development of urban infrastructure was evident to us immediately upon our arrival in Hanoi. The first daytime sight that struck us was the flood of motorbikes and bicycle traffic flowing through the streets with no gaps between them that would allow a pedestrian to cross, most intersections not having traffic lights. The technique for crossing was simply to

walk slowly across the street at a steady pace so that there would be no surprises for those mounted on the two-wheeled vehicles as they maneuvered to avoid hitting you. Most of these two-wheeled vehicles were Chinese-made motorbikes built on Japanese licenses. This was a rather sharp contrast with what I saw during my first visit to Hanoi two years before, when the traffic was overwhelmingly bicycles, rather than motorbikes. Public transportation, however, is still relatively sparse.

During our study tour we visited two foreign-owned industrial plants in or near Ho Chi Minh City. Both plants served the Vietnamese and export markets. One was the American Home ceramic tile factory built by U.S. investors. The working conditions were decent and the working pace was not intensive. A number of signs displayed in full view of the workers urged attention to labor safety. The other plant was a Singapore-based shoe manufacturer, Golden Star Saigon. The hall in which the shoes were assembled was spacious and the work pace was not rushed. As we walked down the production line, however, we could smell the fumes where workers were gluing the soles to the shoes. When we questioned the management about the fumes, which we assumed were somewhat toxic, they said that the plant had only been in operation for two months and that fans would be installed. In the meantime, the workers were being compensated for the fumes with extra pay. No trade union had yet been organized. It was obvious that the immediate advantage to the economy from an up-and-running industrial operation was an inducement for the labor-safety inspectors to close their eyes to the transgression in the expectation that it would be short-lasting. The absence of a trade union contributed, of course, to such tolerance.

When we visited the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labor in Hanoi earlier in the tour, we were told that special priority was being given to the organization of trade unions in the foreign and domestic capitalist firms, since the wages and working conditions now must be negotiated with the individual enterprises through collective bargaining agreements and not just left to random market forces. The role of workers in the state-owned enterprises is also changing because of the economic independence of each enterprise. Workers' committees and trade unions

not only deal with wages, working conditions, and social services, but are also involved in decisions concerning the economic management of the enterprise. Vietnamese trade unions generally have a better reputation for representing workers' interests than Chinese unions. In contrast to China, the Communist Party plant organizations in Vietnam are more likely to side with the workers than with management when disputes arise.

As part of its transition to a socialist market economy, Vietnam is also preparing for entry into the World Trade Organization. This too should not be viewed as a capitulation to capitalism. Governments of countries that are members of the World Trade Organization still retain great latitude in guiding their economic development. Cuba's long-term membership in the World Trade Organization has not weakened its own control over the direction of its economic development. Neither has U.S. membership in the WTO forced the U.S. government to end its embargo on trade with Cuba, which is contrary to the very essence of the WTO.

### ***Status of women in Vietnam***

Special attention in current planning is being paid to the welfare of women. Women's wages average only 72% of men's wages. Women's income in agriculture is 62% of men's. Because they do the majority of housework, women work an average of six to eight hours a day more than men (Vietnam Poverty Analysis 2002).

Members of our study tour were briefed by Vietnamese Women's Union on its activities. The Women's Union's principal concentration is on the education and acquisition of jobs skills by women as the main means of increasing their income and social status. Another point of concentration is the effort to develop the economic infrastructure that will increase the participation of women in the economy and decision-making bodies. The 2001–2010 development plans include such measures as the extension of the network of crèches and kindergartens, registration of all land-use documents in the names of both husbands and wives, increases in the percentage of women in elected government bodies as well as in the committees of the Communist Party. Many of these measures have been laid out in a governmental measure of

21 January 2002 entitled “National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam to 2010” (Decision No. 19/2002/QĐ-TTg). Women have been grossly underrepresented in the skilled labor force, among graduate students, and in middle and higher level government bodies, elected bodies, and Party committees. The National Strategy provides for increasing female postgraduates to 35% by 2010, and raising the percentage of women among skilled workers to 40%. All organizations and enterprises with workforces more than 30% female are to have some women in managerial positions by 2005. Women are to constitute at least 15% of the members of Party committees at the time of the next Party congress (currently about 10%), and 30% of the members of the National Assembly after the next elections (currently 27%) and 33% in the elections after that. Pregnancy-related mortality rates among women (110 per 100,000 births in 1990, 100 in 2000) are to be reduced to 80 per 100,000 births by 2005 and 70 by 2010. Access to health care will be guaranteed for 90% of women by 2005 and 95% by 2010 (CPRGS 2002; National Strategy 2002).

### *Ethnic minorities*

Vietnam has fifty-four ethnic groups. The major group is the Kinh, with 84% of the population. In statistical studies on questions such as education and poverty, data for the ethnic Chinese (Hoa), who constitute 2% of the population, are often combined with the Kinh because of the urban character of the Hoa population and consequent similarity with the large urban Kinh population. The remaining fifty-two ethnic groups form 14% of the population, largely concentrated in the northern and central highlands. Two official Vietnam Living Standards Surveys covering the years 1992–1993 and 1997–1998 gave the following results: The percentage of Kinh and Hoa peoples with incomes below the poverty line dropped from 53% to 31%. The percentage of the ethnic minorities with incomes below the poverty line dropped only from 86% to 75% (Baulch et al. 2002). The high rate of poverty among the minority peoples is attributed to their living in remote and culturally isolated areas, poorer quality land, very limited access to productive resources and services, underdeveloped infrastructure,

harsh natural conditions, high frequency of natural disasters, lower levels of education, reluctance to abandon traditional methods of production coupled with inadequate access to agricultural extension services (Baulch et al. 2002; CPRGS 2002).

The poverty-reduction strategy for the years 2001–2010 will attempt to accelerate the reduction of poverty among the minority peoples. Among the measures being taken is to increase expansion of agricultural extension services, job creation, improvement of infrastructure (roads, transportation, and communications, electrification), starting education earlier with a goal of 100% participation of children in kindergartens, exemption from taxation, prohibition of sale and purchase of land-use rights belonging to minority peoples, extension of the scope of written expression in minority languages, affirmative action to increase minority representation in education, employment, elected bodies, and staffing of governmental agencies, and, where they do not yet exist, establishment of cultural community centers and health-care staffs in every village, universalizing access to radio and television by every household by 2010 (CPRGS 2002).

### ***Conclusion***

The basic difference between a capitalist state and a state administering a socialist market economy lies in the class character of the state. To move toward its long-term goal of socialist transformation, Vietnam has introduced a controlled market economy that leads to increases in the income of the working people within the framework of its short-term plans of development. Socialist and capitalist market economies have entirely different goals. The U.S. Congress has never attempted to legislate an increase in income for the working class. Even its minimum-wage legislation, because of inflation, reflects a decrease in the real minimum wage over the last fifty years. The Communist Party of Vietnam is clear in its determination to maintain the dominance of the public sector in the economy in order to preserve the social basis for guiding the country to a developed socialist society. The forces behind the capitalist sector—domestic and foreign—are certain to try to reverse this dominance. The report of the Central

Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam to the Ninth Congress of the Party seems to indicate an awareness that the class struggle in Vietnam has not come to an end.

The Vietnamese scholars at our conference generally agreed that the introduction of a socialist market economy in Vietnam was a necessary measure on the path toward the goal of a developed socialist economy. Although some seemed oblivious to the class conflicts to be encountered along this path, most were aware of the need to be wary of the predatory nature of capitalist globalization. This ideological awareness bodes well for the future.

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**Opening Address, International Conference  
*The Global Economy and the National State*  
Hanoi, 9–10 January 2003**

**Professor Le Huu Nghia**

*Member, Central Committee, Communist Party of Vietnam; Vice-  
Standing-President, Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy*

First of all, let me on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy and the social scientists and civil servants of the Academy warmly welcome U.S. Marxists and progressive scientists to visit Vietnam and participate in the International Conference “The Global Economy and the National State” opening today at the Academy.

I also would like to welcome delegates from different Ministries, central organizations, and scientists inside and outside the Academy to join this conference.

After the August Revolution in 1945 to gain absolute national independence and unification, the Vietnamese people had to struggle strongly, bravely, and continuously for thirty years. In this victorious revolutionary cause, our people had received valuable support from Communists and progressive people throughout the world. Among members of the American delegation, many had been on the streets to join the movement against the Vietnam War. Please let me take this opportunity to extend our sincere thanks for this precious support you had dedicated to our people in the righteous cause of struggle.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world today is moving and developing in the tendency of globalization, mainly economic globalization. Economic globalization is the indispensable result of the development process and socialization of production forces, labor division, the advanced scientific and technological revolution, and the market economy. Globalization is having impact on every aspect of social life (politics, security, culture, society, etc.) and is becoming a vortex attracting countries and nations to participate in the implementation of regulations and general rules imposed by big capitalist countries and transnational corporations. The developed countries, especially the big Western ones, are the leading and driving force of, and main beneficiaries from, economic globalization.

Economic globalization is a complicated process, full of contradictions, and having duality; it is both positive and negative, it involves cooperation and struggle, it entails opportunities and challenges for many nations, but developing and underdeveloped ones have to face more challenges and suffer losses.

Today capitalism is making use of economic globalization to carry out the process of capitalist globalization. American imperialism desires to impose a new world order under its domination. Through globalization it forces countries to dependence on it; implements unilateral doctrines and hegemony in international relations; invades other countries; interferes in the internal affairs of other nations under the label of "protection of human rights," "antiterrorism," "antinuclear weapons," and so on.

The events of 11 September 2001 have marked a new period in the effort to reinforce the global transnational domination headed by the United States. Using the search for terrorists, the United States has strengthened qualitatively the military aspect of neoliberalism. Its efforts to destroy terrorism are so strong that it allows itself to assume the right to give any nation or state a beating without any explanation, thereby launching wars to invade key geoeconomic and geopolitical areas or important oil areas, the aims of which are to serve the interests of its national and transnational capitalist corporations. This becomes a military lever for capitalist economic globalization, creating a dangerous precedent



in the world, making the world more tense, complicated, and unpredictable.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 1986, the Vietnamese people have carried out a policy of renovation initiated and led by the Communist Party of Vietnam. The economy of Vietnam is developing quite rapidly; the GDP growth rate is high and has been relatively stable for many years; over the period 1990–1995, it was 8.3% a year. From 1996 up to the present, the average annual growth rate has been 7%. Instead of lacking food, Vietnam has become one of the major rice exporters in the world. There is much improvement in culture in our society. Education and training are enhanced in terms of scale, quality, and technical and material fundamentals. Scientific activities including social science, humanities, natural science, and technology are developing in close connection with socioeconomic development. Activities in cultural and art activities, publications and other forms of information distribution have contributed positively to improvement of knowledge and the quality of life and encourage people to take part actively in the cause of renovation, the aim of which is “a prosperous people, a strong country and an equitable, democratic, and civilized society” [Resolution of Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam].

During ten years of renovation, the living standard of the Vietnamese people improved remarkably; indispensable needs such as food, housing, health care, potable water, transportation, recreation, etc. are being satisfied much better. Our progress in hunger eradication and poverty reduction is widely recognized by the international community: the national poverty rate has dropped appreciably—from an average of 58.15% in 1992–1993, to 37.37% in 1997–1998; to 14.5% in 2000–2001. Our many achievements in the field of population–family planning have won the praise of the United Nations. Having suffered the consequences of war over many years, Vietnam has launched a wide, effective movement to take care of families that made sacrifices to the country and its revolutionary cause and to provide support for people living in areas destroyed by natural disaster.

Politics and society of Vietnam are stable; national defense

and security is maintained well. In the present situation of unpredictable complicated changes and the plotting of imperialism and hostile forces to bring about a “peaceful evolution,” the international community views Vietnam as a country of high stability and good security.

External relations of Vietnam are increasingly expanding; regional and international economic integration has brought good results. Vietnam has strengthened friendly and multisided cooperative relations with socialist countries, with neighbors, and countries with which it has had traditional associations. It is taking initiatives for participating in activities to promote cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the Asia-Europe Meeting; it has commercial relations with more than 140 countries, investment relations with nearly 70 countries and regional territories, attracting many investment resources from abroad. Today Vietnam very actively implements the Asian Free Trade Area accord and is negotiating to join the World Trade Organization. The Communist Party of Vietnam also ardently reinforces its solidarity and friendship with Workers and Communist parties, national-independence and progressive movements, and at the same time establishes relations with various ruling parties in the world. Foreign relations are being strengthened and enlarged.

Vietnam’s political system is being gradually consolidated. Much attention has been paid to reorganization and development of the Party. The Communist Party of Vietnam, established and guided by President Ho Chi Minh, has experienced more than seventy years of operation, taking primary responsibility for national development aiming at “a prosperous people, a strong country and an equitable, democratic, and civilized society.” Facing great opportunities and challenges before the nation, the Communist Party of Vietnam, equipped with a solid political will and appropriate guidelines, fully acknowledges its role—to lead the people in overcoming many difficulties in the cause of renovation, especially during a time of many complicated changes in the world. The Communist Party of Vietnam uses Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh ideology as the foundation of its ideology and as a lodestar. It pays much attention to its own reorganization and

enhancement in order to deserve to be the pioneer of the working class, loyal representative of the interest of the working class, workers, and the whole nation, meriting to be a solid component of the international Communist movement that combines genuine patriotism with true working-class internationalism, actively contributing to peace, national independence, democracy, and progress for the peoples of the world.

In the history of the country's path of renovation during the past sixteen years, Vietnam, with its underdeveloped economy, was blockaded by the enemy, having no external benefactors as the Soviet Union fell apart and Eastern socialist countries collapsed, and facing many unpredictable changes. However, under the intelligent leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, together with its correct guidelines that are faithful to the aim of national independence and socialism on the basis of Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh ideology, the cause of renovation of Vietnam has achieved great success, giving a clear proof of the persistence and development of its socialist character. As a result, Vietnam's status and power have been strengthened; its role and prestige on the international arena have been enhanced.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the context of economic globalization as influenced by capitalism, Vietnam, as is the case of many other developing countries, is now facing many difficult choices. It is obvious that, under these conditions, economic globalization does not bring equal opportunities to all nations and does not affect their interests evenly, the inequality and unfairness having appeared at the very starting point; the "playing grounds" are at different levels and "rules of the game" are imposed by the stronger. Nevertheless, if the developing countries have correct policies of integration and pursue the integration process appropriately, they can take advantage of the positive elements to develop themselves and reduce the risks and losses. However, it is worthwhile to note that while production relations are still based on the regime dominated by capitalist private possession, economic globalization deepens contradictions among states and nations; and as a result of the contradictions stemming from globalization, the social issues facing humanity become increasingly intense throughout the world.

The emerging issue in this conference is the relationship between economic globalization and national sovereignty, the national state, because strong development of economic globalization under the influence of capitalism objectively imposes some challenges for the sovereignty issue for many nations, especially the underdeveloped and developing ones. This is a hot issue concerning many countries and scientists all over the world.

The International Conference “The Global Economy and the National State” with scholars from the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy and American Marxists and progressives serves as a forum for social scientists to discuss matters of mutual concern about the relationship between the global economy and the national state during the current process of economic globalization. I would like to request that the conference touch upon the following four subtopics:

1. Economic globalization and the global economy.
2. Sociopolitical and cultural issues in the context of globalization.
3. The role of state in the course of globalization.
4. Marxism and socialism in the context of economic globalization.

The content of discussion proposed for the Conference is very abundant and valuable both theoretically and practically in the world’s current situation. I do believe that international and Vietnamese social scientists will clarify the issues mentioned above. This conference will lay a positive foundation for future cooperation between social scientists of the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy and American Marxists and progressives.

In that spirit, I am much honored to open this International Conference “The Global Economy and the National State.”

I would like to wish good health to all of you, wishing the conference great success.

Thank you very much.

# Possibilities for Trade-Union Resistance to Corporate Globalization

Leo Mayer

To subordinate the market and money to state institutions in the interest of the community is an illusion about to be ruthlessly dismantled. Distrust in the ruling social system's capability of solving problems in a manner compatible with the general welfare seems to be growing. Yet fear of unemployment and the experience of layoffs inhibit the rise of a militant consciousness. Everything depends upon how such experience is interpreted.

The experience of crisis inevitably promotes the trend to integrate the working classes into the dominant discourse of splendid isolationism. The modern right wing's canvassing in "the midst of society" for an affluent-society chauvinism thrives on people's fear of capitalist globalization. Acknowledging the priority of competitiveness, the trade unions merely try to keep neoliberal globalization socially compatible. The "alliances for jobs" formed in many enterprises, which only aggravate national competition at the expense of the employees, are a case in point.

This reveals a profound crisis in the working-class movement that set in long before 1990. The mid-70s spelled the end of a period of working-class struggle during which:

- The fragmentation of the working class increased.
- Regular working conditions were more and more replaced

by temporary contracts, subcontracted labor, enforced part-time work, work not declared for taxing, enforced self-employment, and contracted labor. The new conditions divided the workers into those belonging to the permanent staff and the growing number of the marginally employed.

- Changes in concepts of management and working organization eliminated such structures and work processes as enhanced solidarity and mutual assistance.
- A growing segment became poor despite being employed.
- Mass unemployment became a permanent feature of capitalism in its neoliberal phase.

Since the mid-70s, it has become evident that nationally regulated state monopoly capitalism is at an end. Internationalization of capital, unimpeded since the 90s, began to burst the boundaries of the nation-state. The crisis of the working-class movement reached its climax in the implosion of socialism in Eastern Europe. Capital ended the welfare-state compromise and embarked on a policy of confrontation with the working class. This undermined and devalued, both at the workplaces and in society at large, the traditional visions of trade-union empowerment as a social alternative.

Marxist social scientist Werner Seppmann writes:

On a global scope, a vacuum arose that enables capital to make use of the self-made crises and contradictions to stabilize its domination. By means of the radically changing international division of labor, capital is able to set the workers at each other's throats and thus impose its will upon them. People adapt blindly to these conditions because they have lost their sense of security. The global crisis of the capitalist economic and social system does not give rise to a new upswing of mass activity but rather to silent acceptance of the situation. (*Marxistische Blätter*, No. 2 [2002]: 43)

This crisis is so overwhelming because it goes hand in hand with a crisis in social alternatives. For years people have been

indoctrinated into believing that there is no alternative. The Left is faced with the following problems:

- How can we regain an awareness of common interests and solidarity in times of fragmentation ?
- Can what is diverging converge again?

Solidarity was always bound to certain conditions, even though an organic solidarity arose effortlessly from the collective organization of industrial labor in a situation of transparency. The conditions engendering solidarity have evidently become more complex. While the international development and production networks run by multinational enterprises have become sites of cooperation, this is geared to targets set by the enterprises, i.e., from outside. The gainfully employed are confronted with these, particularly in periods of crises, in the shape of competition for jobs and incomes. All the same, such international development and production networks reflect the contradictions bursting the boundaries of the nation-state. From a limited experience with development, production, and supply, industrial and white-collar workers are compelled to move toward direct global cooperation and competition that, however, remain inscrutable to them.

Modern means of communication indispensable to one's daily routine have only just begun to be used for communication purposes in one's own interests. They are potentially able to shape working people's relations to each other and promote their control of labor and working conditions. In local struggles, the individual problems, the development of the crisis, and the global trends need to be presented as connected facets of the struggle. In our day, the world is characterized by an overriding sense of common social experience shared in vast parts of the globe. Notwithstanding all particularities, we should stress this shared experience.

This sense of common experience is the result of the drive for maximum capital return and market capitalization, the joint aim of globally operating enterprises. They exploit the entire world, turning it unrestrictedly into their resourcing, trade, investment, and production site. Within an ocean of disaster, highly productive islands emerge. This also enables the global finance powers to

dictate their conditions to the nation-states. The IFC, World Bank, and WTO pursue totally identical aims worldwide, resulting in totally identical trends in respect to employment, unemployment, and precarious jobs, privatizing the public and social services, e.g., health, pensions, education, water, etc. Very likely, the present synchronized cycle of crises is no exception but reflects the new dynamics of crises affecting the entire world economy. The high degree of integration of the world economy and the rule of the multinationals lead to a global expansion of the crisis from which no country is exempt. However, global capitalism does not only bring the cyclic crises into line; it also promotes coordination of the struggle.

The present strikes in the building trade of metal workers and electric engineers, strikes in telecommunications and the postal services, strikes in retail trade, industrial strife in South Korea against layoffs and the sell-out of national industries, the general strike called by the trade unions in India against privatization, the general strike of Italian trade unionists against the privatization of public property, as well as in the general strike of the Italian trade unions against the abolition of social achievements, the movement of the landless in Brazil, the present popular struggle in Argentina, the Zapatista movement in Mexico, the meeting of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and the preparations for the European Social Forum in Florence—these are all evidence of a growing culture of resistance. They may even signal the beginning of a new round in the struggle of the working-class movement.

It is evident that for this new phase the working classes must consolidate themselves as an international class because international monopoly capital controls the world economy. This internationalization of capital has likewise internationalized the working classes. In the capitalist centers it is international as a result of labor migration, but above all, it is international due to the cooperation in global value-creating chains.

The employees of multinational enterprises belong to those segments of the working class most closely connected with modern capitalist production; they are the farthest advanced in the objective process of developing an international class character.



And they constitute those able to harm capitalist production most effectively. Yet despite the primary importance of this segment of the working class, any prospect of change and any chance of an alternative world will depend on its becoming part of a social movement expanding beyond its own area and integrating increasingly the precariously and illegally employed.

We need a type of trade union not restricting union activities to elementary problems of labor but incorporating political and economic problems, human rights, social justice, the defense of the poor and those discriminated against, and viewing these problems in an international context.

We need a type of trade union prepared to discuss the problem of property and the forms of property. This is a problem that seems legitimate when put by capital, yet is taboo in the world of labor. Yet the form property takes is a central issue in the strategy of the multinationals. What else is the appropriation of the public service; of the means of communication and the media; of water, intellectual property, the biological resources, pensions and health insurance but the property question as put by capital? Every time a firm is taken over by a multinational enterprise, the property issue is changed in the interest of the latter.

Any prospect of change requires priority to be given to the property issue. Social property rests upon two foundations: the social character of production and exchange (most evident in the world of multinational enterprises) and the idea that property must serve the community.

We have recently experienced the worldwide rise of a new movement against neoliberalism, capitalist globalization, and imperialist war. This global movement may stimulate the working-class movement. On the other hand, this movement needs the organizing power of the working-class movement to evolve a social and political alternative.

Seattle witnessed the emergence of a new relationship among the antiglobalization movement, the working-class movement, and the workers and farmers of various countries. A first step was taken toward turning relations usually restricted to trade exchange, and normally reflecting the international division of

labor, to relations among producers determined to take their own lives into their own hands and gain control over their labor and their working conditions. This allows a first glimpse of the forces likely to change market-regulated commodity relations into relations of a new order between wage earners and farmers in the different countries, the subjects of a true globalization and of the “*cultural association of humanity*” (Gramsci).

The “people of Seattle,” composed of very contradictory segments, have become a mighty adversary. This movement of movements, rallied at the World Social Forum, is about to merge the different claims into one great challenge. This challenge arises from the cooperation and the common struggle of all those fallen into dependence, existential insecurity, poverty, and discrimination as a result of global capitalism.

The slogan “The world is not a commodity” shows that the movement is one of resistance against capitalist globalization and its chief agent, the multinationals. It provides a platform for the joint struggle of working-class and antiglobalization movements.

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# Effect of Economic Globalization on Developing Countries

Nguyen Dang Thanh

In recent years, globalization—its essence being economic globalization—has been an objective reality, generating a new historical context and impressive widespread effects in all aspects of society, on each state, nation, and individual. Globalization, continually undergoing change, is a complex process, so that different and often contradictory views emerge about its nature. Some consider globalization an inevitable objective historical reality, the core of which is the ceaseless growth in scale and frequency of economic interactions under the influence of scientific and technological achievements. Others consider it to be a process, a political game arranged and led by a dominating force. Clearly, a “global game” will involve a “winning side” and a “losing side,” so that views of its essence will reflect a political choice. Globalization on its different levels—globalization in general and globalization in particular—will have specific effects in different fields; for example, economic globalization will have an effect on the nation-state and the world economic and political orders. Economic globalization and integration into the world economy also require intense study and discussion. I present here a general sketch of the effects of globalization on developing countries in the understanding that this task is of primary importance for considering the effects of economic globalization and integration on Vietnam. This sketch is only a coarse overview that must be

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examined in light of experience, and will merit correction and comprehensive, detailed elaboration.

### *A panoramic view of economic globalization*

When the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states that constituted one pole of a bipolar world, some changes in the world order took place. In the chaos of the post-Cold War world, the Western powers, with the United States in the lead, used their economic power to seize the opportunity to rearrange and reorganize the new and old political institutions from the pieces of the old order. First of all, they called for a “general system of values.” And that system was based on the “free market” and “democratization.” In reality, this process could not take place immediately; it needed a transition period.

In this game, the United States and the other Western powers were the leaders. Their management method was based mainly on multilateral agreements with responsibility shared among them. They chose the direction that economic globalization was to take. Globalization can now be described as a heterogeneous march in which the United States and the other major Western powers are the rich people sitting in elegant and expensive limousines (economic power) protected by their appropriately dressed guards (military power). The midlevel states sit on camels with large and small bags loosely hanging on their sides. They are watchful in the fear of being plundered. The poor, underdeveloped countries support each other while going on foot, striving to keep up. Falling behind are lame ones. The front of the march is splendid, attractive, a string of limousines and convoying motorcycles (heading toward the center of beautiful Paris). But the scene from above, as one looks away from the rich states approaching the center, is of long lines of ragged people slowly moving along, and in the distance the unlucky pitiful ones with torn shoes drag themselves behind.

A symbiotic relationship exists, however, between the rich in the center and hard laborers in the distance. These hard laborers are the ones who are carrying the highly prized but inedible

war booty (oil, metal ores, natural resources, and markets in developing countries) that the rich have their eyes on. In the meantime those trailing behind make an effort to follow obediently in the hope of receiving bread, and, if they are lucky, a little wine as well (economic aid, scientific investment, financial loans). The risk of disobedience is the cutting off of food or abandonment in the desert (economic blockade), or even slaughter by the guards (military attacks or coups).

This march, of course, involves many complex interconnected relationships and sharp contradictions.

### ***Direction of development of economic globalization***

Globalization is a major, ever-changing tendency of history. It is therefore not simple to forecast its progress and developmental direction. In general, up to now, people consider economic globalization to be a process toward integration and unification of separate state economic institutions into a single force, a single market on the global scale. In this market, capital, labor, technology, and natural resources circulate freely. Commodities may be produced at any site in the world and sold anywhere.

A deeper analysis reveals that this description is an answer to only part of the question about the nature of globalization—the form—while the core of the question—the content of the global market (including the labor market, capital market, technology, and market for selling commodities)—is still not answered. Therefore the answer to the question about where economic globalization is leading the nation-states and separate economic institutions is a very vague and abstract one—“the global market.” Now it is not clear at what moment a “global market” will come into being and whether transactions in this market are to be conducted at one price. If everything can be purchased in the global market, would people be able to eat pork in Muslim restaurants? Would a Vietnamese investor be able to put capital into a plant in the United States to compete with Compaq? And is a deal that exchanges ten tons of coffee for mobile phones equitable or not? How will disputes be resolved?

If economic globalization is a process leading to a global

market, it is still not clear how the global market will affect state sovereignty. In general, once again we see that economic globalization has favorable and unfavorable aspects. Some suggest that the goal of economic globalization should be defined. But this goal is still being debated and defies defining. Others view economic globalization as progress, a “historical reality” that is “objectively necessary,” so there is no goal, because it is in ceaseless development and change marked by contradictions and contrary sides. It is a process in the historical motion of society, economics, and politics—an endless sequence of successive situations.

Supporters of this latter view argue that the current trend in economic globalization is an economic inevitability and not a political choice. In their view, two clearly defined parallel processes are present in the whirlwind of current economic globalization. On the one hand, globalization of productive forces is an objective, inevitable, historical reality. Clearly, in this respect the current economic globalization has reached a level of having spread over the entire world. We cannot deny the fact that everywhere—in all offices, in every company, in all research institutes worldwide—reports and documents are almost always compiled by using the same tools, Microsoft Word; financial statistics are managed by Excel software; architectural projects are designed by 3D Studio; sociological accounts and statistics are conducted by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Every hospital of the world is equipped with x-ray and laser tools. All economic managers are trained and provided with similar knowledge to manage and regulate their companies.

In the field of production relations, however, economic globalization is a process full of contradictions. The United States and other Western developed countries find themselves in the best position. They dominate and control the globalization process and plan to have capitalist production relations achieve a global degree, that is, encompass the whole world. But this desire is generating sharp contradictions. The struggle against such machinations, against capitalist globalization, has also globalized. Thus, unlike the natural tendency toward globalization of the productive forces—as a historical process—globalization of capitalist

production relations is a process of deep political struggle with major clashes of political will and its own objective dynamics.

Therefore, in the current global economic space, the capitalist forces will certainly aim for their goal—a “black hole” into which economic globalization will suck the economies of every country. This “black hole” goal is the focus of the concentrated power of capitalism. Any state economy that has the misfortune of falling into it cannot escape from it, except in the case of a “big bang” that will lead the world once again into its initial chaotic state.

This disorderly march will lead economies of nation-states to the famous traditional site embodying capitalism—Wall Street.

Current economic globalization, in its essence, is a process leading all states—large and small economies, modern or backward, developed or developing—to be vast enterprises with their prices fixed by the stock market of Wall Street, USA. Upon entering this market, the enterprise (a state economy) will be divided into small parts and its shares will be held and exchanged by many owners—the external investors, *who will no longer be the people inside the enterprise*—and their price will be defined by the Dow Jones, NASDAQ, and S&P-500 indexes. Stock markets include principal enterprises and groups that are the economic backbones of the entire market. What happens to the shares of the powerful groups affects the shares of the smaller companies. Although small enterprises are independent to a certain degree, the state of their business and the decisions they make are always affected by the powerful groups. What is certain, however, is that the shares of the small cannot affect the shares of the large groups.

This is not an economic exaggeration; it is what is occurring inside the spiral of current economic globalization. Directly or indirectly, economic globalization is pulling in the peripheral regions by economic attraction and political pressure. In these peripheral regions, the public sector—forms of state ownership—is being narrowed. Privatization (in the form of equities and joint ventures) of all aspects of state economies is accelerating. Even government debts are being privatized. In Vietnam, Vietnamese beverages are being replaced by Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola; cosmetics by Proctor & Gamble and Unilever; Honda and Suzuki

have long invaded the market of motorbikes, and all these groups have shares on Wall Street. It is not difficult to imagine that all the important economic branches like airlines, electric power, gas, post and telecommunication, finance, ore mining, and construction will be converted into equity structures that will allow market ownership of shares by foreign groups (for example, as joint ventures uniting Vietnam Airlines with American Airlines, British Airway, and or Cathay Pacific, or VTV [Vietnam TV] joining CNN, BBC, and NHK, Petro Vietnam joining BP, Shell, and Castrol—with all these groups having shares on Wall Street). The price of our economic resources will then be completely determined on Wall Street. In that situation, Quang Ninh coal ores, oil in Nam Con Son, and the port of Cam Ranh will not belong to us alone. On Wall Street, it may belong to a group in India for one week and to northern European investors the next week, and then to George Soros. This is where economic globalization is leading. It goes without saying who will reap the benefits.

Therefore, the essence of current economic globalization is a process of attracting and pushing all state economies and nation-states into Wall Street. All formal aspects of this process, such as trade liberation, building of a global market, free circulation of capital, science, technology, and labor, are contained in this essence. They are arias in a Wall Street opera; all state economies become enterprises with a price. Once they have entered Wall Street (ownership is spread out), they cannot withdraw except through bankruptcy. Investors and the market will control their destiny. On Wall Street, however, the enterprises (state economies) may easily find capital, technology, natural resources, and markets. Under such favorable circumstances, if enterprises have a good strategy, business planning, and experienced managers, they may be well off. If they have no such conditions, they may be blocked, pursued by “sharks,” bought, merged, or made bankrupt. These facts apply even to large groups. These are daily occurrences on Wall Street.

Wall Street is the embodiment and crystallization of the centuries-old vitality of capitalism. All financial appropriations by the U.S. government for its huge military apparatus, costly



technological projects, oceanographic research projects, and exploration of the cosmos are fed by Wall Street's milk. Wall Street is the heart of capitalism. If Wall Street ceases working, capitalism will be without consciousness and die.

For the leading political forces that hold the controlling shares of the large groups in their hands, the protection of the existence and development of capitalism is the protection and development of Wall Street. Those leading the process of economic globalization attract (by persuasion and by force) more and more states and nations into Wall Street. Nations tied into Wall Street will voluntarily be obedient and loyal to the protection of Wall Street's vitality and, indirectly, to the protection of capitalism.

Capitalism, through economic globalization, can easily push state economies into this "black hole." This process proceeds with struggle in which the contradictions of globalized capitalism act more and more harshly on the world scale, and gives rise to a globalized struggle against capitalism to halt this process. At the higher level of economic globalization, the main contradiction of capitalism—between highly socialized forces of production and private ownership—is increasingly sharpening and is turning into a contradiction between internationalization, or even globalization, of productive forces and ownership by capitalist groups. On the other hand, economic globalization is an inevitability of the capitalist economy, a means for capitalism to settle another widespread internal contradiction, the contradiction between ceaseless expansion of social production and the limits of the forces of production. Economic globalization is a necessity for capitalism in order to offset the usual contradictions of capitalist production that occur within the space of a state economy by moving from the material space of the state to global space. Other than expansion to a "cosmological market," the global market may be the largest material space Jesus gave to capitalism. If the process of economic globalization is able to achieve this highest level, the contradiction between the limitless nature of capitalist production and limits of material space will bring about an explosive crisis.

There may be another sequence of events. First, contradictions created by the current globalization sharpen on the world

scale—contradictions between rich and poor countries; between center and periphery; among the central capitalist countries as they compete for markets; contradictions between capitalist hegemony and the forces of democracy, peace, and social progress. These contradictions will give rise to a global struggle against the deepening of globalization, against capitalist globalization spreading to the whole global space. Second, the political forces opposing the spread of capitalist globalization can grow to be powerful enough to settle conflicts, preventing capitalism from filling the entire global space. This too will lead to a final crisis of capitalism.

***How is this process unfolding?***

First of all, we must analyze the shape of a globalized economy. If a globalized economy is a structure, its shape certainly has to be formed in different stages. Only by successfully defining its structure can we have a basis for comparing and clarifying different stages of the current process of economic globalization.

One group of economists holds the opinion that economic globalization is a process leading to an economy of global non-territorial structure. This is an economy above and independent of state economies and state elements. It is regulated by a multilateral mechanism that includes intergovernmental and supra-governmental institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and OECD. In reality, it seems that only three centers have such characteristics (regulations) pointing toward a world economy, namely the United States, the European Union, and Japan. To solve this issue, this group of economists tends to view multilateralism as having been converted into a three-sided mechanism. In this view, the global economy has the form of a multistoried pyramid. At the bottom are institutions and elements of the state economy. In the middle are global, nonterritorial economic structures (regulated by the IMF, World Bank, WTO, OECD, etc.) independent of the state economy and defining what may be done and not done at the state level. The top is regulated by the three-sided mechanism (the United States, European Union, and Japan). The three-sided mechanism operates independently of the layers

below, issuing decisions, and imposing rules to be implemented by the IMF, WTO, World Bank, OECD, etc. This pyramid constitutes the so-called globalized economy. Seemingly, the globalized economy has a perfect pattern.

This pattern, however, is not completely perfect. Recent observations show that the three-sided mechanism is the peak of the pyramid. In fact, the peak is one of the centers, the one that is able to regulate the behavior of the other two centers and indirectly the whole system. This center is the United States, as illustrated by recent U.S. economic operations such as its imposition of import taxes on steel from the European Union and the increase in subsidies for agricultural products, or noneconomic decisions like withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol and withdrawal from the antiballistic missile agreement. This shows that Wall Street is at the top of the pyramid of the global economic structure, providing signals and issuing decisions regulating the system, which is consistent with the analysis made here on the end result of the process of globalization.

After the Cold War, when the opportunity existed to rearrange the world economic and political institutions into the pyramid, the Western powers, with the United States at the head, introduced a three-stage management pattern: (1) a stage characterized by persuasion involving multilateral concordance methods; (2) a stage of control involving limited consultation with allies; (3) a stage of imposition by Wall Street characterized by unilateral action and use of force.

#### *The stage of persuasion*

The Western powers used relatively moderate methods of agitation to persuade states and institutions to participate in globalization after the chaotic situation that followed the Cold War. This, in fact, was a stage of formation of the global nonterritorial economic structure (the middle of the pyramid) regulated by the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. The Western powers asserted that economic integration was an economic inevitability and not a political choice. Economic integration was the great opportunity of humanity to bring wealth to nation-states thanks to the

achievements of the informatics revolution and the new technology. Economic integration was a reasonable choice for promoting the comparative advantages of state economies in world economic relations. In the 1990s, the U.S. administration focused on multilateral agreements. Almost all decisions reflected the common will of these allies through the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and UN Security Council. The foreign policy was, in general, temperate (Kyoto protocol, comprehensive agreement on abandonment of nuclear tests).

*The stage of control*

After the Seattle conference, from November 1999 to 11 September 2001, economic globalization became irreversible. All states, willing or not, were involved in its spiral. The laws of globalization were clear. States could not, in fact, refuse to participate in globalization. Their single choice was how to participate in it. In other words, state economies were subjected to the nonterritorial economic structures of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. The political and economic balances shifted in favor of the United States. This was the stage during which the United States, the European Union, and Japan began to strengthen the three-sided controlling mechanism. The United States gradually shifted from the policy of reliance on multilateral agreements to limited alliance (consulting only with limited allies), expanding NATO, increasing its own military strength, withdrawing from the Kyoto protocol. By the end of this stage, the United States, the European Union, and Japan imposed the principles that were to govern the global nonterritorial economy under the regulation of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO and thereby indirectly control the global economy.

*The stage of imposition*

Immediately after 11 September, the phase of strengthening the role of Wall Street began. The United States acted unilaterally, including the use of violence, no longer regarding it as necessary to implement its policies through international consultations, although it continued to seek political support. Politically, the

events of 11 September gave the United States the opportunity to legalize the right of unilateral actions in its own interests. The first unilateral action was the declaration to divide the world in two (“either with us or against us”). George W. Bush used the policy against terrorism in order to divide the world into two parts—for or against terrorism. The United States attracted the major part of the world to its side. With its plan to attack Iraq and to overthrow President Saddam Hussein, the United States confirmed in reality the right of unilateral action without international agreement. Globalization had given rise to unfavorable circumstances, harming U.S. interests (terrorism, economic decline). The United States needed to confirm the right of unilateral action for the sake of U.S. profits, including the waging of an aggressive war as a solution to revive the economy. Any state that resists or deviates from Wall Street’s policies will be subject to U.S. military action. When Wall Street shows signs of wavering, the U.S. administration will intervene and use all means to restore Wall Street’s balance. The ultimate target of the leadership of the Democratic and Republican parties is to force states and political institutions under Wall Street’s control.

### ***Effects of economic globalization on developing economies***

In recent years, theorists and policy makers in developing countries, including our country, have become more aware of effects of globalization on state economies and the attraction to be drawn into it. There is a rule governing why states are attracted to globalization. In general, it involves widespread phenomena like economic integration, opening of markets, enhancement of investment environment for foreign capital, elimination of import tax barriers, promotion of the competitive ability of internal enterprises, satisfaction of ISO standards of the International Organization of Standards, protection of inventions, etc. Actually, the specific process by which states are attracted to globalization, especially the developing countries, is not clearly defined. Here, we strive to outline the general features of the general attraction to the orbit of economic globalization. Studies of economic developments in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, China, Russia,

Argentina, and Brazil demonstrate that all economies, closed or open, have been attracted into globalization in four stages:

1. Attracting direct foreign investments.
2. Eliminating import taxes and trade liberation.
3. Attracting indirect foreign investments.
4. Privatization of state-owned property.

At present, Vietnam is in the second stage. Sooner or later we must enter the third stage to carry out successfully industrialization and modernization. These stages are difficult and full of risk, as our state economy becomes integrated into the global economy. If we have the correct strategies and policies, invest in the proper directions, struggle against corruption, and keep our political will firm, we can achieve our goals, limit our losses, and go steadily forward in the storm of globalization. But deviations and failures may also appear in these stages. So in the forthcoming years, we must be careful and sensible as economic renovation deepens and the state economy confronts these stages.

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# An Assessment of the Global Economy

Wadi'h Halabi

## *One world economy*

For several centuries, there has effectively been only one world economy. Developments in one part of the world sooner or later have impacted even the most isolated regions, and their cumulative effect has been not only economic, but social and political.

Three developments stand out in the formation of the modern world economy. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, progress in navigation and ship design made ocean transport fast and reliable. In the nineteenth century, railroads crossed continents for the first time, transforming land transport, and by the end of that century, the spread of the telegraph made communications across continents and oceans almost instant.

Most commodities traded today are still transported by sea and on land, not by air. Surprisingly, speeds are not much greater than those prevailing one hundred years ago. Rising obstacles at borders, from customs and security to traffic jams, are increasing transport times. The *Financial Times* reported in November 2002 that commodities can take as long as three months to reach the United States from India, because of crowded ports and customs delays. That is actually longer than eight decades ago.

Advances in communications have been great, although telegraphs transmitted key information needed for trade at nearly

the same speed as satellites. Too much information can actually impede communication.

It can thus be argued that changes in the past century in commerce—specifically in the sale and transport of commodities—have been quantitative, not qualitative. By contrast, there have been qualitative advances in personal transport (air travel) and personal communications (telephone, television, the internet), and these have contributed to the rise of a single world society. Naturally these changes also have economic and political repercussions.

### *The most important economic development*

The most important development in the world economy in the last century was social, not technical. It was partly the result of World War I, the worst conflict the world had experienced. That development was the socialist revolution in Russia. Its historic significance lies in the foundations it set for social organization that is harmonious with advances in science and technology, with the environment, and with the fundamentally cooperative nature of humans.

Since 1917 and the subsequent socialist revolutions in China, Vietnam, Cuba, and other states, the world economy has consisted of two antagonistic social systems—one capitalist, the other created by socialist revolutions. It is not possible to assess scientifically all major developments (including the collapse of the Soviet Union, which is not our present topic), without taking into account the existence of two social systems within one world economy.

Different laws govern the two systems. The cyclical boom-and-bust laws of commodity production elaborated by Marx regulate capitalist economy. The noncyclical law of planning governs economies created by socialist revolutions. This is true even when those economies include commodity production, although the latter can endanger planning if not properly controlled.

The differences between the two systems are evident theoretically and empirically. The USSR went seventy years without a single boom-and-bust cycle; China has gone fifty years without a cycle. By contrast, the longest economic expansion in U.S. history lasted barely ten years. If one looks at the combined performance



of capitalist economies—including the Argentinas and Indonesias of the world along with the United States and Japan—the picture since 1973, and especially since 1990, is dominated by crises.

While governed by different laws, the two social systems operate and interact within a single world economy. The noncyclical economies created by socialist revolutions contributed to the relative stability in the world economy from World War II to the late 1980s. Since 1990—the most unstable period in capitalist economies since the 1930s—China and Vietnam’s growth has stood out in the entire world. But because they are part of a single global economy, China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea, and Cuba—the existing states formed by socialist revolutions—are all necessarily affected by the instability and conflicts from a deepening crisis of world capitalism.

### ***The deepening crisis of capitalism***

For an economy—any economy, capitalist or socialist—to develop without crisis, proportionality must be maintained. By proportionality, Marx meant a balance, in the last analysis, between production and the demand of both producers and consumers, as well as between the economy’s two great departments, producing the means of production and of consumption. This is one of Marx’s great lessons, developed in *Theories of Surplus Value*. It is elaborated in N. Bukharin’s *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital* and E. Preobrazhensky’s *Decline of Capitalism*.

The truth is, no economy has, and no economy ever will, achieve perfect proportionality, not even under communism. Changes in technology and tastes alone assure perpetual imbalances. But under working-class rule, and even more under socialism, a planned economy, balanced by control from below, permits the correction of disproportionalities before they balloon into crisis.

Not so under capitalism. The system is necessarily antagonistic to both genuine planning and control from below. Economic activity is unplanned and controlled from above, for the sole aim of realizing individual profit and no other purpose. The resulting imbalances appear to the capitalists as “overproduction”—more has been produced than they can sell at a profit. To them, nothing

else matters. Thus, “overproduction” of food or housing arises side by side with mass hunger and homelessness.

The accumulation of imbalances and the ensuing losses and bad debts lead to crisis. The *Communist Manifesto* refers to this crisis as “the epidemic of overproduction.” For the exploited and oppressed, it is an epidemic of unemployment and want. Based on Marx’s subsequent work, there is justification in calling this a “crisis of disproportionality.”

There is considerable and consistent evidence of a deepening capitalist crisis of disproportionality. Some 28% of capitalism’s global productive capacity has been idled or destroyed since 1990. About half of this has taken place in the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact states following their fall to capitalist rule beginning in 1989. The use of manufacturing capacity has dropped over 20% in Japan, and nearly 10% in Europe, in the same period. The use of industrial capacity in the United States, which now accounts for nearly one-third of world capitalist production, has declined 5% since 2000. Crises in countries such as Indonesia and Argentina, and wars in the Balkans, the Gulf, and elsewhere, account for much of the rest.

Rising bad debts and falling capitalist profits also reflect a crisis of disproportionality. The bad debts held by large Japanese banks exploded from some \$50 billion in 1990 to \$1,400 billion by the end of 1995. The Japanese government has spent at least \$3,000 billion since 1995 to support the banks, yet bad debts continue to accumulate. Similar, although smaller, rises in bad debts appeared after 1990 in banks in France, Brazil, and recently in Germany.

Disproportionality also brings falling profits or rising capitalist losses. In 2001, the profits of the *Fortune* “Global 500,” the largest monopolies in the world, fell 54% from 2000.

The business journal *Fortune* complained, “Every industry has overcapacity. It’s hard to find an exception. . . . The world has never seen anything quite like it: There are too many [computer] chip plants, too many steel mills, too many fishing boats, too many cargo ships; there are too many tires, trucks, airline seats, and cars, too much plastic, too much capital for making loans and writing insurance. . . . If overcapacity was bad before, it’s even worse now

as the economy slows. Making money in a business with global overcapacity is a megaproblem for most business people, and it is not going away, even after the economy turns back up” (19 February 2001). I believe that worldwide capitalist losses and bad debts may have equaled or exceeded profits in 2001, and possibly also in 2000, for the first time since the 1930s. This has profound historical implications.

Unemployment is a social expression of “overproduction.” By International Labour Organization count, the number of “unemployed and underemployed” worldwide rose from around 500–600 million in the mid-1980s, to 840 million in 1993, and one billion in 1996.

Probably two billion adults around the world would rush to seize a job paying four dollars per day. The surplus value that can be created by a worker in production is more than ten times that. Why do the capitalists not put those two billion people to work and collect huge profits as a result? Because there is already “too much” food, “too much” steel—that is, no profits are to be made from expanding production, despite the unmet human needs.

### ***Capitalist attempts to resolve the crisis***

The capitalist response to “overproduction” is above all to try to cheapen labor—through laying off workers, speeding up those still employed, and cutting wages directly or indirectly. Achieving this requires attacks on the organizations of the working class, including its parties and unions. Wages in capitalist countries, the United States included, have fallen since 1973; trade unions have taken terrible blows.

A second capitalist response to “overproduction” is to plunder, through speculation and other measures. With speculation, Marx explained, capitalists try to pocket existing wealth, instead of enriching themselves by investing in production. Since 1973, speculation has exploded. Over \$2,000 billion is now “invested” daily in speculation in currencies, “derivatives” and the like. This is “surplus” capital that cannot be profitably invested in production.

A third capitalist response is to try to idle or destroy “overcapacity” by any means necessary, war included. As I argued

earlier, some 28% of world productive capacity has been idled or destroyed since 1990.

Finally, the biggest capitalists respond to crises by acting to strengthen their position against all others, through monopolization, looting, destruction of weaker capitalists, and war. The U.S. share of world industrial production climbed in the past decade, from around 23% to around 28%. This was not so much because the United States grew rapidly in the 1990s, but because so much production was idled or destroyed in the rest of the world (for example, 31 wars were reported in 2001).

### ***Capitalist globalization***

The U.S.-inspired “globalization treaties” of the past decade, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and others, reflect capitalism’s deepening problems with “overproduction.” Naturally, China, Vietnam, Cuba, and the other states created by socialist revolutions do not want to be discriminated against in world trade. Taking protective measures against the antilabor measures of the WTO and similar treaties will require extraordinary efforts.

The conditions for “freedom of capital movement” in these treaties can lead to cheaper labor by facilitating competition among workers worldwide; and production can more easily be moved from country to country. The treaties also stimulate speculation, even though it can devastate trade, as demonstrated in the crisis that hit Thailand in July 1997.

Through royalties and other measures, “intellectual property” conditions in these treaties facilitate “unequal exchange,” whereby the strongest capitalists can sell commodities they monopolize above their value, while they purchase commodities from weaker parties below their value. “Intellectual property” can also be used to idle productive capacity, simply by denying access to technologies needed to produce competitively.

### ***The future***

New social systems do not emerge because of their inherent superiority—even when they are superior. Rather, they emerge

as a result of the internal contradictions and failures of the old system.

Evidence such as that summarized here points to a deepening failure of world capitalism. This is certain to pose immense challenges to the international working class, its states, Communist and Workers' Parties, trade unions, and all the oppressed.

An argument can be made that today is like 1913 or early 1914; that the period that opened in 1990 is a little like 1907–1923. How? There was a capitalist economic crisis in 1907. It was followed by attacks on workers and their organizations; in retrospect it impelled the imperialists into World War I.

But 1907 ultimately opened the path for the Russian Revolution, revolution (albeit short-lived) in Hungary in 1919, and near-revolution in Germany in 1923. Similar lines can be drawn from crisis in 1929 to the victories of revolutions in China and parts of Vietnam and Korea.

One need only think of the terrible destruction and suffering that has followed the fall of the Soviet Union and the capitalist crises of the past decade to realize that 1990 opened an extraordinary historical period.

Today's challenges require the most scientific assessment of global developments, economic and political, and their implications. This important conference can help with that assessment.

*Member, Economics Commission  
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# Marx and Engels on Economic Globalization

Chu Van Cap

During the two last decades, the concept *globalization* has been touched upon widely in many books, newspapers, seminars, and conferences. The vortex of globalization embraces many nations and regions, so that views about it are controversial because of the different modes of thought and understanding throughout the world, including Vietnam. Globalization is controversial because it is a multisided process, a major tendency in the movement of contemporary world history, every day, every hour affecting all spheres of life, activities, and relations among national states and the lives of human beings everywhere on the planet. Furthermore, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the world is facing global issues that no country can solve alone without multilateral cooperation.

Science and technology are making major leaps forward. The knowledge-based economy is increasingly playing a dominant role in the development of the productive forces. Bilateral and multilateral relations among countries are being deepened and widened in the fields of economy, culture, and environmental protection, crime prevention and apprehension, and coping with natural disasters and major epidemics. Transnational corporations continue to restructure to form huge economic corporations influencing many aspects of the world economy. The North-South

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gap between rich and poor in the world as well as within a nation is getting wider and wider.

Summarizing these different aspects, we find that globalization, first and mainly, is economic globalization, a development at a high level of internationalization of the world economy, a period of qualitative enhancement of internationalization. Globalization impacts social development at all levels: nation-state, region, and world; every aspect of economy, politics, and culture; social life and ecological environment. These impacts are both positive and negative, both for the present and the future.

Economic globalization embraces a number of factors:

—Commodity, services, capital, and human resources increasingly flow freely across national boundaries, circulating worldwide.

—Global economic resources are circulated among countries through a continuing growth of economic linkages. The development of these linkages is not isolated, but is affected by other components.

—The increase of global linkages narrows the gap among countries and creates a closer interdependence, first of all in terms of production and market, thanks to the commercial dynamics of the flow of capital and technology

—The national economies in the world are becoming more open and integrated with one another. The economic development of individual countries and changes in the worldwide economy increasingly influence and restrict one another.

Globalization is substantially economic globalization; therefore economics plays the leading role. Other aspects of globalization are the result of the impact of economic globalization, or are derived from economic globalization.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels had not yet used the term *economic globalization* in their writings. But 150 years ago, according to their thorough way of thinking, they analyzed profoundly the process of internationalization of capitalist production and its developmental tendency—economic globalization.



Internationalization is the tendency for the world economy to develop both broadly and on a high level. It is the process in which relationships among nations are institutionalized on the basis of general standards and systems accepted by the international community and implemented by treaties, agreements, and international practices. Internationalization is the initial step to “globalization” of several aspects of human society. For example, the regime of free trade is internationalized by the GATT agreement, which will be globalized in the future when practically all countries in the world participate in it.

Economic globalization—a new step of high-level economic internationalization—has a long history that originated with the development of the socialization of the forces of production in the international sphere.

In ancient societies, national states existed quite independently of one another, having little relationship with each other. But as the forces of production developed and commodity exchange increased, markets grew and gradually went beyond national boundaries. The establishment of international relationships marked the beginning of the process of internationalization.

The germ of economic globalization was formed before the capitalist period in trade among feudal countries. World trade took hold only after the geographical expansions made possible by the advances in naval technology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The tendency toward economic globalization became visible with the consequent increase in commercial exchange.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote:

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. . . .

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has, through its exploitation of the world market, given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. . . . It has drawn from

under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. . . .

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization.

Marx and Engels clearly pointed out the methodological basics of internationalization of production. First, the process of economic internationalization started very early. Initiatives in geographical expansion and transportation opened up the way to economic internationalization. The history of economic internationalization began some five hundred years ago with the European discovery of America, but this process really accelerated with the industrial revolution in Britain and the other principal capitalist countries. Second, economic internationalization is objectively indispensable as a requirement of production itself, especially for the development of the productive forces. The development of production both requires and creates favorable conditions for economic development with an international character. Third, the process of economic internationalization carries with it the production of material goods, giving rise to the subjective factors on the part of those controlling the strong economies.

Economic globalization is a natural tendency arising from the process of economic internationalization and is shaped by the objective indispensability of economic internationalization. In

reality, for some aspects of the world economy, internationalization is a basic premise for economic globalization. For example, trade and commerce are first internationalized, and then this process extends to other fields such as finance, production, and investment. A system of free trade is internationalized by signing an agreement like the GATT or the acceptance and participation of many countries in international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Such institutions and their rules will be globalized when most countries in the world participate in them. New factors accelerating the process of economic globalization are:

- Explosion of the scientific and technological revolution promoting the globalization process at great speed.
- Establishment of international production networks established with transnational cooperation playing an increasingly important role.
- International economic, financial, and commercial organizations exercising a vital role in promoting the globalization process.

In sum, as a result of the development of the productive forces and the high degree of socialization of production, globalization plays a very big role in promoting production, creating favorable conditions for exchange and expansion of cooperation among countries in many fields, especially in the economy.

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## LEFT CURVE No. 27

**Special Section: The Attack Against Amiri Baraka: Ewuare Osayande:** *The Backlash Against Amiri Baraka and the Repression of the Black Moral Vanguard*; **Adrienne Carey Hurley:** *Abrogating Laurels in an Upside-down World: The Anti-Baraka Campaign from New Jersey to Stanford*; **Theodore A. Harris** (collage); **lamont b. steptoe:** *Interviewing Amiri Baraka*. **Jeffrey Blankfort:** *The Israel Lobby and the Left: Uneasy Questions. Poems on the Intifada*; **Jon Hillson:** *This Is What I Think about Suicide Bombers*; **Ronald Jones:** *To Ayat al-Akhras, Suicide Bomber*; **Anonymous:** *Twice That Afternoon*; **Etel Adnan:** *Jenin*; **Richard Downing:** *Too Close to God*. **Khalid Mattawa:** *Nocturne on Evolution & Catastrophe* (poem). **Agneta Falk:** *I Told You So* (poem). **Jack Hirschman:** *The Darcane* (poem). **Farhang Erfani:** *Being-There and Being-From-Elsewhere: An Existential-Analytic of Exile*. **Ugo Pierri** (drawing). **Carl Auerbach:** *An Elegy for the Death of Language* (poem). **E. San Juan, Jr.:** *Spinoza and the War of Racial Terrorism*. **Thomas Rain Crowe:** *Speaking in Tongues: An Interview with Belfast poet Geardid MacLochlainn*. **Johnny Connolly:** *Bring Them Home—The Columbia Three* (on the 3 imprisoned Irishmen). **David** (*Green Anarchy*): *Communiqué from the Heart of the Beast*. **John O’Kane:** *Trading Terror, Making Democracy*. **Fiction: John Yohe:** *What You Are*; **Michael Standaert:** *The Gift*; **Julia Shure:** *Not Crazy*; **Victorial May Collert:** *Hard To Be Metaphysical*. **Timothy P. Brown:** *Word and Image as the Nexus of Subversion*. **Dominic Angerame:** *Notes on the Exhibition: Ce Qui Arrive (Unknown Quantity)*. **Imogen Bunting:** *Rationality, Legitimacy and the “Folk Devils” of May*. **Reviews: Leslie Shade:** *Living With Cyberspace: Technology & Society in the 21st Century*, eds.: John Armitage/Joanne Roberts; **David Meltzer:** *Front Lines, Selected Poems by Jack Hirschman*; Roland G. Simbulan: *Unmasking the U. S. War on Terror: U. S. Imperialist Hegemony and Crisis*, by Villegas, E. M., et al.; **Doug Minkler:** *Warmongers* (Graphic); **Jeffrey Arellano Cabusao:** *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference*, by E. San Juan, Jr.; **Johnny Christoph Arnold:** *Remembering Philip Berrigan*. 144pp.

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## Book Reviews

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*Reflexiones y Metareflexiones Políticos*. By Thalía Fung Riverón. Havana, Cuba: Editorial “Félix Varela,” 1998. 149 pages, paper.

Thalía Fung, a prominent Cuban philosopher, is currently professor of philosophy at the University of Havana. Since 1990, she has coordinated the area of political science that has twenty active members and eighteen collaborators. This group of scholars is part of the Faculty of Philosophy, History, and Sociology at the University of Havana. In 1997 these scholars published a collection of essays discussing current political science, the dynamics of civil society and the state, dimensions of NGOs, political processes, and problems of world politics.

Fung’s *Political Metareflections and Reflections* expounds on the theoretical foundation and formative studies in philosophy and political science. The first part of this work of political metareflections is a historical development of the relationship between philosophy and politics. A special area within philosophy exists in Greek thought that deals with the study of politics. Political science involved studies on civil society, relations between rulers and the ruling class, population problems, territories, education, and foreign relations. According to Engels, the dialectical relationship between politics and economics is inevitable, starting from the first political revolution—the formation of the state. Nevertheless, he appreciates the differences between them. Engels, as a political scientist, established the connection between society and the state and between political groups. He recognized the necessity of transforming the political structure of the state and developing a different type of society. Fung suggests that a rereading of Engels is important in order to

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understand the nature of current political science. Marxist theory has much to contribute, especially in the areas of dealing with the West, the third world, and global conflicts.

The second part of this book deals with reflections on the nature of political science and the dynamics of political action. Fung's position is that political science has a relative independence from other social sciences, although it is not free of them. Its contents have associations with political history, political philosophy, law, philosophy of law, political sociology, social psychology, and political law. A more thorough analysis would need to include other disciplines, such as economics, logic, and ecology. Political science in Cuba has two interactive dimensions: (1) a study of the political system, political forces, social movements, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the electoral process, interest groups, political culture, social change, and (2) relations with the relative autonomy of the government and the formation of politics. As an emerging science, political science includes descriptions, explications, and causal relations of political phenomena. Fung maintains that the role of political science is multidimensional and its discoveries cannot be explained by other disciplines. However, it utilizes philosophy and other social sciences in its research. Philosophy of law is the closest field to political science. Its corresponding areas of study are the relations between the law and the state, law and justice, and legal-political philosophy. In the twenty-first century, philosophy of law will need to explore the legal methodology of the Marxist base, the relation of law to current political changes, and problems of ecophilosophy and the environment.

In the chapter on tolerance, Fung maintains that, as a political instrument, tolerance is a necessity in the function of government so that alternative views are presented. In politics, tolerance is directly related to relations of power. Political tolerance is an important value that occupies a multidimensional space in the political process of socialism. Tolerance is not, however, to be confused with indifference. Groups that have positive goals differ from those with a negative political agenda. In periods of crisis, extreme tolerance or indifference can bring about the negation of established government. Her discussion of tolerance

and intolerance could have been supplemented with Marcuse's concept of repressive tolerance in order to justify the suppression of some Cuban dissidents.

According to Fung, Gramsci advanced the development of the political relation between the state and civil society by accounting for the mechanisms that permit the state to exercise its hegemony over it. What are the dynamics of civil society in Cuba today? NGOs occupy an important place because of their capacity for action. Different churches have condemned the U.S. blockade of Cuba. The family is important in the socialization of new generations. There are formations of interest in sports, art, and different types of work. The development of joint ventures in business has led to both state and individual or group ownership. The transition to socialism that followed the revolution instituted new demands, requirements, and social relations in civil society. Fung indicates that the immense economic difficulties in Cuba have not led to massive unemployment or a restriction on social services, although, salaries have lost buying power. The Helms-Burton law is not only an attack on the state, but also affects various components of civil society. Currently the relation of the state to civil society is in a transitional stage with an acceleration of interactions.

Thalía Fung's work in political science is an important contribution to Marxist social science. In Marxist theory, politics and economics are dialectically related and consequently we have the discipline of political economy. Although Fung does not deny this relationship, she presents convincing arguments for the relative autonomy of political science. In the future, additional writings are needed to show the dialectical relationship between the economic base and the political as well as the political and different components of the superstructure for the various types of research in political science.

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*Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution.* By Peter McLaren. Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. 264 pages, cloth \$80.00, paper \$22.95.

*America's New War; America Strikes Back; Target Terrorim, War on Terror*—just a sampling of the numerous ways U.S. mainstream media coverage has packaged events since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by “terrorists” connected to Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network. In the aftermath of September 11, U.S. government leaders, promising to exact revenge against the “evil-doers” who committed this crime, sought to whip citizens up into a patriotic frenzy. The demarcation between good and evil was clearly made when President George W. Bush told the international community that they were “either with us or against us” in the fight against terror. “Operation Infinite Justice” then morphed into “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” granting the U.S. military, aided by British troops, unlimited power and resources to launch preemptive strikes against any country suspected of “harboring terrorism.” Syria, Iran, Lebanon and North Korea have been mentioned as possible targets in America’s “new war.”

In the rush to round up terrorists, it seems likely that lines will be blurred between “terrorist” activity and nationalist, anticapitalist, and anti-imperialist struggles occurring in many parts of the world. The war on terror could easily be transformed into a war on any person or group that opposes the massive injustices being inflicted on millions of the world’s poor under the guise of “globalization.” For evidence of this, one need not look very far. In the UCLA *Bruin*, a professor compared Osama bin Laden to Che Guevara, and CNN has reportedly made similar statements. Such comparisons reveal how easily, in the present atmosphere, revolutionaries like Che, committed to egalitarian and anticapitalist struggles, become equated with individuals and groups like Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda acting for authoritarian regimes.

As a response to these continuing misrepresentations of Che’s political ideas, I recommend Peter McLaren’s *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*. Using a Marxist analysis,



McLaren takes critical pedagogy to a new level in this skillful examination of the pedagogical practices of these two historical figures. While recognizing that Che is a better known figure than Freire (a Bolivian educator who helped transform education into a tool for liberation), McLaren devotes considerably more space to the life, history, and teachings of Guevara in an effort to “balance the scales.” McLaren explains that the lack of attention the field of critical pedagogy has given to Che “constitutes an oversight of momentous proportion, both for the educational Left in particular and for teachers and teacher educators in general” (xxii). The disproportionate attention to Che does not, however, mean that Freire’s important contributions to revolutionary struggle and thought are diminished. Despite divergences in their approaches to liberation (Freire was a proponent of nonviolence, while Che was not), McLaren enables readers to see how their fundamental political philosophies can be used as “the wellspring for creating the type of critical agency necessary to contest and transform current global relations of exploitation and oppression” (xxvi).

Why Che? Why Freire? Why now? McLaren poses these questions to readers as a way of directing our attention to the inequalities and injustices occurring worldwide as a result of world capitalism. He argues that

oppression has not been vanquished by capitalist democracy but continues to emerge unabated in new forms by means of innovative and decentralized production facilities, newly centralized economic power brought about by new media technologies, capitalist warfare against unions and social services, state-sanctioned Latinophobia, and the disproportionate incarceration of Latino/as and African Americans in a rapidly expanding prison industry. (xxiii)

Against this backdrop, he correctly observes that the Western academy has become enamored with postmodernist theory, thereby relegating Marxist thought to the political dustbin. With its emphasis on multiplicity, contingency, and indeterminacy, postmodernist thought offers no useful strategy to combat the massive exploitation and oppression facing millions of the world’s poor as the result of global capitalism. Describing postmodernists

as “voguish hellions of the seminar room,” McLaren explains, “Poverty, for them, is at the very least a purgative for an indulgent society and at worst a necessary evil—if you want the material trappings of the American dream, that is” (xxv). Thus, the answer is clear: there is no better time than now to rediscover and embrace the philosophical and pedagogical teachings of Che Guevera and Paulo Freire.

What differentiates Che and Freire from postmodernists, is their emphasis on class struggle on a world scale. This requires a totalizing vision (an anathema to postmodernism) that is committed to eradicating the impoverishment and misery currently being felt by so many throughout the world. According to McLaren, a “revolution against capitalism and its political affiliate, imperialism, was not perceived by Che as an aberration but rather as one among a number of necessary periodic convulsions that were never ending as long as social injustices continued to exist” (42). The same could certainly be said of Freire who “was driven to socialism not only by its utopian possibilities—its critical and not naïve utopian dreams—but also by the brute reality of capitalist social relations” (191). This is a much different version of the world than that offered by postmodernists who “legitimate their politics primarily on the basis of experience [while] Che and Freire link such ‘experience’ to an objective economic analysis and historical materialist view of consciousness that does not divorce the ‘subject’ from the messy terrain of the social” (199). After comparing the pedagogical practices of Che and Freire, McLaren fuses them together in order to create what he calls “revolutionary pedagogy.” This type of pedagogy would

challenge the ideological assumptions that underlie both conservative and progressive schooling [and] refashion a politics in which market reality yields to the larger universal values of socialist democracy that both Che and Freire so forcefully advocated. (197)

I found this to be a most valuable book for anyone devoted to emancipatory politics. In particular, I would make this required reading for Western academicians who have unfortunately fallen prey to the seductive potential of postmodernist thought. In an era

when critical pedagogy has been reduced to nothing more than “classroom furniture organized in a ‘dialogue friendly’ circle to ‘feel good curricula’ designed to increase students’ self-image,” a call for a more sustained critique of neoliberalism is welcome and urgent. As transnational corporations and their instruments for regulating trade (the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation) continue to sacrifice the world’s poor for greater and ever-increasing profit, it is important as educators that we begin to embrace the lessons of Marxism, instead of replacing them with trendier postmodern theories that work in the service of capitalist exploitation.

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## ABSTRACTS

**Robert Lanning, “Lukács’s Concept of *Imputed Consciousness* in Realist Literature”**—This article examines issues of realist literature in the work of Georg Lukács. His concern with the writer’s portrayal of reality, the aesthetic category of specialty, and the significance of the literary type are discussed. The central argument is that the work required of the writer to produce realist literature is also required of the reader. It is suggested that the concept connecting both is *imputed consciousness*, and that this expectation for knowledge of reality makes realist literature continually important in the struggle for social change.

**Edwin A. Roberts, “British Intellectuals and the Communist Ideal”**—Among the British intellectuals who were attracted to communism in the 1930s were different types of thinkers including disaffected Labourites, former liberals, a group of young writers and poets, and a highly influential core of key scientists. From their vision of the communist ideal emerged a coherent and cohesive school of Marxist thought in Britain. Whatever its shortcomings, the ideal that inspired them contains elements that deserve the continued respect of the contemporary Left.

**NST Conference and Study Tour in Vietnam: “Globalization and the National State”**—A conference and study tour in Vietnam, 5-17 January 2003, was sponsored by *Nature, Society, and Thought* in cooperation with the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy. In this issue we present a report on the study tour, including principal features of the socialist market economy in Vietnam, and a selection of papers presented at the two-day conference in Hanoi. Additional papers will be presented in the next issue.

## ABREGES

**Robert Lanning, « Le Concept de la conscience impute à la littérature réaliste chez Lukács »** — L'auteur examine quelques points par rapport à la littérature réaliste dans l'oeuvre de George Lukács. Il évoque chez Lukács son souci de description de la réalité, la catégorie esthétique de la spécialité et la signification du type littéraire. L'argument principal est que le travail de l'écrivain pour produire la littérature réaliste doit également se retrouver chez le lecteur. Il suggère que le concept qui les lie est la *conscience imputée*, et que cette attente de connaissance de la réalité rend la littérature réaliste sans cesse déterminante dans la lutte pour le progrès social.

**Edwin A. Roberts, « Les intellectuels britanniques et l'idéal communiste »** — On trouve parmi les intellectuels britanniques attirés par le communisme dans les années 1930 des types variés de penseurs tels que des Labourites mécontents, des ex-libéraux, un groupe de jeunes écrivains et poètes, et un noyau très influent de scientifiques incontournables. De leur vision de l'idéal communiste est née une école cohérente et fédératrice de la pensée marxiste en Grande-Bretagne. Quelles que soient ses imperfections, l'idéal qui les inspirait contient des éléments qui méritent toujours le respect de la gauche contemporaine.

**Le Congrès NST et le voyage d'étude au Vietnam : « L'économie globale et l'état national »** — *Nature, Society, and Thought*, en collaboration avec l'Académie politique nationale Ho Chi Minh, a organisé un congrès international et un voyage d'étude au Vietnam, du 5 au 17 janvier 2003. Nous présentons dans ce numéro un rapport sur le voyage d'étude, y compris les caractéristiques principales de l'économie socialiste au Vietnam, et un choix des communications présentées lors du congrès de deux jours à Hanoi. Des communications supplémentaires seront publiées dans le prochain numéro.