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**NST**

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**CONTENTS**  
**Vol. 18, No. 2 (2005)**

ARTICLES

*Victor G. Devinatz*, An Analysis of Strikes Led by the  
Trade Union Unity League after Passage of the  
National Industrial Recovery Act, 1933–1934 205

*Brian Miller*, Praxis and Postmodernism: Nine Theses on  
History 219

*Mauricio Schoijet*, The Metatheory of Scientific  
Revolutions and the History of Biology 233

MARXIST FORUM 241

*Rafael Hernández, Francisco Brown, Ariel Dacal,*  
*Julio A. Díaz Vázquez, and Fernando Rojas*, Cuban  
Discussion of Why Eastern European Socialism  
Fell 243

*Erwin Marquit*, A Comment on the Cuban  
Discussion 275

*Georg Polikeit*, The EU Constitution: Transforming the  
European Union into a Great World Power 279

*Nguyen Ngoc Dzung*, Changes in Capitalism since the  
*Communist Manifesto* 297

BOOK REVIEWS

John Case, *The Soviet Century*, by Moshe Lewin 303

Gerald M. Erickson, *The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A  
People's History of Ancient Rome*, by Michael Parenti 311

ABSTRACTS (in English and French) 326



## **An Analysis of Strikes Led by the Trade Union Unity League after Passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, 1933–1934**

**Victor G. Devinatz**

Many trade-union activities of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) during “Third-Period Communism” (1928–1934) focused on the establishment of independent “revolutionary,” or “red,” industrial unions opposed to the conservative, craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions. The transformation of the CPUSA’s trade-union arm, the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), created in 1921, into the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) in 1929, with the specific purpose of organizing Communist-led “dual unions” in industries where AFL unions already existed, appeared to be a dramatic change in policy from the strategy of “boring from within” the AFL that had been employed by the Party for the better part of the 1920s (Johanningsmeier 2001).

Relatively little has been written in the scholarly literature about TUUL activities as a whole. Although two monographs have been devoted solely to covering the history of the TUEL throughout the 1920s (Foner 1991, 1994), as yet no single volume has done this for the TUUL. A number of books, however, have devoted one or two chapters to discussing the trade-union federation within the context of broader treatments of U.S. Communism (Klehr 1984; Cochran 1977; Ottanelli 1991; Levenstein 1981).

Johanningsmeier argues that although the Communist International formally promoted the change in strategy of CPUSA trade unionists from using the TUEL to “bore from within” the AFL to forming the TUUL as rival dual unions to the AFL, significant sentiment already existed in the Party by the late 1920s for the organizing of these industrial unions (2001). Although not dealing with the TUUL as such, an article by Manley (1994) on the Workers’ Unity League (the Canadian equivalent of the TUUL) points out the significant role that it played in Canadian labor struggles and the influence these unions exerted, which has not been widely recognized or acknowledged, during the first half of the 1930s.

More has been written about the roles and activities of individual TUUL-affiliated unions. Nelson discusses the organizing activities of the Marine Workers Industrial Union (MWIU) on the East Coast docks, primarily New York City and Baltimore (1988), while Kimmeldorf primarily covers the MWIU’s organizing on the West Coast (San Francisco), but touches on the union’s role in New York City (1988). Keeran (1980) discusses the origins of the Auto Workers Union (AWU) as an AFL affiliate, becoming independent of the federation in 1918 and eventually joining the TUUL in 1929. He also provides a comprehensive discussion of the AWU’s leadership role in the Briggs strike of 1933, undoubtedly one of the most important strikes in the auto industry before the formation of the United Auto Workers in 1935.

In his history of California farm workers, Daniels (1981) discusses the formation and activities of the TUUL-affiliated Agricultural Workers Industrial League (AWIL) in 1929, which became the Agricultural Workers’ Industrial Union (AWIU) in early 1931 and finally, in the summer of 1931, the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU). He also covers in detail the substantial number of strikes that the CAWIU led among California farm workers in 1933. Finally, Meyerhuber (1987) provides a detailed history of the National Miners Union (NMU) and the disastrous major strikes that it led in western Pennsylvania, involving as many as 40,000 workers, and in the Harlan County, Kentucky, coal fields in the spring and summer of 1931. Other

accounts of the 1931 NMU-led strike in Pennsylvania can be found in Draper (1972) and Nyden (1977).

Briefer discussions of individual TUUL unions appear in a variety of other books devoted to labor, such as Ruiz (1987), Freeman (1989), Gerstle (1989), Cohen (1990), Feuer (1992), Ross-wurm (1992), and Honey (1993). In addition, a number of biographies of leading CPUSA activists also touch upon individual TUUL unions: Healey and Isserman (1990), Dennis (1977), and Barrett and Ruck (1981).

One view widely accepted in the historical literature, largely based on the major works of Klehr (1984) and Cochran (1977), is that the TUUL was a dismal failure. Klehr argues that the TUUL was never an effective force in the trade-union field during its nearly six-year existence: “Very nearly stillborn by its second anniversary, the TUUL was a ghostly presence in most industries, where its organizers demonstrated an eerie talent for losing what strikes they did succeed in calling” (1984, 118). And Cochran is no less critical than Klehr in his assessment of the CPUSA’s foray into red unionism during this period, claiming, “Throughout their lifetime, the red unions (aside from a few special cases) were propaganda organizations. To the extent that they had members at all, these came in during strikes and left when strikes were lost (which they generally were) . . . the Communists never succeeded in breathing life into their revolutionary industrial unions. The policy, in terms of its declared purposes, was a failure” (1977, 44–45).

Because Klehr and Cochran apparently base their analyses on several major TUUL strikes in highly visible industries, the prevailing interpretation in the historical literature is that these strikes were largely disasters and led to few, if any, gains for the workers participating in them. In addition, these scholars claim that the TUUL unions attempted to use these strikes for mounting a frontal assault on capitalism at every conceivable opportunity as opposed to focusing primarily on economic and trade-union demands such as opposing wage cuts and speedups, and obtaining either shop-committee or union recognition. My purpose here is to test the veracity of these standard historical interpretations

by investigating TUUL-led strikes in a wide variety of industries (needle trades, textile, shoe, mining, agriculture, steel, auto, maritime, etc.) in 1933 and 1934 after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which led to increased strike activity on the part of AFL, independent, and TUUL unions.

With the enactment of the NIRA and the inclusion of Clause 7(a) in the law, which provided most private-sector workers with the federally protected right to organize, union membership in all types of labor organizations dramatically increased. Since Clause 7(a) was ambiguous with respect to workers' legal right to collective-bargaining representation, many employers established company unions in an attempt to prevent workers from joining AFL, TUUL, or independent unions (Klehr 1984, 123). Nevertheless, by the end of October 1933, the TUUL had benefited from this legislation through dramatic increases in its membership. At this time, the TUUL estimated its membership between 125,000 and 130,000 members, with 30,000 in the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union (NTWIU), 10,000 in the Steel Metal Workers Industrial Union (SMWIU), and 10,000 in the Shoe Leather Workers Industrial Union (SLWIU) ("Membership in TUUL," 31 October 1933).

Because the act promoted the regulation of prices, wages, and production through a tripartite relationship of labor, capital, and the state, the CPUSA referred to it as "slave legislation" and considered its orientation to be protofascist. CPUSA leader Earl Browder denounced the labor provisions of the NIRA as "the American version of Mussolini's 'corporative state,' special state-controlled labor unions closely tied up with and under the direction of the employers." Furthermore, the Party viewed the NIRA as an attempt by the state, capital, and AFL leaders to keep labor militancy under control, even though the legislation reinvigorated the strike movement in 1933, leading to triple the number of strikers that year when compared with 1932 (Klehr 1984, 123).

#### ***Source of TUUL strike data***

Information concerning the TUUL-led strikes used for the analysis presented in this study was obtained from the

TUUL's monthly publication (*Labor Unity* 1933–1934). After the passage of the NIRA in June 1933, *Labor Unity* began to provide lists of summary information on strikes held in various industries through 1934. Information provided for each strike includes the name of the company being struck, the union leading the strike, the number of workers involved in the strike, the location (city and state) of the strike, the reasons for the strike, the overall outcome of the strike (won, lost, or not listed), and the particular gains achieved if the strike was won (for example, a 10 percent wage increase and union recognition).

It should be pointed out that not all types of information are reported for each individual strike. The piece of information most often missing is the actual outcome of the strike (whether the strike was won or lost). Even when it is mentioned that the strike was won, in many situations it is not reported what specific improvements were obtained. Besides the strike outcome, the information omitted most often is the number of employees involved in the strike. In a few cases also, either the name of the company or the location where the strike occurred is missing.

In a majority of cases, the specific name of the TUUL-affiliated union which led the strike is listed, such as the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union. In approximately 30 percent of the strikes in the *Labor Unity* strike lists, however, only the TUUL is listed as the union leading the strike. Finally, these strike lists are undoubtedly incomplete. It is unlikely that every single strike led by a TUUL-affiliated union in 1933 (after the passage of the NIRA) and 1934 was reported to the TUUL national office. Nevertheless, even though incomplete, these strike lists still provide us with important insights into the nature of TUUL-led strikes in the latter two years of the organization's existence.

#### *Analyzing the TUUL strike data*

Of the 169 TUUL-led strikes in the *Labor Unity* strike lists for 1933 and 1934, 77 strikes were won, 8 strikes were lost, and no outcome was listed for 84 strikes. A location (city and state) was

listed for 164 strikes. These strikes took place in 22 states with 58 strikes, more than a third of the total (35.4 percent) occurring in New York State. Five states (New York, Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, and Massachusetts) accounted for nearly 72.6 percent of the total number of strikes. By geographic area, 64 percent occurred in the East (105/164); 16.5 percent occurred in the Midwest (27/164); 17.1 percent occurred in the West (28/164), and only 2.4 percent occurred in the South (4/164).

The location of the TUUL strikes is consistent with the organization's geographic membership concentration throughout the United States. Approximately 51.5 percent of the TUUL's membership at the end of October 1933 was in the eastern region of the United States (67,000), while 15.4 percent (20,500) was in the Midwest ("Membership in TUUL," 31 October 1933). In addition, at this time, 34.6 percent (45,000) of the membership lived in New York City ("Membership in TUUL," 31 October 1933; "TUUL Unions in the New York District," ca. 1933).

A clear majority (73.8 percent) of TUUL-led strikes occurred in large metropolitan areas. A little more than 40 percent of these (51) took place in New York City, or 31.1 percent of all TUUL-led strikes held during the period under consideration. After New York City, Chicago was a distant second in the number of strikes (10 strikes or 6.6 percent), with Philadelphia a close third with 9 strikes (5.4 percent).

Tables 1 and 2 supply reasons TUUL-led strikes were called and the outcomes of strikes won by the TUUL unions. Contrary to the view promoted by Klehr, Cochran, and others that the TUUL unions launched strikes for revolutionary purposes in a frontal offensive on capitalism, all of the reasons for which the TUUL unions conducted strikes revolved around economic and trade-union demands, with wages and union recognition being the two primary reasons (see table 1). In addition, as seen in table 2, the major gains that the TUUL unions achieved in victorious strikes were wage increases and union recognition. It should be noted that the listing of wage increases as the major positive outcome of the strikes may be somewhat misleading. A primary cause of many of these strikes, as was the situation in auto, was the implementation

TABLE 1 Reasons TUUL Strikes Were Held\*

Reason	Number of Strikes	Percentage of Strikes
Wages	35	89.7%
Union Recognition	11	28.3%
Reduction in Hours	2	5.1%
Increase in Number of Jobs	2	5.1%
Reinstatement of Workers	2	5.1%
Cost of Lamps	1	2.6%
N= 39 strikes		

TABLE 2 Outcomes Obtained in Victorious TUUL Strikes\*

Outcome	Number of Strikes	Percentage of Strikes
Wage Increases	21	87.5%
Union Recognition	7	29.2%
Reinstatement of Workers	2	8.3%
Increase in Number of Jobs	1	4.2%
Reduction in Cost of Lamps	1	4.2%
N= 24 Strikes		

\*NOTE: For Tables 1 and 2, percentages do not add up to 100 percent because some strikes occurred for more than one reason and more than one outcome was obtained in some victorious strikes.

of wage cuts, and the main result was the restoration of wages to their previous levels. Moreover, included in the outcome category “wage increases” was a strike issue for back wages.

Of the 11 TUUL unions that led strikes during this period (not including the all-inclusive TUUL category), 6 led 10 or more strikes—the Steel Metal Workers Industrial Union (SMWIU), the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union (NTWIU), the Cannery

Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU), the Marine Workers Industrial Union (MWIU), the Shoe Leather Workers Industrial Union (SLWIU), and the Food Workers Industrial Union (FWIU). The remaining 5 TUUL-affiliated unions led 3 or fewer strikes each in 1933 and 1934. Of the 6 unions holding 10 or more strikes, the SMWIU led 38 strikes; the NTWIU and the CAWIU led 16 strikes each, while the remaining 3 unions each led between 10 and 12 strikes. The SMWIU and the NTWIU held 83.3 percent of their strikes in the East, while the CAWIU led all of its strikes out West, with all but one occurring in California.

The CAWIU conducted the largest strikes, with 3,458 workers, on average, engaged in each of its work stoppages during this period; the SLWIU (1,727 workers) and the NTWIU (1,352 workers) were far behind in terms of the average size of the strikes. Of the remaining 3 unions that led more than 10 strikes, the average strike size was well under 1,000 workers, ranging from 375 workers per strike for the MWIU to 625 workers for the FWIU.

The reasons for the TUUL-led strikes found in the *Labor Unity* lists in 1933 and 1934 are supported by CPUSA internal documents. From the NIRA's enactment until the beginning of October 1933, in nearly every one of the TUUL-led walkouts, involving a total of 64,400 workers, employees struck for wage increases, establishment of minimum wage scales, reduced hours, an "equal division of work during the slow period in seasonal trades," and union recognition ("Membership in TUUL," 31 October 1933; "TUUL Unions in the New York District," ca. 1933).

In addition, the high success rates of TUUL-led strikes calculated from the *Labor Unity* lists in 1933 and 1934 is again supported by CPUSA internal reports. Such documents indicate that, in New York City, the TUUL unions, organized in the Trade Union Unity Council (TUUC), won most of the strikes that they conducted during this period. More than half of the TUUC-led strikers (35,000) were employed in the needle trades, with successful strikes occurring among fur workers, bathrobe workers, custom tailors, and knit-good workers. The 2,500 knit-good strikers and the 2,000 bathrobe strikers attained wage increases ranging from 20 to 35 percent. The implementation of the 35-hour

work week was obtained in knit-good, while union recognition was also achieved in bathrobe. In the fur industry, considerable wage increases were attained along with a 35-hour work week. In the dressmakers' strike and the white-good workers' strikes, however, the CPUSA acknowledged the NTWIU's failure to achieve "any organizational gains" by conducting the walkouts ("Report on TUUL Activities," 4 October 1933).

Internal reports also indicate that another TUUC union with a base of support in New York City was successful in leading strikes at this time. In the shoe industry, the SLWIU conducted a number of walkouts that resulted in substantial wage increases of between 20 to 50 percent for the vast majority of strikers. When these strikes ended, the union increased its membership more than sevenfold, from 1,200 to 9,000 members. As in a number of other successful industrial actions, the CPUSA attributed the success of these walkouts to a united-front-from-below policy with shoe workers who were members of independent unions ("Report on TUUL Activities," 4 October 1933; "Report of the Trade Union Unity Council for the Past Six Months," ca. 1933).

Other successful strikes in New York City in 1933 and 1934, according to internal documents, were led by the SMWIU, which included 1,000 silver-hollowware workers who obtained "substantial gains," although union recognition was not achieved. In two small shops in the light metal industry, the SMWIU took over the leadership of spontaneous strikes at Majestic (350 workers) and Durable (200 workers), where wage increases from between \$2 to \$8 per week were obtained, with the majority of the workers joining the union. In addition, in other TUUC-led strikes, such as the mirror workers (500) and pipe makers (900), "considerable gains" were also wrested from employers ("Report on TUUL Activities," 4 October 1933; "Report of the Trade Union Unity Council for the Past Six Months," ca. 1933).

### ***Reevaluating TUUL-led strikes after the passage of the NIRA***

While the widely held view of TUUL strikes (based on Klehr and Cochran), is that these industrial actions were an abject and total failure, a more nuanced analysis of the successes and failures

of TUUL strikes held in 1933 and 1934 is instructive. As demonstrated by the statistics reported here, a good many TUUL-led strikes after the passage of the NIRA were successful. It is true that the TUUL did not lead many strikes in heavy industry (such as heavy metal, transport, and railroad) or in many parts of the United States, especially in the South. It did, however, lead strikes in a wide variety of industries and experienced considerable success in organizing and leading strikes in smaller shops (usually under 600 employees) in urban-centered light industries, particularly in needle trades and shoe, in 1933 and 1934.

And although much of the TUUL literature directed toward public consumption was filled with political slogans, such as “Defend the Soviet Union,” TUUL organizers emphasized, and many times obtained, economic and trade-union demands—such as wage increases and union recognition—in the strikes that they launched and led. In fact, one complaint of TUUL leaders at the national level was that “our organizers” and the “leading comrades” in the Party were not willing to “bring forward the Party or even to explain the revolutionary character” of the TUUL unions to rank and file members (“Report on Trade Union Situation in Philadelphia District,” 15 October 1933). This point is further reinforced by Ottanelli, who argues that the CPUSA did not politicize the TUUL’s strikes through invoking revolutionary rhetoric during strike meetings (1991, 27–28).

Assuming that Cochran (1977) is correct in his assessment that the TUUL unions had trouble both in retaining members and in achieving organizational stability after the conclusion of strikes, these unions did provide a voice, leadership, and representation to many different groups of workers—African-Americans, women, immigrants, and the unskilled (Johanningsmeier 2001)—who received little or no support for their activities from the AFL and independent unions. Finally, the real question concerning TUUL-led strikes, in fact, may be not whether they were won or lost. The important thing is that they provided a significant training ground and offered learning experiences for CPUSA trade-union activists who in the latter half of the 1930s would come to play a leading role in the great victories of the Congress of Industrial

Organizations (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2002). Reassessment of the effectiveness of TUUL-led strikes in 1933 and 1934 must take these facts into consideration.

*Department of Management and Quantitative Methods*  
*Illinois State University, Normal*

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## Praxis and Postmodernism: Nine Theses on History

Brian Miller

1. There is never only one historian involved in the unraveling of a given historical subject matter. In every area of historical study, no matter how specialized, a cluster of historians is involved. No historical scholar works in a vacuum. Interpretations of evidence are constantly challenged by peer-group caveats and critique, in many cases resolving in consensus before the debate in question moves on to yet other aspects of consideration and contention. Novelists and poets may dispute each other's aesthetic worth, but contentions among them regarding interpretations of any *concrete evidence* behind their literary formulations are usually a side issue in literary critique. An exception may lie in Gore Vidal's interpretations of character and fact in his American history novels, such as *Lincoln*, that purport to be realistic historical accounts for which Vidal may validly claim artistic license but for which he may be to some extent properly held to account in that particular literary genre—more than if he had written in some other genre. All the same, as a rule, *historiographical* controversy is different from *literary* controversy. The existence of historians quarreling over *evidence* and its interpretation may provide a *prima facie* case for the validity and scientific nature of historical enterprise.

The skeptic says that the quarreling is proof of subjective perspectives. We're inclined to think it attributable to the

commanding and often unyielding presence of those objects which people seek to incorporate into their world of understanding. (Appleby et al. 1994, 259–60)

2. The *thoroughgoingly* empirical cannot stop at one set of facts, or at facts *per se*. A necessary extension of the empirical process lies in reasoning and interpretation, if the empirical project is to be carried out. In other words, a “purely empirical” process of “fact gathering” must transform into its opposite—that is, into reasoning derived from discovery together with conclusions, interim and qualified or otherwise. Empiricism is not to be equated with superhuman objectivity. We commence any empirical investigation, by definition, *from where we are*.

3. Science is posited on human mastery over the object. This is not a neutral position, which is why scientific pursuit is misunderstood when conceived as being *neutral*. The need to know is driven by the need to master, whether by intervening, harnessing, manipulating, or merely measuring and predicting. (“Knowledge is power.”) The objectivity of science is an instrumental objectivity, for if anything is to be understood as a means of gaining mastery over it, then the object’s true workings must be grasped inductively. I assume the doctor or specialist I consult is professionally *committed* to my cure, and is not *neutral* regarding me and my prospects of health. At the same time, I would hope he or she would look objectively into my condition in order to be able to cure it. I would have no confidence in a postmodernist doctor who believed that all diagnoses were “social constructions of reality,” or who regarded any prescription as “only a text.”

Science is *praxis*. Its practicing and practical objective is human success. And that is whether in the form of cures, discovery/hypothesis leading to understanding of inner workings, or accurate prediction. The successes of science reflect a hold on objective truth, for that which consistently “works” according to scientific understanding reflects the nature of the object being seen and made to “work.” An understanding of science as praxis does not rule out a scientific activity distorted by corporate, political, or military priorities. In such cases, the praxis of mastery is mixed

up with or collapsed into the praxis of domination. Nor does such understanding rule out the use of science to save the environment—quite the contrary. The politicization of science is only a matter of degree, in terms of departure from “pure” science. All science is “political” and “social” to the degree that it is posited upon mastery over its objects, but this does not turn science itself into ideology; when successful, science *really works* (a tautology), yet it remains provisional in its determinations.

Postmodernism is based on a view of science as pretending to be objective (or deluded into thinking it is objective) while really being ideological. This pair of opposites forms a false dichotomy. As praxis, science will partake of both objectivity and ideology in given circumstances but is neither alone. Historians looking to science for an “objective” model are looking in the wrong direction. They should be looking for a model of mastery over given objects of inquiry, discovery, and interpretation. At the same time, the objectivity of scientific *procedure* is built into scientific practice because—as praxis—science exists to master its objects and to deliver results from inquiries, and this requirement forces the removal of as much illusion and error as possible vis-à-vis the object. So a scientific mode should not be thrown out the window because the motivation *behind* scientific endeavor is not neutral and value-free.

Our version of objectivity concedes the impossibility of any research being neutral (that goes for scientists as well) and accepts the fact that knowledge-seeking involves a lively, contentious struggle among diverse groups of truth-seekers. Neither admission undermines the viability of stable bodies of knowledge that can be communicated, built upon, and subjected to testing. These admissions do require a new understanding of objectivity. (Appleby et al. 1994, 254)

4. “The danger in any survey of the past is lest we argue in a circle and impute to history lessons that history has never taught and historical research has never discovered—lessons that are really inferences from the particular organization that we have given to our knowledge” (Butterfield 1965, 22). The dictionary definition

of theory is: "Supposition or system of ideas explaining something, esp. one based on general principles independent of the facts, phenomena, etc., to be explained" (*Concise Oxford* 1976). A historical study founded upon a theory of history will deduce from it that which has yet to be proved. Historical study proceeds not by deduction but by induction: from reasoning and empirical research, the one feeding the other. Empirical research in any given area is potentially never-ending, and consequently no static theory could ever keep up with it. Only continuous reasoning can do that.

The sociologist may provide a system of class structure or evolve theories of voting behaviour which are statistical abstracts from the multifariousness of real life. For his own purposes, these conclusions may be valid and fruitful, but no historian is entitled to assume their validity for his own period and problems: he is not entitled to know his conclusions before he has got there by specific study of historical evidence. (Elton 1972, 52–53)

The historian . . . can help [social scientists] to understand the importance of multiplicity where they look for single-purpose schemes, to grasp the interrelations which their specialization tends to overlook, to remember that the units in which they deal are human beings. While the historian can profit from the social scientist's precision, range of questions, and willingness to generalize, he can repay the debt by giving instruction in the rigorous analysis of evidence, sceptical thinking, and the avoidance of ill-based generalizations. Since the rashness of the social scientist, treating his theories as facts and intent on applying them in practice, constitutes one of the main dangers to which modern society lies exposed, the study of history may be said to serve a vital purpose when it combats the overconfidence of men [*sic*] who see the world as categories and statistics, and who think in jargon. (55–56)

Keith Jenkins [a leading champion of postmodernist history] is right to claim . . . that Elton's views are undermined

by the fact that he fails to meet philosophical points by articulating his own ideas philosophically. But if we dismiss Elton upon such grounds, we miss the point of what he was trying to do. Elton did not express his ideas philosophically because he believed that history could be talked about in a different way. It was his aim to give voice to the beliefs of many professional historians and to make sure that they are not excluded from discussions on the nature of history. (Hughes-Warrington 2000, 84)

One might add that Elton's outlook probably still informs the practice of most historians, if not their remarks at interdisciplinary conferences.

5. Marxism as a historical movement has in the past partaken of positivism (that is, a system of thought that recognizes only positive facts and observable phenomena as valid objects of study), but we must look again at the *classical* Marxism of historical materialism to distinguish a Marxian empiricism from a positivist one (the latter as originally invoked by Comte, the founder of philosophical positivism). First of all, "material" in historical materialism does not mean, or only mean, "economics." Historical materialism is not economic determinism, but *exists to combat it*. "Material" in historical materialism means the opposite of "ideal." The natural world and human history are not created or run by eternal ideas or the Absolute Idea—or even by Comte's three "necessary" historical stages (the "theological," the "metaphysical," and the "positive/scientific)," but by actual, concrete processes in nature vis-à-vis the affairs of definite human beings in definite social formations. History is human and human centered. Consciousness cannot be ruled out. Far from it, for Marx holds *consciousness* to be the distinguishing feature separating human production from animal "production" for survival. History can thus in certain developments be dominated by human-derived ideas—but not by the Idea.

Only from the perspective of a human-centered history is it possible to perceive and grasp historical reification—the invocation,

in the struggles of classes, of suprahuman structures or fetishes to dominance over actual human beings. These structures are seen as forces that appear to be equal or superior to human beings in terms of power, identity, and personality. A theology supporting an omnipotent god is one such reification, as identified by Feuerbach. The glorification of an absolutist monarchy is another; a national myth is another; a coercive economic system like capitalism with its fetishism of commodities is yet another.

Historical materialism examines the determinism of such systems in the light of their reification, for it is obscurantist and bourgeois-liberal (if also post-Hegelian, like Marxism) to *overlook* or *neglect* determinisms *in* history on the basis of not accepting the determinism *of* history. Because historical materialism neither overlooks nor neglects such determinisms, it is tarred by its liberal/conservative adversaries with the determinist brush—a tactic deployed when it is more convenient ideologically to overlook or ignore the determinism put in train by capitalism. But historical materialism is precisely the opposite of what its enemies call it: it is a praxis of overcoming *all* determinisms. Theories of historical development in the humanities are both determinisms and intellectual reifications, predicated upon the reifying tendency to believe that eternal ideas (such as Comte's quite unprovable and unfalsifiable tripartite structure and other such structures conjured up in history textbooks) govern history and determine its course.

On this basis, every such theory is a form of reifying idealism: precisely that which historical materialism was formulated to combat. Historical materialism is the praxis of human liberation from such fetishes. The common ground shared by historical materialism and science is praxis. Science is posited upon the praxis of human mastery over objects; historical materialism on the praxis of human mastery over, and thus liberation from, reified objects and reified thought that ramify and justify oppression. On this basis, the two may inform one another. Historical materialism is empirical. It is thus concerned primarily (on synchronic and diachronic levels) with historical capitalism, now embracing the globe, if Immanuel Wallerstein is correct that “we are now close to

the commodification of everything” (1996, 90). Discussing in his conclusion the crisis in culture, Wallerstein writes:

The re-opening of intellectual issues is on the one hand therefore the product of internal success and internal contradictions. But it is also the product of the pressures of the movements, themselves in crisis, to be able to cope with, fight more effectively against, the structures of historical capitalism, *whose crisis is the starting-point of all other activity*. (93—emphasis added)

6. It is quite in line with the outlook of historical materialism that it will suffer a severe loss of intellectual prestige inside academia when the praxis it embodies is politically weakened by the depletion of cohesive and significant working-class infusion from without—a working class still in the process of re-identifying itself vis-à-vis the advanced capitalist mode of production. Periods of triumphal reaction in relation to working-class defeat suit the kind of “academic Marxism” that can maintain itself in respectability only by mimicking or living off the latest in bourgeois theory that, in the absence of working-class action “for itself,” will be in the intellectual ascendancy. (We have already seen this in the academicism of “Austrian Marxism” at the turn of the twentieth century.) By the same token, right-wing manifestations (and I include the basics in postmodernism in this) are likely to flourish academically in a period of triumphal global capitalism, whatever weaknesses and internal contradictions may be obscured by the “triumph.” Thus do ideas and the movements embodying them function in history, but this ramifies a historical-materialist outlook rather than detracting from it.

7. If it is true that historical materialism combats an inherently deterministic theory of history of any kind, it must therefore be thoroughlygoingly *empirical*; there is no other intellectual option. But it is empiricism as praxis for liberation, not empiricism as a fetish for “facts.” No one on either Right or Left disputes Marx’s virtually lifelong dedication to a revolutionary cause on behalf of the working class; his empirical work was grounded in his praxis. But a misunderstanding of science as “neutral” leads to the view

that Marx could not have been a *scientist* precisely *because* of the fact that he labored intellectually for a cause. But what scientist does not labor for the cause of mastery? Marx's approach is *reasoning* based on two interrelated sources: (1) the need in all praxis to interpret evidence in order to gain mastery over unearthed material (and for Marx "unearthing new material" was never-ending), and (2) critique of theories and other interpretations that are fundamentally against the working class or working-class interest. Marx's work is a blend of induction from empirical findings and critique. Marxism is "weak" on theory—that is, on any theory of history *per se*. The base-superstructure model outlined in the 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* has been dismissed as being no more than a metaphor. Marx wrote here of the materialist conception of history *not* as theory but as "the guiding principles of my studies" (1987, 262)—that is, more in the nature of a hypothesis.

The late letters of Engels, which protest the imputation of economic determinism in the works of Marx and speak of the determining role of economics only "in the final analysis" (2001, 58), are considered woefully inadequate by such theorists as Althusser, who elaborated a structuralist theoretical discourse out of his own conception of Marxism. But this supposed incompetence of Engels is not an expression of *weak* theory but of *antitheory*. In much the same way, we have seen Elton criticized (see above) for being insufficiently theoretical when his whole point was an *antitheoretical* thrust.

Engels' letters underline the limitations of ANY general theory or model when it comes to analyzing particular historical events, processes or societies. (Letters to Bloch and Schmidt: "All history must be studied afresh...") These letters amount to a general warning against a certain pre-emptive use of theory, and a plea for empirical and in particular for historical study. This is not merely the ageing Engels: it was a recurrent theme in Marx too. Right back to *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels argue uncompromisingly the primacy of people's "materialistic connection" in historical development, like the Preface.

But they also warn that “definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into . . . definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production.” (1846) Had Marxists taken this seriously they could never have advanced the kind of universal theory of this connection of the sort developed by [G. A.] Cohen from the 1859 Preface or by Althusser from Engels’ letters. And Marx makes the same kind of statement over thirty years later to the Russian journal of 1877 [the quotation pouring scorn on ‘super historical theory’]. (Sayer 1987, 13)

Sayer refers to a still-unpublished 1500-page chronology of world history that Marx compiled near the end of his life. “The painstakingly empirical tenor of such an enterprise is worth remarking in this context” (13).

Further observations might be made.

First, that the history of Marxism might have gone down a different path had *The German Ideology* been a recognized part of the canon from the beginning, instead of being withdrawn from submission for publication and not discovered and published until 1932. Thus both Lenin and Gramsci would have been acquainted with Marx’s uncompromisingly negative stance on ideology (for example), and the antitheoretical stance of Marx and Engels on history *as such* might have been a lot clearer to Marxist thinkers long before Althusser and Cohen came on the scene.

Second, that the base-and-superstructure metaphor appears to be meant as a heuristic guide, though tossed off in the mere preface to a book that (in Hume’s words regarding his own *Treatise*) “fell dead-born from the press” in 1859. Few major thinkers can have deliberately elaborated their whole central “theory” in a short preface alone. Nor was Marx one of them. What we appear to have here and elsewhere is a *contempt* for theories of history *per se* based on reasoning centered in (a) acquaintance with empirical findings, never-ending for Marx, and (b) a *critique* of theories. According to this view, the Preface is an interpretive

summing up (which is what prefaces tend to be) preparatory to a further plunge into empirical work that Marx was to undertake in the volumes of *Capital*. Marxism, while being empiricism as a praxis of mastery through reasoning in action, is not so much poor theory as antitheory in regard to the nature of *history as such*. It belongs to an empirical tradition while being not a manifestation of a pretended or deluded “objectivity” but of praxis in the fully scientific sense that I have discussed.

Finally, to cite the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it” (Marx 1976, 8).

8. The following may be taken by some readers as derogatory of the women’s movement, but this is not intended. As opposed to the empirical method invoked by the founders of historical materialism, we have *feminist* history, evolving into *gender* history. This has proceeded on the grounds that it is historiographically feasible to introject back the consciousness of the 1970s into previous ages in order to place a gloss of *women’s consciousness* upon such events and movements as the French Revolution and Chartism. In other words, as Butterfield says, to infer “from the particular organization that we have given our knowledge.” A consciousness is read into past events and actions that has not been derived from studying them, but from present-day gender theory. One might as well posit a *children’s consciousness* as a factor in the French Revolution. After all, children undoubtedly took part in it in their own way, and children too have been oppressed and neglected as subjects of history. Had there been a major children’s consciousness movement in the 1970s we might have seen just such a reading-back into past historical events. This is a deductive method that makes no attempt to prove its premises. If, however, little if any evidence of mass behavior conforming to 1970s “gender theory” can be found for, say, the 1790s or the 1840s, then the procedure comes to resemble that of the somewhat idealist-inclined Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923): that is, where there are no overt manifestations of proletarian consciousness to be historically adduced from the evidence, then the consciousness that *should* have formed part of the *objective*

situation is “ascribed.” Just as we may have ascribed proletarian consciousness, so we may have ascribed feminist consciousness even if it did not actually manifest itself.

This kind of “women’s history” has proved so untenable that it has been merged or amalgamated into “gender history,” which includes both sexes. At that point, it seems to lose its former *raison d’être*, since the whole point originally was to highlight women’s consciousness historically, thereby giving history a new or newly uncovered subject. If, however, *both* sexes are now covered, the emphasis taken off male exploitation of female. We see *two* oppressed genders, and since there are no other, this begs the question as to what—outside 100% of the human race—can be oppressing them. The logic of this must therefore be that *nothing* was oppressing them, and therefore conflict is expunged from the historical record. Since that may be deemed undesirable, it would follow that historical materialism must be reintroduced to provide the basis for a praxis in historical writing and research that liberates through mastery.

Historical materialism will indeed take up the women’s cause, for there can be no doubt of their oppression, which continues. But it will place it within the context of considerations prematurely deemed by pioneers in women’s history to have been old hat—back to class struggle again, in other words. Following empirical demands, historical materialism will identify such concrete manifestations as eighteenth-century food riots, and, in the nineteenth century, religious revivalism, abolitionism, and temperance. The last of these especially united women in a common cause that was a matter of gender *specifically* because of the objective social conditions women found themselves in vis-à-vis men in combination with those who reaped profits from selling alcohol to men. Women’s studies can be and are potent and fruitful, but not on the basis of objectifying or reifying gender perceptions, whether for the 1840s or the 1970s.

The very notion of gender shows the influence of the cultural and linguistic turn in the humanities. From its origins as a term of grammar, gender has come to refer in English increasingly to the cultural and social construction of

sexual identity. Joan Wallach Scott insists that “a more radical politics” required “a more radical epistemology” that she found in postmodernist theory. She praises postmodernist theory for relativizing the status of all knowledge.” (Appleby et al. 1974, 226)

Scott’s “more radical politics” did not result from this agenda. If “the status of all knowledge” is relativized, how is it possible to discern truth via praxis? Indeed, what can be any foundation for praxis, if every viewpoint is perceived as just as valid as every other? The practical consequences are reactionary.

9. But postmodernism, *by denying the subject*, militates against either a feminist or any kind of multiculturalist approach to history. And because the discovery of historical event and truth is denied except in the form of fiction, then there cannot, in postmodernist terms, be historical study of the social construction of gender concepts, because such a study will have to be as “fictional” as the concepts themselves. “Postmodernist history” is an oxymoron. Or, perhaps a *kind* of history along the lines of Michel Foucault *is* possible—that is, one that denies the necessity of being grounded in evidence because reliance on “evidence” is itself ideologically positivist and therefore not only unnecessary but distorting. (Distorting of *what*?) The self-fulfilling prophecy of history as fiction is thus realized: there is “only the text,” and thus there need be no verifiable research behind it. Research is futile because we cannot know “the thing-in-itself”—that postulation of one of the greatest of our German idealist philosophers. In this light, we may see that Scott’s reasoning is fundamentally circular (as Butterfield might have predicted); but this allows her to gain in stature as a postmodernist because, to postmodernism, *all* reasoning is properly circular. Thus the futility of any intellection, any action, any praxis whatever, although Scott appears erroneously to have believed that a praxis would follow from her postulations. Instead we got Camille Paglia.

This seductive relativizing is determinism with a vengeance, and so the praxis of historical materialism must oppose it, because historical materialism specifically opposes determinisms.

Meanwhile the postmodernist possibility exists of creating vast historical fictions that can be read like novels and may even *be* novels *à la* Simon Schama. This fiction is just as good as history and no less reliable, because nothing can be known or verified anyhow. Perhaps instead of studying history we should devote our higher education to the study of tropes, since there is no history but only tropes (White 1974). On the other hand, it has been remarked that the Holocaust was not “a text,” and historians dealing with Holocaust denial find themselves dealing also with history denial.

Leaving postmodernism aside, any attempt to show a “social construction of reality” in the case of gender attitudes has to relate and detail the complex social and psychic mechanisms by which this “social construction” came about in the period under scrutiny. Since the detailing of past “psychic mechanisms” is a particularly difficult historical task for lack of historical evidence dealing with masses (as opposed to anecdotal and literary evidence), the feminist historian is perforce required to examine the period scrutinized by recourse to “gender theory” generated in the present day, not by recourse to evidence from the period itself. An entire subject is thus retrospectively conjured up—like the heroes and heroines of historical fiction. Hence a reading of the present into the past in any attempt at a feminist viewpoint on history not dealing directly with historical women—and so we reach the circularity of postmodernism by another route.

*Department of Historical Studies*  
*University of Bristol, UK*

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# **The Metatheory of Scientific Revolutions and the History of Biology**

**Mauricio Schoijet**

## ***The metatheory of scientific revolutions and the Darwinian revolution***

The idea of discontinuous conceptual changes as central events in the history of science had already been discussed by several scientists, historians, and philosophers before the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). It was already present, of course in a less elaborated version, in Frederick Engels's preface to the English edition of *Capital* (1996, 33–34). It was supported by Alexander Koyré and Gaston Bachelard, and rejected by Pierre Duhem, Robert Millikan, and Karl Popper. Louis Althusser tried to apply the same idea to the social sciences, almost at the same time as the publication of Kuhn's book. It had a great impact, and might be considered an important event in the history of culture in the twentieth century.

Kuhn deals mostly with the history of astronomy and mechanics, with some pages about chemistry, and practically nothing about biology. The purpose of this article is to review some attempts at applying his ideas, or at rejecting them as not being applicable, to the history of biology, adding some thoughts on the possibility of a generalization of Kuhn's metatheory.

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***The resistance against Darwinism: Non-Darwinian or anti-Darwinian theories of evolution***

Kuhn's book does not mention even once the word "counter-revolution." Any reader might therefore assume that there is only a passive resistance from those members of the scientific community who support the previously dominant theories that gradually become extinguished. The history of science would then be linear, with no possibility of moving backward.

The history of the Darwinian revolution suggests other possibilities. It liquidated the creationist view that all species had existed with no change since the initial moment of divine creation. The theory of evolution by natural selection of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace also had destabilizing effects at the societal level; a struggle between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary approaches was initiated by counterrevolutionary scientists and political and ideological counterrevolutionaries within society as a whole. Within the field of science, counterrevolutionary scientists went beyond passive resistance, following strategies of reevaluation of previously rejected theories, or creation of new ones intended to present the old in new clothes, in order to oppose these theories to the emerging revolutionary theory. If I am correct, the view of a linear history shared by Kuhn and most scientists and historians needs reformulation.

Clarification of the history of theories of evolution requires analysis of two closely related areas: comparative diffusion of the theory of evolution by natural selection and the form taken by the struggle of revolution against counterrevolution. Serious disagreements among historians have arisen on the latter point.

Darwin and Wallace announced their theory of evolution by natural selection in 1858. It met with strong initial resistance. For example, seven hundred members of scientific and medical societies, including sixty-six members of the Royal Society (ten percent of its membership), published in 1864 a statement declaring it impossible that God's word, as expressed in nature, should contradict the Bible (Burkhardt 1974). This resistance softened, however, as Darwinism became conflated with Lamarckism (Moore 1979, 381).

There were three non-Darwinian or anti-Darwinian theories of evolution. The first, by the French naturalist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck (1744–1829), appeared before the natural selection theory, and was that of evolution by adaptation and inheritance of acquired characteristics. The others were the orthogenesis theory of the Swiss Theodor Eimer (1843–1898), published in 1890, and the mutationist theory of the Dutch Hugo De Vries, in 1901.

Orthogenesis rejects natural selection with the argument that nonadaptive changes also appear in the evolution of species. From this, Eimer went on to state that a species might be programmed to change in some given ways. The U.S. philosopher John Dewey was right in calling this theory one of “divine design by installments.” The error of orthogenesis was in not perceiving the evolutionary complexity that often caused adaptive features to be tied to nonadaptive ones.

De Vries suggested a mutationist theory—that sudden changes might happen in a large number of individuals of a given species that would mutate in a simultaneous way. He was misled into this belief by observation of the primrose (*Oenothera*), a family of plants having variously colored flowers with tube-like corollas. This is a hybrid species, therefore one that oscillates between different forms.

#### ***Four versions of Darwinian revolution***

First, the U.S. historian John C. Greene argued that the notion of a scientific revolution is not applicable, as several successive paradigms would have coexisted, such as those of Buffon, Lamarck, and Darwin (Greene 1981). If we consider Lamarckism as an attempt to rescue creationism, or to present it in another form, therefore in radical opposition to Darwinism, this position looks unacceptable.

The second was produced by the historians Gertrude Himmelfarb and Michael Ruse. According to them, Darwinian revolution gained victory in the relatively short time of two or three decades (Himmelfarb 1959; Ruse 1982). Following Robert S. Westman, we might consider it as a form of the “vulgar triumphalism” found in some textbooks, journalistic articles, and college students’ term

papers (1990). In other words, it would be a hagiographic and simplified version of a complex history.

The third is that of the British historian Peter Bowler (1983, 1988). He states that Himmelfarb and Ruse are wrong in that they put forward a mutilated history. According to this author, Darwinism eclipsed around 1890. In other words, the idea of evolution of species prevailed, but the dominant theories were non-Darwinian or anti-Darwinian, that is, Lamarckian, orthogenetic, and later mutational. A revolution did happen, but it was non-Darwinian. Only after the start of genetics with the work of the German biologist August Weismann (1834–1914) and the Czech Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) did the Darwinian revolution, articulated with the science of genetics, finally win. This occurred after the first geneticists perceived the compatibility of genetics with the Darwinian natural selection theory and subsequent development of population genetics in the 1920s. According to Bowler, Darwinism had reached its maximum popularity in the 1870s and 1880s, but declined around 1900, to the point that many of its adversaries thought that it would never recover. Eberhard Dennert published in 1903 a book with the title of *Vom Sterbelager des Darwinismus* (At the Deathbed of Darwinism). A history of biology published by Nordenskjöld in the 1920s mentioned Darwinism as a short-lived phenomenon (Bowler 1988, 15).

The fourth version is that of the German-American biologist Ernst Mayr. He agrees completely with Bowler in his critique of Greene, Himmelfarb, and Ruse about the eclipse of Darwinism, but rejects the idea that the non-Darwinian, anti-Darwinian, or pseudo-Darwinian theories did represent a revolution. On the contrary, they would be a continuation of the fideist and idealist counterrevolution under other forms. Mayr includes Loren Eiseley, Himmelfarb, and Greene in his list of authors who produced the worst distortions of historical truth and misinterpretation of the history of ideas (Mayr 1990). According to Mayr, before the Darwinian revolution the counterrevolution was creationist, but with the rise of Darwinism it changed form and retreated, reappraising the Lamarckism that it had previously rejected, and concocting orthogenesis—theories that allow the survival of divine design

under new forms. The role of the De Vries mutationist theory is less clear.

One factor that favors confusion is the loose way in which the term *Darwinism* is used. Contributing to the confusion, it might be suggested, is the fact that Darwin himself had not stated the radical incompatibility of his theory of natural selection with Lamarckism. I believe, however, that this is part of a more general problem connected with the existence of relativist trends both in the philosophy and the historiography of science.

It seems worthwhile to mention a relativistic attempt by David Hull (1985), who, according to Bowler (1988, 73), considered it impossible to define Darwinism as a coherent ensemble of beliefs, and therefore suggested a social definition of Darwinists as those who claim to be loyal to Darwin as a founder of evolutionism (Hull 1985; cited by Bowler [1988, 73]). Not only does he forget the essential point of Darwin's theory of evolution—that is, natural selection—but he agrees with those who suggest a circular, therefore nonsense, definition of science as what scientists do. It would whitewash such characters as the nefarious charlatan Trofim D. Lysenko, who tried to sell his Lamarckian merchandise with ritual genuflections toward Darwin.

Bowler is absolutely right in asserting that if Kuhn does not claim that the way toward a new paradigm is straight and easy, this case would show that it is more crooked than normally imagined (1983, 12).

The difficulties in characterizing the Darwinian revolution are not accidental. In Greene's case, we might think of a lack of understanding that Darwinism represents a radical break with all previous theories. With Himmelfarb and Ruse, it is not only lack of understanding, but a lack of perception of historical events essential for this understanding. In the case of Bowler, he is a learned and honest historian who gives us a better account of the facts, while he shows himself unable to situate them within a correct conceptual frame. This is not only his problem, but affects other historians, beginning with Kuhn. They see a revolution as a drastic change, but not the role of counterrevolution. In their view, a revolution would only confront passive obstacles, such as

the weight of tradition, but there would be no counterrevolution as an ensemble of active forces capable of developing strategies that include retreats from given positions in order to occupy others defined by new theories or refloated old ones.

I suggest that the roots of counterrevolution in biology—that is, of the opposition to Darwinism—were not only determined by the deadweight of tradition, but by the rise of conservative and racist trends in Europe, the United States, and even Argentina in the second half of the nineteenth century. The conservative trend in politics and ideology was probably connected with a backlash against socialism that followed the working-class rebellion of June 1848 and the Paris Commune in 1871. French intellectuals were overwhelmingly against the Commune. The European conquest of Africa was accompanied by the rise of racist ideologies, including anti-Semitism and “scientific” racism in France and Germany that led to one of the most shameful episodes in the history of anti-Semitism, the Dreyfus affair in 1894.

The trend toward the Right was also apparent in the formation of a protofascist movement in France led by General Georges Boulanger and its attempt at a *coup d'état* in 1886, and in the hysterical way in which the French bourgeoisie, having given up the democratic ideas of the French Revolution, celebrated in 1893 its alliance with czarist Russia, the most backward and barbarous regime of Europe at that time. There was even the case of an important scientist, the German pathologist Rudolf Virchow, who warned explicitly against the danger of Darwinism as a doctrine susceptible to encouraging lower-class radicalism.

*Departamento El Hombre y su Ambiente*  
*Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco*  
*Mexico*

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## MARXIST FORUM

Among those Communist parties politically allied with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Communist Party of Cuba was the first to express its comprehension of the depth of the problems in Soviet and Eastern European parties and the state institutions they had created. At the International Seminar of Communist Parties Marking the 175th Birth Anniversary of Karl Marx held in Calcutta in May 1993, the Cuban representative, politburo member Maria De Los Angeles Gracia, stated, “The idealizing procapitalist ideology of the consumer societies was able to flourish [in the socialist countries] because the existing structures in these countries were rotten to the core.”

As historical information from the former Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries becomes increasingly available, the validity and depth of the Cuban analysis gain greater recognition among Communist parties formerly allied with the CPSU. These parties have generally been hesitant to recognize how pervasive were ideological and structural distortions of the socialist idea in the European socialist countries, in spite of the tremendous gains in living standards, education, and culture experienced by their populations.

In this Marxist Forum, we offer a detailed presentation of the Cuban understanding of why socialism fell in the USSR and Eastern Europe. It is interesting to note that the views presented in the Cuban discussion parallel the conclusions of Moshe Lewin’s

*The Soviet Century*, a review of which also appears in this issue of *NST*.

Another article in the Marxist Forum presents a Marxist critique of the proposed European Union constitution. Although the constitution was rejected in referenda in France and the Netherlands, its proponents are very likely to try again at a later date to push it through. The analysis by Georg Polikeit is thus still timely.

The Marxist Forum article by Nguyen Ngoc Dzung presents a Vietnamese view of changes in the nature of the capitalist system since the time of Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Readers may detect an emphasis on questions that reflect Vietnamese concerns arising from the country's socialist-oriented Marxist economy.

## Cuban Discussion of Why Eastern European Socialism Fell

### Participants:

**Rafael Hernández**, Political scientist; director of *Temas*

**Francisco Brown**, Master of Contemporary History; Center for European Studies

**Ariel Dacal**, Master of Contemporary History; editor, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales

**Julio A. Díaz Vázquez**, Ph.D. in Economic Sciences; professor at Research Center of International Finances (CIEI), University of Havana

**Fernando Rojas**, Licenciante of History; president, National Council of *Casas de Cultura*, 2004

*On the last Thursday of every month, Cuba's TEMAS magazine sponsors a public discussion on themes of general interest. At its June 2004 meeting, several important Cuban researchers and writers on this subject addressed the group. Their discussion lasted over two hours and this is the transcript of their discussion. Audience participants also included the historian Oscar Zanetti and Professor Carlos Alzugaray, who teaches at the Superior Institute for International Relations (ISRI), Cuba's school for training diplomats.*

**Rafael Hernández:** This year it will be fifteen years since the beginning of the end of socialism in Eastern Europe, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was dramatic, due to everything that

transpired afterwards. It was the result of a series of triggering factors with serious consequences.

It would be very difficult to comprehend this phenomenon in all its scope and in each national reality, not only in the USSR, but in different countries, such as the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia, or Albania. The panel will not be able to go deeper into all relevant issues, much less study each national case. Considering that, we want to reflect on all the problems faced by socialism in Europe and in the USSR.

The first question is: Which socialist model was historically used in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe? How could it be described in relation to the events that originated it, and in relation to European revolutionary movements in the first two decades of the twentieth century, where many of those processes had precedents?

**Fernando Rojas:** I will limit myself to the Soviet Union, for now. It is praiseworthy how this type of comparison is made in Rafael's second question. It refers to how those revolutionary processes shaped in first two decades of the twentieth century started to be questioned by Bolshevism early in the 1920s. I stress Bolshevism intentionally, because three periods have to be differentiated. The first, when Bolshevism, as such, starts introducing changes in its own tradition, challenging even the Party's leader. A second stage, when different factions start forming and begin struggling among themselves, ending, as is well known, in the victory of Stalin. And the last time, when it changes—this idea belongs to Trotsky—from the power held by Stalin's faction to the power held by Stalin himself.

All this happens in less than a decade.

In what areas are those changes taking place? I would point out only a few that in my opinion are the most important. At the same time, I will not point out references to historical precedents of these revolutionary projects—the Marxist precedent—because the analysis itself will take us to that.

An area related to the reason behind world revolution, or, to be better situated in the Eurocentric version of many of these movements, the reasoning behind the European revolution. The generalized criteria of all parties, including Lenin, Rosa

Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci (although he came into this movement at a later time, he should be considered part of it), in all parties of the revolutionary Left, formed in 1915—and which later started the Third International—was to acknowledge that the revolution could start in an isolated country, that is, Russia. But no one ever thought that the revolutionary process could be permanent without a revolution in other European states, without the expansion of that process, which had been defined by Marx and especially by Engels, spreading more or less quickly to other countries.

Even Bolshevism's foreign policies and the new Soviet Union always went in that direction. That idea, however, was replaced with the opinion that it was possible to build a national socialism. That idea took hold gradually, not immediately, and it was included in the Soviet Constitution of 1936, with logical consequences for domestic policies and, especially, for foreign policy, for the political parties, for the state, and for the Communist International, which rather ended in representing the interests guaranteeing the national security of the Soviet state.

A second subject relates to socialization—I use this term intentionally—of property, the process of transformation in relations as it refers to property, the production relations in their totality. The Bolsheviks, in the first year of the revolution, tried to implement that quickly, to the point that War Communism, a forced measure introduced because of the pressure of civil war, was even considered a permanent consequence of economic development, to the point that, in December 1920, a decree was being prepared to abolish money. The Council of Commissars was already discussing the first project in that decree.

At the beginning of 1921, Lenin, with the help of Trotsky and Bukharin, advocated a more gradual approach to socialization. In 1922, in the Eleventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party, he stated that the retrocession should be stopped—meaning the forms of privatization, and concessions to foreign countries created by the so called New Economic Policy (NEP)—which could be understood as starting a more rapid development of socialization.

However, a few months later, at the end of 1922 and beginning of 1923, the idea was to achieve socialism through cooperation—literally translated from Russian, although it can be understood as cooperativization. This was not, however, the formula applied at the end of the 1920s, but included different types of cooperatives, with a more gradual conception about progressing to a model in which—as Lenin himself would say—the bourgeois could coexist with state property, and, gradually, become a producer, a worker for socialism. The debates were very intense, but we all know that they ended with something like a revolution from the top down, even using murder and punishment as methods, and quickly turning all Soviet agriculture into cooperatives, and nationalizing, also quickly, all industries. This is another topic where Bolshevism at first, and Stalin’s power later, went against the ideas previously held.

A third topic is democracy in society, in the Party, Soviet democracy. In a recent essay about Rosa Luxemburg, I wrote that the idea of destroying the bourgeois state had nothing in common with creating limitations to all types of democratic expression in Soviet society; that was the opinion of Rosa Luxemburg, and also Lenin.

This way of thinking was substituted by the state of the Soviets, the bureaucratization of the Party, and, as a result, the moment when Stalin established his personal power, arbitrarily, through murder and assassinations, as is well known.

A fourth topic is that of nationalities, which will be very important when we approach the subject of [resolving the national question]. Not much has been said about it, but Lenin definitely opposed the Constitution of the USSR. He used the following phrase, “I advise going back,” writing this the day after the USSR was established. Going back would mean to annul that constitutive action and to go back to the previous situation, when the republics had been declared autonomous.

Pragmatically, and in spite of successive constitutions, in the model established, the Russian center had power over the rest of the nations.

There is a fifth topic, which is perhaps less known. It does not come from the Bolshevik tradition or other parties of the first two

decades, but it is important, because it was Lenin's belief, and, in my opinion, without due recognition. Due to its relevance, and, above all, due to its influence in the formation of a world revolutionary process, it should have been analyzed more closely. He dictates this in his article "Better Fewer, but Better" on 2 March 1923. On 6 March Lenin left work forever, ending up sick and remaining so for the rest of his life, unable to carry out almost any activity. He believed that advanced capitalist countries in Western Europe—please note that he did not mention the United States, which would give way to many hypotheses, but it would take us too long to analyze—will not achieve socialism through a gradual process of maturation in their conditions, but through the exploitation of the nation defeated by war, Germany, and of the entire East. Lenin used the word *East* following the European academic tradition, meaning the entire non-European third world. Even today, when a Russian says East he means Egypt, China, India. Such an idea makes us understand world geopolitics, in the sense that the third world will have a large revolutionary initiative when contemporaneous conditions are appropriate. And this is a subject which has not been heeded as it should, as has been shown after the crisis generated by the Chinese revolution, a few years after this prediction.

**Julio A. Díaz Vásquez:** I think that in the twenty-first century—although many of us will not be here anymore—the reasons for the fall of socialism in Europe will continue to be discussed, and perhaps the archives will be open, which, in my opinion, is a necessary step to delve into the reasons for the failure of this first assault on heaven.

I will talk about the "Classic Socialist Model" (Soviet), which had three big pillars.

The first one was nationalization, or the establishment of social property. Social property was identified—and this is another ongoing debate—with state property.

The second one was the political element of the state, the democracy represented by the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat," that is, a dictatorship by the majority that later, with the evolution of the USSR, was identified as the state of the whole people.

And last, socially, the elimination of exploitation of man by man, guaranteeing housing, health care, education, care of the elderly, etc.

These three pillars would gel in the subordination of the state and the government to the Party on the basis of ideology. In other words, the system sustained itself on ideology, from which it would go to politics, and from there to the economy. This was the model which started, mainly, at the beginning of the 1930s.

Now, state social property was used to sustain an economic model based on central planning, excluding the market, establishing itself in a vertical direction—from the ministry to the enterprise. For example, money, in this model, had a passive role, it had some activity as to distribution, related to workers' salaries, by which they could satisfy their basic needs. From there arose the problem of maintaining the balance between the state budget and the circulating currency. The main problem with this "economic model" was the lack of self-regulating tools, that is, it did not generate ways that could perfect the model itself.

The question would be: Why did it succeed? I think it did because of the events leading to this model, which were the crisis of capitalism and the beginning of accelerated industrialization, which, in a way, was like going back to War Communism."

Every author analyzing the model's limitations always timed it between 1918 and 1920, since in order to develop in a few years—I think Stalin said that "in ten years we can do what capitalism needed hundreds to achieve"—it was necessary to centralize [resources] and put them as a function of industrialization. When this country launched industrialization, it had three conditions for resolving that problem extensively: an abundant workforce, natural resources, and, also—which has not been stressed enough—in the 1920s and 1930s, technological differences between the most developed capitalist centers and the industry (not very big) that was taking hold in the USSR. Let us remember that famous tractor factory sold by Ford to the USSR in 1929, built in Stalingrad, without much difference from the tractors manufactured at that time in the United States. But this model finished before the end of the 1930s.

It is hardly mentioned that already in 1938 a reform in prices was necessary, to correct distortions in the economy, because the sector in charge of the means of production and natural resources was inefficient, causing waste, because the basis of the economic model was to offer natural resources and cheap machines as an incentive to consumption, which ended in low profits for the primary branches of the economy.

I am referring to the importance of taking into account the precedent of War Communism, because this at first started as a political opportunity, something which later was like an experiment that, let us say, could shorten the road to socialism.

But it did not happen, and it had long-term repercussions in the genesis of the model. The genesis of what happened several decades later started there. This was the disease that destroyed it. At the end of the civil war—in my opinion—one-time Bolshevik centers, with large groups of workers in some cities, such as Moscow and Leningrad, were destroyed.

Some of them went to the Red Army, others tried to survive in the rural areas, and those who stayed in the cities had lost all the characteristics shown at the beginning of the revolution.

Then the Party, essentially, replaced all representatives of society, especially the Soviets, and became the guarantor of the revolution. This is the germ of bureaucratization. Additionally, we have the bureaucratic heritage of the czarist state itself, the slow development of productive forces, the low educational level of the population, basically the peasantry. And there was a further element which has been sidestepped, although pointed out by Trotsky: the role played by the demobilization of the Red Army. In 1924 there were nine million soldiers in the Red Army, so that when this was taken apart, the leadership of these armies went to the Party—that is, to the partisan organization, or to the Soviets.

These victors, who became members of other social sectors, had the methods that had made them victors in the civil war. And when that monolithic unity achieved by the Bolsheviks in the work centers was lost, then the Red Army had the real power. All of this had a definite influence in the bureaucratization unleashed later. This “economic model” was energized when preparing for

war in the 1930s. First, the threat of fascism, and reconstruction later, renewed this extensive model. In this way, in the mid-1950s, when the losses had been recovered and the economic and, in a way, social wounds, had been healed, it was found that the model was exhausted.

The lack of a self-regulating mechanism—which, as already noted, was the main reason for its deficiencies—brought about the need to develop another, more dynamic model.

Eugene Varga, a young economist in those times, born in Hungary, but now a Soviet citizen, wrote an article at the end of the 1920s stating that [the possibility of relying on] “contingencies” was exhausted. Lenin came up then and warmly approved Bukharin’s book about the economy in a transition period; however, three months later, Lenin supported the NEP.

Many years later, before he died in 1964 after he had been director of the largest institute of social sciences that the USSR ever had, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Varga wrote that Soviet society, the people, the common man, those who suffer and cry every day, did not have any possibility of surmounting the situation in the country. In my opinion, he was summarizing his experience on the entire development of socialism in the USSR, rather than referring to the attempted change brought about by Nikita Khrushchev as secretary of the Party in all those years, the so-called thaw that in the end did not solve the fundamental problems of that model.

By then, all the conditions for the crisis were already there; it was only a question of time until they would enter the fray and become part of history.

**Ariel Dacal:** A political perspective is vital, in order to analyze the Soviet model and its expansion into Eastern Europe, because the fundamental errors are mainly there.

First, it is necessary to differentiate between Leninism and Stalinism. The Bolshevik revolution took on tremendous challenges. One of the main debates at the time was whether Lenin had forced history, whether he had tried to accelerate the revolutionary process, whether the revolutionary process was utopian or not. The main objective was to find an effective way to achieve those three pillars described by Professor Julio Díaz.

That historical challenge, which consisted of building a new reality in a backward country, was tried through trial and error.

There is a constant thread in Lenin's projections, as they relate to his expectations about the European revolution. The Russian Revolution was, for Lenin, only a prologue to the European revolution, and he died hoping that Europe would raise the socialist flag.

It is important to notice, not a failure in revolutionary forms and projections, but rather, the meaning of Stalinism that marked the socialist model we are analyzing, far from what Lenin intended.

The first characteristic was the excessive upward movement of political decisions.

Bureaucracy—which was mentioned here—was taking over all political decision making in Soviet society, a style which was later taken to other experiences. Not only concepts are structured in this way, but institutions as well.

This new dominant sector starts to formulate the project based on its own interests, joining the Party with the state. The Party, instead of being an ideological entity that guides debate, turned the state into its administrative tool. Instead of ideas, what came down were propositions, concepts, and political directives. A type of militarized Party was the result that was very different—and I want to insist on these elements—from the loyalty and discipline expected by Lenin. He created a disciplined Party, first, due to the historical opportunities in which he had to develop them, to direct, to teach, to educate the working class, not to tame it and subjugate it.

It is a Party with a similar basis, but it operates essentially in a very different way. In his last years, which were very painful, Lenin saw, on the one hand, the challenges for a revolution which lacked the support of European revolutions, after the waves in 1919 and 1923, which gradually subsided, and on the other hand, a group of elements emerging in the crude Russian reality, in politics, in society, in the economy, and which needed new answers.

He classified bureaucracy as a residual element in the revolutionary process, a heritage that could have a definite influence if not caught in time. The figure represented in this sector—and we are not going to exaggerate the role played by figures in history—

was Joseph Stalin, as well as the ideal man to capitalize on leadership and control at the time.

First, he was a Bolshevik from the beginning of the revolution, a man used to obeying and giving orders, symbolizing something that still holds true for the Russian culture today, the idea of the strong man, able to personify and practice the epic spirit of a people.

Stalin, sometimes skillfully and at other times morbidly and even criminally (Stalin physically eliminated his opposition), surrounded himself with loyal individuals, but loyal to him, to the leader, rather than to the idea, to the debate. And something that is vital to any revolutionary process was cut off, the revolutionary debate itself. As Trotsky pointed out, already in the 1930s—and I agree with him on this, in spite of all the personal contradictions he had—a counterrevolutionary process gelled, related to the essence of the Bolshevik project, even acknowledging that this project was not free from contradictions and challenges.

This Stalinist institutionalizing led to an iron control, by a political system formed by politics of the masses strongly manipulated by an official unidirectional ideology coming from the politburo, and supported by a very efficient use of the media. It must be remembered that the last big debate in *Pravda* was in 1923, about prices in agriculture and industry. No serious debates occurred since, until the 1980s, with glasnost already near the collapse. This model had a unilateral, inflexible, strong vision about what building socialism should be like. There was a deadly fusion between the social image, the social psychology of this new subject that was getting involved in the revolution—and history proved that later—between power and truth, because the truth could only come up through the decisions by power.

This mentality, this partial way of seeing life and the revolutionary process itself, harmfully infiltrated all aspects of society. There was not a single aspect in society which was not subordinated, dominated, and subjugated by this concept.

We are referring to the failure of this particular model, which from the beginning was denying any possibility of change. It is true that there were material and cultural elements which evolved,

but its development, in all these years, was not solid enough, but rather counterproductive for the whole system. One of the big achievements of the Soviet period was to make culture accessible to the large illiterate masses, but, because of its authoritarianism, lack of participation, and lack of democracy, in the broadest sense of the term, even if there was cultural development that increased the ability to think and see the world from different perspectives, there were no mechanisms for that culture to flow through different structures of the system.

So that this cultural development, which was echoed in the 1980s, did not become a legitimation process, but one of disengagement and disdain for the basic values they felt identified with at one time.

**Rafael Hernández:** Since we cannot go deeper in all these problems for lack of time, I am going to ask Francisco Brown what are his thoughts about the second subject: how was the crisis foreshadowed? (Some talks have already referred to this aspect.) Also, what were the triggering factors of the collapse, that is, of the model's failure?

**Francisco Brown:** I am going to synthesize what I said in my book *Europa del Este: el colapso* (Eastern Europe: The Collapse), published by the *Editorial de Ciencias Sociales* a few years ago. But before talking about those problems, I want to point out that there is an important difference between Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the USSR, the collapse, or defeat, of socialism was not programmed beforehand, nor seen beforehand from its beginnings. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the germ of the collapse was already present when beginning to build socialism, simply because they had the Stalinist model we have been criticizing here. In the Eastern European countries, we do not have a revolutionary process that emerged from societies' own demands, but socialism was imposed from the outside, in a context of capitalist-Communist confrontation that started in the Cold War, in the years immediately after World War II.

In this model, socialism is such that the people are considered to be small nuts in the gigantic social machine. This is different from Lenin, who conceived socialism as the vital creation of

thousands and millions of people. This model is understood as a process imposed from the top down. Eastern European countries had a double imposition: external, the Soviet Union, which comes out victorious from World War II, and internal, elected politicians who were not the most able to lead the process. As is well known, Communists came out weakened by the fascist occupation of their countries.

In cases such as Poland, for example, the Catholic Church played a very significant role in preserving national identity before the foreign occupation, as did social-democratic and other forces. However, most of these were excluded; some of them had to go into exile, others had to enter the Communist Party, which became the main leading vector in society. It was the imposition of a model, with all the problems and distortions that have been mentioned above.

The double standard is an expression of this phenomenon, as well as the alienation of electoral political processes, which became a formality. You voted to avoid problems, and there was just one candidate to vote for.

**Julio A. Díaz Vázquez:** You voted without entering the booth.

**Francisco Brown:** Exactly. Economic alienation is another symptom—mere producers with norms of consumption; since the legitimacy of the system is questioned from the beginning, it must be legitimized through consumption. It is not a coincidence that at the time of the collapse, these societies had tremendous debts with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Other symptoms are: elements of inertia and passivity in the citizenry, electoral processes by formalism, large deviations and distortions in democracy, psychiatric hospitals for those who disagreed with the official line, because if someone disagreed, he or she was crazy. All these symptoms revealed that the process was deathly ill.

**Rafael Hernández:** About this symptomatic process foretelling the end, who wants to add something to Brown's short list?

**Julio A. Díaz Vázquez:** I just want to add that this model, made in the USSR and Eastern Europe, could not be reformed—it is something I could explain in broad terms: it had to be totally accepted or rejected. Everything Brown mentioned was present

in the USSR. If I were told that now we are dissecting it, like an autopsy of a cadaver, I would say that the possibility of saving it—from my understanding of all the implications—should have been done later by NEP, but NEP went to heck, and right there ended all the possibilities for that model, which had already been born and was ill. Its death, according to better informed and shrewder analysts, was only a question of time.

What has been said over here about Eastern Europe is true, but I also want to stress there were conditions over there for a noncapitalist development. If we analyze the situation after World War II, that whole area had the possibility of a development without a capitalist cycle. But the “Soviet model” was imposed upon them. That’s why the USSR and Eastern Europe should not be put in the same bag, without analyzing those differences. Although this subject is much more complex, I would rather not talk about it now, because it could be a topic for another occasion. Essentially, the time for reform in all these countries was over; at least, that’s what life proved.

**Fernando Rojas:** The cultural deficits pointed out by Ariel and related to the production of a cultural life must also be considered a symptom, because they were growing. They became more serious every decade, at the level of sclerosis in art, in critique, in everything involved in the creation of spiritual life. It is enough to remember what happened in the Academy, the research methods introduced, how social sciences were treated, which was becoming more sclerotic with time.

**Rafael Hernández:** Then you agree with Julio that the crisis could not have been avoided during the 1980s?

**Fernando Rojas:** I want to advance one of my own doubts before talking about this. I am not sure if without forced industrialization, without agricultural cooperatives, and without national unity—and we know how this was achieved—the USSR could have defeated the Nazi army. This problem is a contradiction with the previous analysis. Of course, it cannot be verified; history cannot be repeated in a lab.

Now you analyze the victory over fascism, social economic conditions, and, of course, the military, which made it possible, and the influence of those processes is at the basis of it all. What

means, what methods, what springs were used to get to those conditions? There is an ethical dimension here to the problem that is very important for us to note.

**Rafael Hernández:** Please clarify, Fernando. You mean that the defense of the Soviet Union facing the Nazi invasion would have needed anyway an authoritarian regime like Stalin's?

**Fernando Rojas:** I don't know for sure, but I wonder about that. Industrialization, cooperativization, national unity, Soviet ideas—none of these is exactly related to Stalin's authoritarianism. I think they are different things, although, of course, they are undoubtedly interrelated. It is a very problematic topic for me. About your other question, I think things could have been different in the second half of the 1920s—trying to put it in chronological perspective. Other decisions could have been made when these issues were discussed; all of us have mentioned them somehow, when a direction was taken that finally led to Stalinism. Later, the victory in the war created a propitious climate for a change. Julio is suggesting that it was necessary to make another revolution. Correct. But, as a whole, haven't the events in the 1920s been called a "revolution from the top down"? And what Gorbachev started doing, couldn't that also be called a "revolution from the top down"? This revolution could have been made at the end of the 1950s, when there was talk about a personality cult. And, of course, during the 1980s, although we know the results, awareness was mobilized. That is a factor solid enough to presume that a process of transformation could have been started.

**Francisco Brown:** I would suggest talking more carefully about this topic of irreversibility of historical processes—referring to the assertions by Julio and Rojas—I would not do it so freely and decisively, I would not risk stating that it is irreversible, period. History summarizes itself in man's conscious activities, which give him access to the process, advancing it, delaying it, or deflecting it from its course. The statement that the collapse was irreversible would be valid only during a stage of the socialist revolution. We would have to determine the exact moment when there was no other solution. We should not forget that many dogmas were formed in this context.

**Rafael Hernández:** Dogmas?

**Francisco Brown:** Dogmas. Classical Marxist-Leninist thinkers never talked about a one-party system. Lenin spent all his energies trying to achieve a coalition government, with the involvement of forces that did not want it—just like the bourgeois parties in Cuba that at one time did not want to collaborate with the Revolution, thinking that a revolution in Cuba, ninety miles from the United States, would not last over three months. The dogma replacing polemic with servile obedience was instituted; the dogma that socialism is a society without any contradiction, the dogma of harmonic and proportional development of the national economy. And, in the meantime, reality was working otherwise; an alarming slowdown of economic, scientific, and technological development was taking place; socialism was falling behind capitalism; it was losing in its economic emulation.

There was also the lack of access to leadership by new generations. And Marxist liturgy has to be added to all this, which became a collection of quotes, that is, Marxism's creative character was eliminated. I marveled at that first question. You wondered, Rafael, what kind of socialist model? That would have been a very dangerous question in the 1980s, because the concept of *model* was then considered to be revisionist. Socialism had things everybody had to comply with, and Marxist thought did not accept that every country has to build Marxism around its own conditions, its historical and national characteristics. All these phenomena contributed to the socialist collapse.

**Ariel Dacal:** Some historians say that Trotsky failed because he left an open field for Stalin, that he could not concretize some things, and that he struggled with those contradictions. I was surprised at the power of people's subordination to what the Party represented. During the famous "purges," they would rather rot as human beings than be disloyal to the Party. It was a much more complex psychological process than double standards, which I think are more epidemic. These contradictions involved more than the soul. At a certain moment, Trotsky lived that contradiction, but it was too late, perhaps, when he solved it. I think we must go back to the beginnings of the revolution.

Lenin's big question was to formulate, with his political genius and his responsibility, the historical challenge, who will defeat whom? He knew that they were living together and struggling, a system that was dying and one that was being born, that capitalism had not lived long enough and could not die. The possibility of trying to make socialism live in these conditions was lost. I want to insist that a set way of understanding, doing, and trying politics that prevailed for decades in the USSR was coming to an end.

As to the ability to restore the model, I am in the middle. In the Soviet case, which I know best, I agree with Brown's idea, that it was imposed on the others. Once war was over in Eastern Europe, those models called people's democracies had positive results at the end of the 1940s, when some mobilization was achieved—a valid and interesting term—in that building process. But later, the Stalinist model, riding the tanks, became stronger. It would be very categorical to state that the collapse was irreversible and it was not reformable, although it is also very utopian and passionate to say yes.

Yes, I think that it was possible to achieve a reform, although there were several stages, several opportunities to achieve this. I insist, at the same time, that, given the characteristics of the system, any change could only have been made from the top down. And if we can understand that those who could have access to the channels of political decision making were the result of double standards, of pretenses, or at least of that way of understanding politics, a change was very difficult.

Those leaders did not comply with Lenin's almost urgent demands: the necessity of having learned, honest, and, above all, thinking people, who were the only Communists able to face that historical problem.

Gorbachev summarized a whole generation, although he was not personally responsible for what happened in the USSR, he was the outcome of a system, because he had been traveling that road for a long time, where he had to be docile, repetitious, not creative at all, in Lenin's sense.

Brown talked about the lack of generational relief. That fact allowed the "water to go down the drain in the tub," understanding that the water was socialism and the tub was history's experience.

The generation from the 1930s to the 1980s broke with Stalinism. At that moment, a vacuum arose, and a new generation came that had not practiced anything beyond obedience, obeying orders coming from that “gerontocracy,” which at the same time included a “meritocracy” coming from World War II.

At Andropov’s funeral, only 7 percent of the members of the Political Bureau were under sixty, and over half of them were over seventy. In the Council of Ministers, only 17 percent were under seventy. When they started dying, there was a domino effect, and everybody was dying.

These spaces of power were taken by people like Gorbachev, the visible face in all that generation. These are the same people who are currently ruling capitalist Russia, if that can be called capitalism. To have an idea of the political transvestism suffered by the dominant caste, in 2002: 71 percent of the political Russian elite had belonged to the old regime, as well as 60 percent of the business elite. It was a parasitic caste established during many decades, able to subvert the system, to return to private property, to capitalize their power, that waited for the opportunity in history to disassemble everything, and today they are nothing else but the face of a distorted residual bourgeoisie that had been hidden for a long time.

**Francisco Brown:** About the last issue mentioned by Ariel, this phenomenon of a new political and economic Russian elite is being reproduced equally in the other socialist countries. During the time of so-called real socialism, the dominant elite was recycled—that is why they were involved in, contributed to, and benefited from the collapse.

**Rafael Hernández:** Now we will let the audience speak.

**Carlos Alzugaray:** I want to emphasize a vital problem only to understand what happened, and it is the gross use of deceit and manipulation with political ends of practically all scientific sectors, and in the first place, of course, the social sciences. We all remember textbooks by Kuusinen, Konstantinov, and others, or the five history texts published by the CPSU, all different.

The use of deceit, lies, justification through social sciences, the political changes, inevitably lead to disappointment and delegitimization, beyond economic factors. I agree with Julio,

although I would rather think that four or five times it was possible to carry out reforms.

About Fernando's statements, I rather think that Stalinism appealed to Russian nationalism, the defense of the homeland—World War II was called the Great Patriotic War. But surely, other leaders could have done what Stalin did, and would have mobilized the people to defend against fascism.

Lastly, I agree with the lack of legitimacy of Eastern European regimes pointed out here, but I would like to add something. Although Poland's case was more complex than other countries like Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria, Communists had a role in the antifascist struggle, and they became stronger. They could have been part of coalition governments, although they should not have been the only ones in the government. That was the big mistake in the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Regimes guaranteeing the safety of the Soviet state could have been established, including Communists, perhaps as a political alliance in the government. On the other hand, in many of these countries Communists who had fought were later killed. Rudolf Slansky, secretary general of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, leader of the Slovak national rebellion, was sentenced to death during the Stalinist purges of the 1940s [actually arrested in 1951 and executed in 1952—ed.]. This finished any legitimacy Communist parties could have had at that time, because all of them, including in Poland, were prestigious for having fought fascism.

**Armando Chaguaceda:** Ariel, I think it is necessary to explain better the relation between Leninism and Stalinism. There is a total divorce between them, and Stalinism is presented in a deformed, poor, authoritarian version. However, some authors have pointed to the possibility of finding some political precedents during Lenin's time. In my opinion, socialism committed two main mistakes in the twentieth century.

First, it did not achieve the development of a radically new and superior social organization for production and property. I agree with Professor Julio about the mercantile hybrids that resulted.

The second mistake was related to society's democratic mechanisms of self-regulation. This last one should be debated:

for example, the original idea of dictatorship of the proletariat and democratic centralism. It is analogous to Cuba's 1940 Constitution, which was good, but lacked complementary laws to put it into practice. The same thing happened with the Leninist conception.

It is not possible to separate both approaches radically. It is true that Stalinism was rude and authoritarian and closed debates in *Pravda*, but it is also true that the Kronstadt revolt showed that there was a need for a change in direction. In that sense, democratic debates, like those mentioned by Rosa Luxemburg, would have sent a signal to the political elites that something else was needed. At the same time, discussions about the role of mediation and democratic regulations in regard to representation seem to ignore, or to detract from, the concepts of dictatorship of the proletariat and democratic centralism (or at least, they do not talk about it).

If you are talking about the development of the bourgeoisie as a caste, it is precisely the idea of democratic centralism becoming stagnant in many cases, without building real tools for grassroots to control processes, that allows the lack of regulating mechanisms and grassroots control.

**Desiderio Navarro:** I am very happy with this debate, especially for one reason. Many have mentioned how knowledge about the socialist bloc was passed on, a knowledge which was not only pre-made, but many of the people who went to the Soviet Union accepted that knowledge—that is, enjoyed the advantages of staying in the showcase, looking at only what they could see from there, and communicating it to others. And there was really poverty in the USSR, which unfortunately was not seen by those who stayed inside the showcase. I had the opportunity to come out of the showcase and see it, because there was poverty in the third world—at the level of Africa—when you would go to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, or other places.

Similar to this illusion are explanations you can sometimes hear from people—for example, that socialism collapsed because Gorbachev was a CIA agent, because of treason—a vision that is not Marxist at all. I recall that during that time I tried through different means to break that ideal image of the socialist bloc.

I want to point out some issues. One of them is that there was criticism from the Left.

The apparatus that has been mentioned could not impose itself completely; criticism from the Left did emerge, although it was always silenced or annihilated, even physically, in all countries. But it is important to consider that the processes did have elements for internal rectification. People on the Left in different positions were expelled from the Communist Party, their work was eliminated, and in some cases they had to leave the country.

Such is the case of György Lukács and his involvement in the process in Hungary; Rudolph Bahro in East Germany—just to mention a few names. And it must be acknowledged that, in many cases, criticism was made from within socialism. We must also remember the problems that were criticized even during Lenin's time. Mayakovsky committed suicide, precisely, after all that he had done between 1924 and 1933. He had already criticized all the phenomena we have mentioned here, during that period—corruption, lifestyle, abuse of power, even many that were not written down—all of them appear in Mayakovsky's poetry, which was coming from the Left.

As to the problem of the position of bureaucracy in the system, it is necessary to explain it in terms of class, especially because of the point reached. When you pick a textbook from that era, you see a trick as to the portrayal of the class concept. In classical Marxism, class was determined two ways, by the ownership of the means of production, and by the distribution of the social product. It is described as such even by Lenin. In textbooks, starting at the end of the 1920s, the second element disappears, which points out that the unequal distribution of the social product could result in the formation of a class. And the Party-state-army hierarchy influenced all these processes a great deal.

About the opposition between the model imposed and not imposed, there is a case that breaks this scheme—Yugoslavia, which is very interesting.

Now, talking about the reason for the collapse of socialism, and joining some of the final comments, it should also be questioned

where did it collapse from. When we watch the collapse, we can see all the hierarchies of Communist parties in the current capitalism, as has been mentioned here.

Jerzy Urban, Jaruzelski's spokesman, is paradigmatic, a fierce ideologue until the last minute. He is a multimillionaire today, one of the one hundred wealthiest men in Poland. How really Communist, then, were those Communists? I disagree with Comrade Ariel that there was a bourgeoisie hidden for a long time, always there. It just happens that these processes of "original accumulation" of capital, if you want to call it that, start within socialism itself. Economic capital, cultural capital, a process of concentration even by endogamy, families that start forming one class because of their education and capital (economic, cultural, social), because of their relations with the Western world. After having that concentration and accumulation, the socialist machine became a hindrance for the members of that class, and they realized that they would gain in a transition to capitalism. And they were right. Now it is well known that a change like that one was possible without an apocalypse—that image of socialism collapsing where dignitaries were going to be persecuted and dragged through the streets, but the reverse was true; they could be the winners in the whole thing.

**Hiram Hernández:** My first question, playing with the idea of why real socialism, state socialism, collapsed, would be how come it lasted that long? The second question is fundamentally related to the analysis of power.

**Ariel Dacal:** We are talking about authoritarianism, personality cult—sometimes charismatic, sometimes not—about democracy understood as mass movements, manipulated masses, humans treated as objects, a political system that tries to put people into a unidirectional framework, a militarized party, a police—as George Orwell says—of thought, totalitarianism. My concrete question is, what essential differences can be found between Stalinism and socialist models such as state socialism and fascism?

**Roberto González:** Leon Trotsky predicted in the 1930s that bureaucracy would end up by owning the means of production, and the numbers given confirm that prediction. I agree with Chaguaceda and Desiderio Navarro that a large part of the roots of

the Soviet collapse are in Stalin's crimes and distortions. Without ignoring the differences between Lenin and Stalin, which of course are immense, I wonder whether there were other problems and distortions. Let me illustrate that with two concrete examples. The first one is the concepts used by the Party, questioned by Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky at the beginning of the century, who referred to "constitutionalism," a concept by which the secretary general could substitute for the entire party. The second example is the end of the civil war, certainly a tragic time for Soviet Russia, when Lenin suspended democracy within the Party, banning all factions. It should be remembered, by the way, that he did this with the support of all the Bolshevik leaders, including Trotsky, who later complained about that decision. In his final writings, in 1924, Lenin begins to become aware of all these problems, but those policies remained. Stalin's actions were based on that, with the cooperation of all the Party's leaders, who later, when Lenin died, helped Stalin to hide what has been later metaphorically called "Lenin's testament," where he criticized everybody, and where he proposed eliminating Stalin from the post of secretary general. Stalin convinced the rest of the leaders, so that the other Bolsheviks are also responsible, including Trotsky himself, with all his merits.

My question goes to Fernando Rojas's statements, about industrialization, collectivization, and the defeat of Nazism. I agree with Alzugaray that national mobilization is key for these achievements. Czarist Russia defeated Napoleon, who had, in his historic moment, the most advanced army in Europe, the so-called Grand Army, equivalent to what in the twentieth century would be the Nazi army. Without this mobilization, collectivization and industrialization would not have taken place. Naturally—and this coincides with Navarro—there was a leftist alternative, because the Bolshevik opposition had a solution which was partly stolen by Stalin, applying it, but criminally.

Industrialization and collectivization could have happened in another way. But my question goes further, Soviet bureaucratization, the distortions in the revolution, Stalinism, the collapse, are they not related to the initial Russian backwardness? Could it be that the

“attempt to get to heaven” in Russia, with those conditions, when the Bolsheviks did it, was destined to drag along those unresolved problems?

**Oscar Zanetti:** One of the most controversial moments this afternoon occurred when Julio Díaz Vásquez discarded the possibility of social reforms in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Socialism then was a system, and it is presumed that one of the fundamental and functional principles of all systems is to preserve and reproduce itself, doing it the only possible way in this world, that is, changing. A process that could go from the cynical formula of Prince Salina, in the novel *El Gatopardo*—“it is necessary to change something so that everything continues being the same”—until the revolution.

Now, it should be clarified what changes. First, it must be acknowledged that there were changes—for example, Hungary in the 1980s was different from 1958. The question would be, in what direction, with what forces, to what ends were those changes made? It would have to be weighed whether the structural conditions of that possibility for change agreed with the nature and the scope of necessary change, in order to surmount the level of analysis in the debate.

**Carlota Ams:** My question is related to the fact that the socialist bloc all along was facing a foreign system, the capitalist world. I wonder to what extent facing that, and the necessity to confront a very different economy and society, and to compete with that system, contributed to the collapse of the socialist bloc, dialectically speaking.

**Aurelio Alonso:** I want to start underlining my disagreement with the title of this debate. European socialism did not “collapse.” I think the correct term is “fail.” The other interpretation indicates a reticence to acknowledge that in the system created by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, deep structural distortions were generated and established that were incompatible with the viability of a project to overcome capitalism. And, as a consequence, what happened was reduced to a mainly opportunistic event. I think undoubtedly there were opportunities. Big movements in history always happen because of opportunities, but their motives

deep down never stay at the opportunistic level. As long as we refuse to analyze the failure without prejudices, we will also be obstructing the search for ways toward a viable socialism.

We cannot consolidate socialism by insisting on the fact that socialism in the twentieth century was built on suitable economic and supraeconomic frameworks that have to be saved or recovered from reversal.

Neither do I consider admissible the total rejection of its achievements.

There were considerable achievements that should not be lost in any attempt at reconstruction. But undoubtedly, socialism of the twenty-first century must be reinvented, with a lot of imagination. At the economic level, but also—and perhaps especially—the political and cultural levels, since it is obvious that failure resided in the inability to generate a true democracy, not according to already used models, but starting with the configuration of a system guaranteeing people's involvement in decision making, as leaders, and not only as subjects. [Needed is] a true system of popular power that the October revolutionaries thought they had already found in the Soviet original version, spontaneously born, moreover, from the revolutionary experience, not from the leaders' minds; and as power got institutionalized, it became a vacuum, a caricature.

Therefore, I dare to say that we are living in a decisive era, where critical analysis about experiences that failed as well as those that resisted, internationally and nationally, is strategic.

**Félix Sánchez:** I lived in the USSR at the time of the change from socialism to capitalism. I experienced it in their new Higher School of the Communist Party. In the old section of Moscow, a few blocks from Mayakovsky Square and the Novosloboskaya subway station. It was a privilege. We arrived in 1986, when perestroika was a promise, and I left in 1990, when there were only a few walls standing in the building that we say today has collapsed. We were a big socialist family when I arrived; no one was speaking about models; we were aware we were united by what was essential.

We must acknowledge that that type of socialism died from the inside. The casualties were the masses, those for whom a theory is

valid if they accomplish their dreams, their wishes. The big problem that prevented us from learning from that lesson is precisely here, in the way we are talking today about those countries.

Presumably strengthened, superior relations of production coming apart, people giving away, with less uproar than if a pastry was taken away from them, the means of production that they had “owned,” deserves a more serious analysis.

How would we react if capitalist ideologues were telling us that what’s happening in disastrous capitalist countries—those of the third world—is because they were applying a wrong model? I am sure that we would apply the economic-social concepts with which we learned to classify countries by their essence, and not according to their external characteristics. The fact that those countries collapsed appeared to show that they were the only ones with problems, and the others—Cuba, China, Vietnam—did not have any. This is a happy, but inappropriate, conclusion.

In thinking again about that common structure, one must doubt. “Doubt everything,” said Marx, answering a question by his daughter Jenny about her favorite theme. It is a shame that we have always given more worth to the written word about history by Marx and Engels, often in the heat of a reply, than to their definitions. We see the cracks today in the socialism that collapsed. This dialectic, explaining the development process, could have explained that war with capitalism could not be won by a strategy of delay, of waiting for opportunities.

After so much alienation foisted off to capitalist society, we must acknowledge today that in those socialist societies, people were alienated from the power, the means of production, ideology. They were so far away from those things that they could see from the gates, without even a shot or a barricade, how their societies were turning around one hundred and eighty degrees.

They were not insensitive to that turn. For them, those from “real reality,” the turn was not so big, just a few degrees, and the possibilities for improvement deserved the risk. There was no initiative from the masses to counteract the collapse, because the masses’ initiatives had been diluted into an obedience that was understood as conscious unanimity.

The accuracy or inaccuracy of destructive policies was not questioned, because people had learned a long time ago that decisions coming from organizations on the top must be obeyed by organizations in the bottom (including its constituency).

It was customary that ideas originated in the politburo and came down from there. There was no mechanism for correction from below. There never was.

And when perestroika started tearing apart what was left, they found that same blind obedience to a principle that theoretically should have strengthened the Party, instead of making it weaker. Although the cult of Stalin's personality had demonstrated earlier that, when it comes to Party matters, the militant masses were weaker than the single secretary general, history placed the same rock in front of Lenin's sons.

When we visited the Autonomous Republic of Karelia in the middle of 1990, while Yeltsin continued with his electoral maneuvers, and the secretary of one of those areas requested us, from "the brothers and comrades of the Cuban Communist Party" to tell him everything we thought about his disastrous perestroika, he did not raise his voice to criticize our crudity, the predictions we dared to make even then, but to rebut with an expression, "I agree with you on everything, but on one thing. You talk about our perestroika. It is not like that; it is Gorbachev's perestroika. No one discussed it with me or with the Regional Committee, no one asked me for my opinion. I cannot accept that responsibility."

A shrewd professor of the Higher School of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who gave lectures on international law, told us once, "We have to review many things, comrades. We keep on repeating them, hearing about them, without thinking a lot about them. Why democratic centralism instead of centralized democracy?"

He was neither a revisionist nor a renegade. He was a good man who was hurting because of the course the country was taking, and on seeing that nothing would prop it up, would always ask us to learn from what was happening to them.

**Fernando Rojas:** On talking about the October Revolution, related to Russian history and its relevance, the fact needs to be

mentioned that the Bolsheviks assumed power because they were the best prepared to face the national crisis that had broken out and had to be solved. The Russian population could not bear war and hunger any longer. Those in power at that time did not have any solutions to offer about the crisis. Remember the answer by Lenin and Tsereteli in a session of the Soviet, when the latter stated there was not a party in Russia that could guarantee popular demands. From the last rows of the room the voice of the Bolshevik leader thundered, "There is such a party!"

Fidel summarized in a sentence the response to doubts about the need for revolution, "Lenin cannot be blamed for making a revolution in the old empire of the czars." What happened later, when socialism was built, is something else. Democratic centralism was planned as a consequence of the polemic that divided Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and it was the only issue—which was essential in forming the iron-strong revolutionary organizations that Lenin wanted to form—about which the two factions disagreed when discussing the statutes of the Party in the 1903 Congress. It was about defending the role of the leaders of the Party and its constituency in a popular organization. Lenin mentioned that principle strictly in regard to organizational and disciplinary issues until his death. He would not talk about them either during discussions about strategy and tactics, or for propaganda.

The three crises in the Party's leadership, when Lenin's position was in the minority, were resolved not through democratic centralism, but because the leader threatened to leave the Central Committee and resign. Stalinism made of democratic centralism a permanent principle of the Party and the state.

Lastly, we should not forget that Stalinism perverted the concept of socialism itself, as a society with universal and increasing comfort, freedom, and fairness.

The regime that was proclaimed in 1936 as socialist was very different from the new society planned earlier during decades of struggle and analysis.

**Francisco Brown:** The events in the socialist countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall must be conceptualized. Jaruzelski

himself, the last president of socialist Poland, was saved from going to trial because, with the implementation of martial law in Poland, he prevented the entrance of Soviet troops in the country. Martial law or Soviet occupation was the dilemma of the Polish leadership at that time.

His selection of martial law allowed him to continue collecting a president's pension. So, it is necessary to see the international framework and the framework of every country where those events took place.

**Ariel Dacal:** The socialist alternative needed in the twenty-first century cannot hide in this experience, but it cannot be built if this phenomenon is not analyzed, delved into, and studied. It has been historically the strongest, the most tangible system in the attempt to subvert capitalism, even with the mistakes we have pointed out.

About differences between fascism and Stalinism, I think, with all due respect to those who pointed that out, that Stalinism is a somewhat worn-out dream. In spite of all his mistakes, Stalin made a different and better country, badly industrialized, but industrialized, with people who could not be involved, but at least they had access to culture. Fascism left destruction and chaos. The best example of Soviet legacy—leaving behind theoretical escapades that sometimes make us a little arrogant—is the common people's daily impression; "there was something there that got lost."

That collective sentiment, the idea that something had to be saved from that historical experience, is not there when it comes to fascism.

Another issue is Leninism vs. Stalinism, and the emergence of flaws that originated when the new system was born coming up later. Sometimes we start speaking about the process and we do not think about historical rigor, the responsibility and the risk to try more than one model, a challenge of that magnitude, in the Russian complexity.

Lenin could have wondered, "What did I get myself into?" Nevertheless, the essential difference is that Lenin was entirely an intellectual, a Marxist above all, and Stalin was not. If we make a light review of praxis as it comes to the Party, we will see that

Lenin was always very ambivalent; he never had a final position about the role of the opposition. What was done in the beginning of the Russian Revolution later became a principle. This is the big difference: Stalinism made into a principle the necessity dictated by a circumstance, not only for the Soviet Union, but for the whole world. When Lenin died, Stalin's speech was to raise his own prestige, "We will follow the teachings of the teacher, of the Great Lenin. I am Lenin's continuer." He was trying to build a myth and identify with Lenin. And this hurt the revolutionary movement a lot, not only during the 1920s, but throughout the entire century.

I feel that there is still a lot of passion involved in the analysis of these processes, all over the world. And fifteen years are nothing from the historical point of view, not counting the ideological responsibility. We have been oversaturated with the idea of making the enemy responsible for this failure. But we have been gradually discovering things we had not seen for a long time, although it is still difficult to have a global and integrated view of the Soviet process.

**Julio A. Díaz Vázquez:** Most of the participants talked more about the consequences of the application and functioning of socialism than about the causes of that functioning. I am going to limit myself to the primary question: socialism emerged in a country without the conditions for building it, a country that Marxist thinkers believed was not mature enough for change.

I think that socialism as it is known has not resolved the basic problem, how to create the conditions to go from capitalism, or a developed mercantile society (it does not necessarily have to be capitalist) to a new social form.

That question has not found an answer yet. I share the Marxist principle that whatever replaces capitalism has to be better than what capitalism has given us. In that context, Stalin's geopolitical theories before the war, and those he had later, had great influence on the development of socialism, particularly in Eastern Europe. That was not a consequence, but a cause, and could explain what happened then.

On the other hand, I totally agree with the idea about preparing a Party to come into to power and remain in power, as well as

what has been pointed out today about the essence of exercising that power, which has been excluded from the socialist literature for many reasons—I think, above all, because these issues were implicitly excluded in the model itself.

I wonder why is it that this socialist society has, as we know, shown so much intolerance? The explanation is twofold. First, the political model of a single Party, etc., abrogated the right to interpret society's directives—that is, in the last analysis, it replaced the Soviets. No other institution has been as democratic when originally conceived as the Soviets.

And, it certainly was not a spontaneous creation by the masses, because the first Soviets were formed in Petrograd, responding to call of the Social Democrats, although later they became broader. It was essentially very democratic, because it represented different workers' platforms, and workers voted. The Bolsheviks won the race with that vote to better represent workers or society at that time.

It lost that core. The first questionable issue was the democracy instituted by that Party, which assigned to itself the right to represent all of society, in the name of a class categorized as more progressive. Besides, the economic model was not more efficient. But, as I said before, it was a consequence of the political model; what was a consequence at first, became later the cause. What made it possible to last so long? The special conditions in Russia.

Having an abundant workforce and natural resources made it possible to maintain a model of extensive development for a longer period of time than would have been possible under other circumstances.

Paradoxically, the power that conquered the cosmos, and also exported natural resources, minerals, and gas was the complete opposite of what we would call a developed economy.

I want to mention an experience I had in 1981. Several specialists from an institute of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) were riding home in a car from the airport, returning from a meeting in Warsaw sponsored by the CMEA institute—where I was working in Moscow. Someone in the group asked the institute secretary who was coming back with us, what

had he bought in Poland, and he answered, “some shoes for my grandchildren, because I cannot find them [shoes] in Moscow.” And he added in Russian, what we in Spanish could translate as, “It is impossible to live like that.” This experience indicates that this model did not solve elemental problems at the social level, regardless of conquering the cosmos.

That is why I agree with the ideas that conclude that the “model” could not be reformed.

How were economic reforms attempted? Allowing for monetary-trade relations—that is, giving more freedom to the market—but this is not possible with centralized planning and with this political model. The last goodbye to reforms happened in Czechoslovakia, with the attempt to reverse or reform that model. Czech reformers knew they had to get to the political arena, but the problem is that it was untouchable. And they were not allowed to do it. That is why I stated that cases in Eastern Europe, outside the Soviet Union, should not be treated in the same way.

Yugoslavia’s example, for example, cannot be applied to the reality of the rest of the countries—although all of them ended sinking in the same marsh.

I agree with comrade Carlota that competition with capitalism cannot be excluded from the analysis. But I would give it a broader meaning. The model we are talking about, the “classic socialist Soviet model,” needed an enemy to survive, and if there is not one, it does not work. When the Soviet Union solved its problems with the others, with the border countries, who was to blame for the lack of harvest in 1934, 1935, 1936? The hand of capitalism. Nobody could say anything about the disparities created by the collectivization process. The enemy, of course, had a role in that failure, because it is no secret that the United States did everything it could, as Reagan said, to break socialism. But the economic model was marching towards failure all by itself.

An example of its irrationality is that forty percent of accumulated rubles went to the machine industry, which provided for the construction of machinery, but left other important needs in second place.

I remember a lecture by Academician Agambedian in Moscow in 1985, when he explained the core of the plan they were going to develop with perestroika. There was a plan before perestroika, called “acceleration of the economy.” I was surprised that the lecture of this famous scientist, whom I respected a lot, was completely technocratic. “We have science and technology and other things, but we must change the correlation between what goes for the machine industry and what goes for consumption, because in this way, we only produce 2.5 percent of what we consume.” However, as he explained it, the machinery in the Soviet Union was replaced only every forty years, while in the United States—he gave this data—it was changed between eight and twelve years. How? Modifying proportions, that is a technocratic measure of production, technology, etc., where people were not taken into account at all. German and Hungarian specialists who were present questioned this approach.

I must say that literature and analysis about socialist reforms, as they relate to the political, economic, and social models, are incalculable, but the attempts at reform always ended in failure, because they were partial. If the political structure was to be dismantled, the social order would go into crisis. The political system and economic structure prevented the reform of the economic model. And, in the last analysis, who got hurt? Consumers, the citizens.

Successful socialist reforms in the present, in China and Vietnam for example, and not referring to what is specific in both experiences, confirm that, essentially, processes that started as reforms definitely point to other “socialist models” that have nothing to do with the fabric of “real socialism.”

To conclude, in order to replace capitalism it is necessary to create a model that is more democratic than capitalism, more efficient, really responding to the needs of the people. It is not necessary to make a eulogy to the capitalist showcase in order to do this, but to stress the need of rational consumption, without repeating what that specialist stated, “It is impossible to live like this.”

**Rafael Hernández:** Although this panel has lasted two hours and twenty minutes, it is obvious that the problems mentioned are

much more complex than we can clarify in such a short time. We leave this discussion open, because perhaps it is more important to open our minds to all these problems, instead of arriving at our own conclusions, so that we can study them more deeply. Thanks to everyone for participating.

*Slightly edited from a translation by Maria Montelibre provided by CubaNews (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CubaNews>, editor Walter Lippmann—not to be confused with the fee-based business-oriented newsletter CubaNews). Spanish transcript originally published in TEMAS magazine, no 39–40, October–December 2004 (<http://www.temas.cult.cu>).*

## **A Comment on the Cuban Discussion**

### **Erwin Marquit**

In the preceding Cuban discussion, Francisco Brown makes a rather sweeping statement about the process that led to the emergence of a socialist bloc of states in Eastern Europe:

In the Eastern European countries, we do not have a revolutionary process that emerged from societies' own demands, but socialism was imposed from the outside, in a context of capitalist-Communist confrontation that started in the Cold War, in the years immediately after World War II. (253)

It is worthwhile to outline briefly here the varied ways these Eastern European countries entered the socialist path.

The Communist-led guerrillas of Albania and Yugoslavia had essentially liberated their countries from German occupation in the face of the Soviet advance. In essence, they constituted the only existing political force that could take the reins of government in the wake of the collapse of the German occupation. It would not

have been easy for the Soviet Army to install a different ruling body, even if it had wished to do so.

In Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party led the only organized underground resistance to the German occupation. Upon liberating Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union reinstalled the London-based bourgeois-democratic Czechoslovakian government-in-exile under President Edvard Beneš, with whom it had maintained friendly relations. In the first postwar elections, the Communist Party received 38.7 percent of the vote, more than any other party. The Communist leader, Klement Gottwald, became prime minister, leading a coalition national-unity government with a council of ministers in which the respective parties were represented proportionally. In 1948, the bourgeois parties attempted to bring down the government before a meeting of the trade-union congress that was to call for the nationalization of industry. The bourgeois parties planned to precipitate a government crisis by having the majority of the ministers resign at once. They counted on the support of the social-democratic ministers; the left-wing social-democratic ministers, however, refused to resign. As a result, a majority of ministers remained at their posts and the crisis was averted. In *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938–1948*, Josef Korbel, Beneš's former ambassador to Yugoslavia (and father of Madeline Albright), admits that the Soviet Army played no role in the events of 1948. He was so adamantly opposed to prospect of the adoption of a call for nationalization by the trade-union congress that he justifies the use of a spurious issue to precipitate the government crisis. He even bemoans the fact that the bourgeois politicians failed in their attempt to find a prominent military figure willing to carry out a coup. The resigned ministers were replaced, and the trade-union congress issued the call for nationalization of industry, which was then implemented by the elected Czech parliament. The transition to a socialist economy in Czechoslovakia thus took place by strictly parliamentary means.

Nor can Bulgaria's transition to socialism be attributed to imposition by the Soviet Union. During World War II, the Bulgarian government allied itself with Germany and, after Pearl Harbor, declared war on Great Britain and the United States (but not on

the Soviet Union). Czar Boris III feared that the population would rise against him were he to do so, because the Bulgarian people were Russophiles, grateful for the Russian liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman rule in 1878. During the war, the Communist Party played the leading role in organizing a guerrilla resistance force of 10,000, the largest in any country allied with Germany. In 1943, the Fatherland Front was formed to unite the Communists, the socialist, the left agrarians, and the antifascist bourgeois political groups. When the Soviet Army entered Bulgaria in 1944, popular sentiment strongly supported the transfer of power to the Fatherland Front. The Communist Party remained the leading group. A strong case can be made that the initial Soviet occupation helped, rather than imposed, the choice of a socialist course in Bulgaria.

In the other countries allied with the Nazis—Romania and Hungary—it is clear that the Soviet occupation shaped the post-war political developments. The Soviet Union created a socialist country in the eastern part of occupied Germany (the German Democratic Republic), in response to the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany by the United States and its Western allies.

Poland's path to socialism was certainly facilitated by the Soviet liberation of Poland and the installation of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PCNL), in which the Communists, allied with social democrats, played the leading role. The principal opposition to the Polish Committee of National Liberation came from forces associated with the London-based government in exile. Keeping in mind the semifascist character of the prewar government (known as the "colonels") that had set up the government in exile, one could not expect the postwar process to unfold along parliamentary lines, so that support of any political force by the Soviet Union would be decisive. Prewar Poland was largely agricultural, with a large landless peasantry and only about two million people employed out of a population of some thirty-five million. The ratification of the land reform initiated by the PCNL and opposed by the London government-in-exile became the basis for the PCNL appeal for peasant support in the 1946

referendum that was to determine the future course of political-economic development. It is clear, however, that whoever counted the votes would win the referendum.

All the Eastern European countries adopted the Soviet centralized economic planning model. Subsequently, Yugoslavia and Albania went their own ways. Until the 1980s, the Soviet Union prevented any attempt in the other countries to abandon or fundamentally modify the Soviet model, although Poland, after initial Soviet resistance, was able to gain Soviet tolerance for continuing an agricultural system based on privately owned farming.

In Warsaw, I had occasion to read the summary by the Polish cultural attaché in Beijing of Mao Zedong's famous "hundred flowers" speech. In an unpublished section of this March 1957 speech, Mao alluded to the fiercely anti-Communist outburst in Hungary and the more limited disturbance in the Polish city of Poznan in the previous year. According to Mao, the socialist systems in China and Russia were stronger than those of Eastern Europe because in the former, the people fought for their revolutions, while in the latter, socialism was handed to the people on a platter. This assessment is rather different from being initially "imposed from the outside."

The comment by Poland's Wladislaw Gomulka is more accurate: At the end of World War II, the states of what were to become the "people's democracies" were lying in the street; they went to whoever picked them up first.

# **The EU Constitution: Transforming the European Union into a Great World Power**

**Georg Polikeit**

“Constitutional questions are power questions.” This ancient maxim of the workers’ movement, worded for the first time by Ferdinand Lassalle, founder of the General Union of German Workers, has a double meaning. On the one hand, constitutions set out specific rules concerning the construction and structure of state power and its relationship with the people. On the other hand, and more importantly, constitutions are an expression of the already existing power relations and of social power, in particular of the economic power relations, which, through the constitution, are translated and fixed into a juridical form.

Concerning the European Union (EU) constitution, then, we must ask ourselves: on what economic and social power relations is it grounded?

They are undoubtedly capitalist relations. More precisely, they are the power relations that characterize the present stage of capitalist development—that is, the stage of globalized monopolistic capitalism, after the demise of the countries of “real socialism,” which had stood for capitalism’s counterweight in international political relations. The real power relations that find their juridical form in the EU constitution are determined by the economic power of the big transnational enterprises that are active in the European Union and by the interests of financial capital with legal offices in Europe.

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**Why a “constitution”?**

After its publication, the draft of the constitution for Europe met with different assessments, including on the Left. Some have interpreted it as a step toward a greater democracy and even as a break with the unilaterally neoliberal tendencies of the old EU treaties.

In my view, such assessments can only stem from mistaking for reality the nice words that can usually be found in the constitutions of the capitalist states. Anyone who has retained a critical stance toward the present should question the possibility of such a sudden democratic thrust in that same European Union whose specific features on a European scale have been war politics, right-wing politics, and the destruction of the social state.

Why have its sponsors chosen the notion of “constitution”? Why has the text of the new treaty not been called simply a “treaty,” as has been the case in the past? The use of the term “constitution” is certainly not accidental.

It is commonly accepted that constitutions are the founding document of states. This is exactly the intention of the sponsors of the European constitution. They want to further the *de facto* process that began a long time ago of building a European supranational state. But they also want to give a juridical form to the founding of a European state. People must get used to the fact that operating in the European Union are political power-holding institutions that can make decisions at the central level—that is, institutions with a state character that will subordinate to themselves, even more than in the past, the national states that up to now have been sovereign also from a formal point of view. This case is similar to that of the individual states of the United States and of the German *Länder* in relation to their respective central institutions.

Not by chance, article I-6 reads: “The constitution, and law adopted by the institutions of the Union in exercising competences conferred on it, shall have primacy over the law of the Member States.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, we are witnessing the birth of a European superstate with typical internal as well as external state functions.

This is true, in my opinion, even if this state is still at an embryonic stage and even if the character of a “confederation of states” prevails in certain sectors. Certain typical state prerogatives have

not yet been transferred to the EU state or have been transferred only to a limited extent. For example, an autonomous right to taxation is still lacking. But the situation in this field can certainly change in the future.

***When does a state become a state?***

The objection could be made that the state character of the EU indicated here is overstated. According to this point of view, the definition of “constitution” is contentious because this document has not been the product of a democratically elected constituent assembly and because, in most countries, it will not be ratified by popular referenda.

It is certainly right to stress that this “constitution” has not been democratically legitimized. But this is an aspect that the EU constitution has in common with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. This latter too was not written by a constituent assembly and has not been ratified by a referendum. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany was imposed by the Western occupation forces in a way completely similar to the draft of the EU constitution—that is, through a “convention.” This should be kept in mind.

But starting from what point does a political structure become a state? States also existed in antiquity and the Middle Ages. State violence was carried out also under the first German empire and under the fascist dictatorship. The definition of “state” thus cannot depend upon compliance with certain democratic procedures.

It seems to me undisputable that with the EU constitution, real political decision-making prerogatives have been transferred from the national states to the central institutions of the EU, and that these prerogatives have been formalized in terms of constitutional rights even more than in the past. This result was exactly the intention of the promoters of the constitutional process.

***A European straitjacket for many sectors***

According to the constitution (article I-12), in the future there will be sectors with exclusive EU competence, sectors with a competing competence between the EU and the Member States,

and sectors where the states will retain exclusive competence even though the European Union can carry out coordinating measures. In all sectors where the EU has its own competences, the EU institutions can pass juridical acts that are binding for all the Member States in the form of European laws, European framework laws, European regulations, and European decisions (article I-33). These institutions can also control and promote the enforcement of these laws, if necessary through sanctions.

According to article I-13, the Union shall have “exclusive competence” for the “establishing of the competition rules necessary for the functioning of the internal market,” of the monetary policy, of the common commercial policy, and of the custom union. Also, the Member States shall have competence to “coordinate their economic and employment policies” (article I-12.3), and “to define and implement a common foreign and security policy” (article I-12.4), including the military policy ensuing from it (articles I-12.4 and I-16).

The definition of “competition rules” for the internal market does not concern only the functioning of the internal market. This drafting hides fundamental guidelines of economic policy. Many European directives have been approved also in the past that, by pretending to regulate the internal market and to “protect free competition,” have promoted, for example, the liquidation of the so-called “state monopolies” and thus fostered, more generally, privatization on a European scale of enterprises and public services. This frontal attack against the social state came into being after the Second World War in many European states, and its structure encompassed important sectors of state ownership.

The Member States can certainly continue to carry out their own autonomous foreign policy, but article I-16.2 obliges them to “actively and unreservedly support” the guidelines of the common foreign policy and to “refrain from action contrary to the Union’s interests or likely to impair its effectiveness.” This means that the fundamental foreign policy decisions will be taken at a European level, and therefore the position of a European Minister of Foreign Affairs has been created.

Among the sectors where the EU has “exclusive competence,” the European Central Bank (with its accompanying European System of Central Banks) deserves specific mention. Its status as an absolutely independent institution has been adopted unconditionally by the EU constitution. This “exclusive competence” has thus been raised to the status of a constitutional norm. The European Central Bank (ECB) has exclusive competence to “define and implement the Union’s monetary policy,” to “conduct the monetary policy of the Union,” to “conduct foreign exchange operations,” and to “hold and manage the official foreign reserves of the Member States” (article I-30 and III-185). It also has great financial power. Article III-188 states explicitly that neither the ECB nor any members of its decision-making bodies can seek or take instructions from other institutions, such as the European Parliament or the national parliaments and governments. Thus, the ECB eludes any democratic decision and control. The members of its decision-making institutions are appointed exclusively by the heads of states or governments (article III-382.2). It is explicitly provided that they must be “persons of recognized standing and professional experience in monetary or banking matters”—that is, they must come from the dominant financial circles.

The Member States have the power to legislate in those areas in which the constitution confers on the Union a competence shared with the Member States, but only “to the extent that the Union has not exercised, or has decided to cease exercising, its competence.” Thus, in this case too, the EU has priority in making decisions.

The above applies also to the cooperation between the police forces and the judicial forces, the right of immigration and asylum, border controls, agriculture and fisheries, energy, certain sectors of social policy, regional policy, environmental policies, research and technology policy, aerospace, and many more sectors.

### ***Concentration and centralization of political power***

The “sharing of competences” set out by the EU constitution shows that the prerogatives and the decision-making power of the EU institutions have a wide range. I do not believe,

therefore, that much significance should be attached to the question of whether the EU will evolve in the coming years toward a “confederation of states” or toward a “federal state” that, as indicated by the German minister of foreign affairs Fischer in his May 2000 speech in Berlin, is the aim of German foreign policy. In any case, what is taking place is a process of concentration and centralization of political power in the central institutions of the EU.

The shifting of important decisions from the level of the national states to a supranational level, which is even more distant from the citizens, means that the citizens are actually even more deprived of the possibility of being heard. For the grass roots of the democratic movements, including the organizations of the workers’ movement, the conditions of struggle do not improve but worsen even further. Any Member State that might decide, on the basis of specific internal power relations, to step out of line would meet with heavy political and financial fines. Due to the economic interconnection, it would be possible to break out of this straitjacket only at the cost of heavy repercussions.

***What is the state of fundamental rights?***

Some object that the EU constitution, while not changing the existing power relation, does set out, in the chapter on the values and objectives of the Union and in the Chart of Fundamental Rights, a number of fundamental values and rights whose importance it would be wrong to minimize.

True, in these chapters one can find some formulations with a humanist and pacifist bearing. They are sometimes even rather advanced for a bourgeois-democratic constitution.

Among these, we can find the prohibition of the death penalty (article II-62) and of the “reproductive cloning of human beings” (article II-63). But there is no prohibition of the cloning of animals and plants. In these cases, the interests of valorization and commerce have prevailed over ethics. The *right to conscientious objection* (article II-70.2) and the prohibition of “*any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or*

any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation” (article II-81.2) should also be mentioned.

Article II-88 even mentions the right to take collective action. Upon closer consideration, however, we see that this right to strike is subject to many restrictions. This right, in fact, is explicitly limited to *conflicts of interest of a social nature*; it is not couched in general terms and thus it does not include conflicts of a political nature. Moreover, the right to strike is mentioned together with the entrepreneurs’ right to impose lockouts. It is literally stated that “workers and employers” have “*the right . . . , in cases of conflicts of interest, to take collective action to defend their interests, including strike action.*”

Moreover, the EU constitution goes no further than the usual list of fundamental rights that can be found in bourgeois constitutions. Missing are fundamental social rights such as *the right to work, the right to a home, the right to social security, and the right to a minimum income.*

In their place, we find a whole series of passages full of subterfuges and juridical traps. Instead of the right to work, it is stated that everybody has the “*right to engage in work*” (article II-75.1). It rings almost like a “right to work” but actually it has nothing to do with the right to a labor place. This wording could even be interpreted in the sense that, in case of strike, the strike-breakers would have the right to “engage in work.”

### ***Neoliberalist capitalism as a constitutional principle***

Contrary to the lack of fundamental social rights, the freedom to conduct a business and the right to own property—including the right to bequeath it—are raised to the status of universally valid “rights of the European Union” (articles II-76 and II-77).

In the constitution of the German Federal Republic it is written that, in principle, ownership is tied to the “general welfare” and that it can be transformed into common property “for social objectives” (articles 14 and 15). Similar, and sometimes even more advanced, wordings can be found in many other European constitutions. These formulations were born

of the awareness, developed by the antifascist forces at the end of the Second World War, of the nexus between imperialist capital and fascism.

The EU constitution is much less advanced. It implies the dodging and the de facto repeal of the corresponding norms in the national constitutions. According to article II-77 of the EU constitution, no one can be deprived of his or her possessions, except in extremely rare cases and under exceptional circumstances. In the EU constitution it is not possible to find any mention of “social restrictions” to ownership, of “common property,” or of “socialization,” not even in terms of pure possibility.

On the other hand, the constitution repeatedly refers to an economic order defined in one passage as “*a highly competitive social market economy*” (article I-3.3) and in another passage as an “*open market economy with free competition*,” without any mention of the term “social” (articles III-177, III-178, III-185).

This is not simply a reference to a factual situation consistent with the basic neoliberal orientation of the old EU treaties. Rather, in the constitutional text, the “market economy” is given the status of a fundamental order in accordance with the constitution itself.

If needed, this phrasing could be interpreted as a general prohibition of the pursuit of a different socioeconomic order. Those who recall the subtle virtuosity of the ruling that in 1956 outlawed the German Communist Party and of the rulings on the ban on public employment [*Berufsverbot*] in the 1970s know very well that “trusted” jurists could extract from these formulations a generalized ban on socialism.

A fundamental and extremely important drawback of the draft constitution is the absence of any positive reference to the struggle of the European peoples against fascism. This is particularly striking in the light of the great number of “fundamental rights” mentioned in the text. Those who want to govern Europe together with the Italian neofascists disguised as the “democrats” of the Berlusconi government and with Haider and company in Austria, those for whom it is unproblematic to form coalitions with right-wing extremists, obviously cannot accept inclusion of antifascism among the fundamental rights of the EU constitution.

It should also be added that, as in the case of all other constitutions born under the ruling of capitalist relations, it is legitimate to question the real, concrete value of the “fundamental democratic rights” and of the “fundamental freedoms” included in the constitution. In the past years, socialists and communists, critics of globalization, and peace campaigners have had the opportunity to experience the real force of those principles. The characteristic feature of all bourgeois states is the abyss separating the text of the constitution from its translation into reality.

This does not imply subscribing to constitutional nihilism. In reality, within the context of capitalist relations, constitutional rights can be valuable as starting points for, or factors supporting, political and social movements. In this sense, the democratic forces of the Left will be able to use the “rights” set out by the constitution when it comes into effect, or even defend them against future reactionary attacks. But from an abstract point of view, without the decisive factor of extraparlimentary struggle, these rights remain only a nice facade that hides the real relations.

#### ***Military policy with global policy aims***

The EU military policy is a particularly negative aspect of the draft constitution that deserves mention. The main points can be summarized as follows:

- According to the constitution, not only the “common foreign policy” but also the “common security and defense policy” become compulsory. True, “some Member States” are accorded a particular status. But all the other states are under the obligation to take part in the military policy of the EU. In this way, the basis is laid for a further militarization of the EU, for the building of a “military Union” with global reach.

- Article I-41.1 considers explicitly military “missions” outside the Union as consistent with the constitution. A mandate consistent with international law for the performance of such “missions,” such as a mandate of the UN, is not considered to be an indispensable condition. This is contrary to the prohibition

against making wars of aggression, as in article 26 of the German constitution and as in the UN Charter.

- According to article I-41.4, the decisions to intervene militarily are adopted by the Council of Ministers—that is, by the heads of state and of government. These decisions are not subject to any binding vote of the European Parliament. According to article I-41.8, as far as military policy is concerned, the Parliament has only the right to be “regularly consulted on the main aspects and basic choices of the common security and defense policy” and “shall be kept informed of how it evolves.”

- The Member States are explicitly obliged, on the basis of article I-41.3, “progressively to improve their military capabilities.” The constitution thus enforces further rearmament. To this end, a European armament, research, and military capabilities agency will be established with an institutional status. The precursor of this agency is the European Defence Agency. According to a communiqué of the general secretary of the EU,<sup>2</sup> its task is to “identify . . . future operational [military] requirements of the EU,” to “verify” that the requirements for the implementation of those capacities are satisfied by the Member States, and to promote the “harmonization of military endowments” by directing and coordinating the European military industry.

- The draft constitution allows for the intervention of EU combat forces also within the EU, on the territories of the Member States. In this connection, article I-43 states that the EU “shall mobilize all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States” in order to “assist a Member State in its territory” in case of a “terrorist threat.”

- Articles I-41.6, I-41.7, and III-309 envisage a closer “structured cooperation” in the military and armaments fields by a restricted group of states of the EU “whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions.” In other words, the constitution envisages the formation of a “hard nucleus” of the best armed states of the EU that are ready to bring military actions to their conclusion in an

independent way in any part of the world, even if the rest of the Member States do not participate in them.

***From a “world secondary power” to a “center of global power”***

At this point, a logical question arises: why, at this historical juncture, does the constitution envisage building a supranational state with such internal centralization of power and with the aims of global politics that have just been outlined?

I think the answer should be sought in the changed world economic and political conditions that have occurred beginning with the mid-1980s within the context of the globalization that followed the liquidation of the socialist European states in 1989–1990.

The EU supranational state is useful for two reasons. In the first place, it fosters the economic and political processes of restructuring in the enlarged EU in the interest of the dominant capitalist groups, and it makes possible their defense against any present or future opposition. Second, it represents and defends the global political interests of the large firms and financial groups operating from Europe.

The strategic objective of the EU for the present decade is to become an autonomous world imperialist power capable of operating on a global level side by side, or at least on an equal footing with, the United States, as has been recently stated by EU functionaries.

This agrees with the economic-policy goals set out at the EU summit in the so-called Lisbon Agenda on 23–24 March 2000. The concluding document of this meeting reads: “*Today, the Union has set itself a new strategic objective for the next decennium: the objective of making of the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic space of the world.*”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the leading politicians officially pursue the objective of overtaking the United States by 2010 in terms of “economic dynamism” and of making the EU the world’s greatest economic power.

It is therefore not by chance that, for a long time now, the language of the official statements of the most prominent EU politicians has made use of the concept of “global player” to define the role the EU has envisaged for itself.

As far back as 1998, Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, in his function as the EU rotating president, declared that “nowadays, the basic challenge is the transformation of Europe from a world secondary power to a center of global power.”<sup>4</sup>

In the framework financial program of the EU Commission for 2007–2013, published in February 2004, we find a section entitled “The EU as a Global Player.” Here we read, “In the face of fundamental threats—terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and failed states, internal and regional conflict—the EU has to operate in its region, at the level of the international order and at the level of frontline action beyond its borders.”<sup>6</sup>

### *The contradictory relation with the United States*

This strategic objective of the EU clashes with the official doctrine of the dominant circles in the United States. As is well known, this doctrine envisages a unipolar world order dominated by the United States as the only world power.

It is thus very likely that in the coming years new contrasts and rivalries will keep emerging between the EU and the United States. These conflicts can take on even sharper forms than the present ones to the extent that the crisis of the capitalist system worsens.

At the same time, the EU and the United States also have important common interests. They are the basis for compromises and for common initiatives in world politics. The common interest of the EU and United States financial oligarchies consists mostly in safeguarding the present world capitalist system as a whole and in the exploitation of the world by a number of imperialist metropolises against all those opposing forces that may arise for one reason or another. The EU is an integral part of the present imperialist “world order,” while at the same time, within it, representing the interests of an autonomous block of imperialist powers.

Some prominent EU politicians have even motivated the construction of the European Union as an autonomous imperialist center of power in terms of the need to preserve a “multilateral world order.” The Left and the peace movement today cannot agree on whether an evolution of the EU in this direction can play a positive role as a balancing factor in relation to U.S. imperialism.

However, in the light of an objective analysis, such a hope or expectation cannot but reveal its illusoriness. The EU is moved, just like the United State, by imperialist motives of domination and intervention on a global scale. The choice between an imperialist world order exclusively dominated by the United States and one dominated also by the EU is a senseless alternative. A world jointly exploited by the United States and by the UE is no better than a world dominated exclusively by U.S. imperialism. The fundamental nature of the EU, which is oriented towards capital's interest, is the reason why it would be deceptive to expect that, in the absence of a radical reversal in the power relations that are its social characteristic feature, the EU could play a positive role for peace, democracy, and progress in opposition to the policy of world domination of the United States.

***Which alternative?***

The question, then, revolves around an advisable and progressive alternative to the present-day EU. On this point, also, there are many debates.

Could a resumption of the "sovereign" national states, as they existed before EU came into existence, be a solution? This alternative would essentially entail going back to the imperialist national states of the past, and cannot be considered progressive. Moreover, the integration of the states of the European Union has created economic realities which cannot be brought back to their previous stage.

It is a fact that, in the present political situation, new grounds emerge for political and social conflicts and for class struggle, thanks to the construction of the EU as a center of power and as an imperialist supranational complex structure. This terrain cannot be ignored by progressive anticapitalist and anti-imperialist forces. Just as it is mandatory to fight in order to limit, contain, and ultimately prevail over the power of the large capitalist firms and banks within the context of the national states, for an essentially different policy on a European scale similarly oriented not toward the interests of capital but toward those of the great majority of humanity, a progressive alternative to the present

development of the EU can only be the struggle for “another Europe.”

“Another Europe,” a Europe of peace and cooperation based on solidarity and social progress among peoples on an equal footing, does not imply another constitutional treaty or a treaty on a different base. This too is needed. But what is needed, to begin with, is a fundamental change in the power relations both in the individual national states and on the European level. Only in this way is it possible to develop a fundamentally different political orientation for European cooperation and thus to draw up new treaties regulating the relations among peoples and governments on an equal footing.

The concrete contents of another Europe, as they are discussed and elaborated in the antiglobalization movements, social forums, the peace movement, the trade unions, and other movements, are inevitably in fundamental conflict with the economic and political interests of the dominant circles of European capital. This is why all the hypotheses based on a “gradual” correction and a “development forward” of present-day Europe through individual reforms are unrealistic. They do not take into consideration the real present-day opposition between the fundamental economic and political interests of the majority of the population on the one hand and the interests of the dominant capitalist circles on the other. “Another Europe,” as hoped for by the great majority of the people—that is, corresponding to the demands of the peace movements and of the social movements—requires a radical break with the European Union as it has developed up to now. It requires a complete reconfiguration of social life on a radically different sociopolitical, and thus also juridical, basis.

Finally, it cannot be forgotten that Europe can become a bearer of peace, of cooperation among equals, of social, ecological and democratic progress, and of civilization, only with the supersession of the boundaries imposed by the interests of those who hold power over the present capitalist economic and political relations. Therefore, the question of an alternative of progress to the EU is inextricably bound to the question of a radically different economic order, to the objective of an economic and social system really moving toward the common good and based on

social common property; in short, this alternative corresponds to the notion of socialism. A real European unity, corresponding to the teachings of European history, to the ideals of the progressive and humanistic traditions of European thought, to the traditions of the workers' movements, and to the interests of the majority of the peoples in the whole of Europe—this kind of European unity can be conceived only if grounded in such a new social basis.

Under the given circumstances, the present objective in the struggle for “another Europe” can only lie in the unity of the oppositional forces and in the development of opposition movements, through the strengthening of the resistance against the present antisocial and imperialist policy of the European Union. Only in this way can different social and political power relations emerge in Europe.

Presented at the international conference, “Superpower Europe: Communists, Democracy, and Europe,” Rome, 29 January 2005.

*Georg Polikeit is a professional journalist living in Wuppertal, Germany. He is a member of the Marx-Engels-Stiftung. He is editor of the newspaper of the German Communist Party (DKP), Unsere Zeit (UZ). He publishes regularly articles in UZ, in Marxistische Blätter, and other journals, mainly concerning questions of European policy.*

#### NOTES

1. References to articles of the constitution have been updated in accordance with the text published in the official journal of the EU on 12 December 2004.

2. See statement by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy on Defence Matters, Brussels, 17 November 2003, Press Release SO234/03, Annex 1.

3. Conclusions of the Presidency of the European Council (Lisbon).

4. Draft Declaration of the President of the European Council, Wolfgang Schässel, on the occasion of the informal meeting of the EU heads of states and governments, Pörtlach, 24 October 1998.

6. Building Our Common Future: Policy Challenges and Budgetary Means of the Enlarged Union, 2007–2013, Communication of the Commission to the Council and European Parliament, Brussels, 26 February 2004, COM(2004) 101 final 2.

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\*                      \*                      \*

**Jan. 4/5.** Departure from U.S. cities. Westward crossing of International Date Line.

**Jan. 6.                      HANOI**

*Morning:* Arrival in Hanoi. Transfer to hotel.

*Afternoon:* Tour Hanoi. Temple of Literature, Ngoc Son Temple, the 36 streets of Ha Noi.

**Jan. 7.                      HANOI—MAI CHAU—HOA BINH**

*Morning:* Leave for Mai Chau valley, noted for breathtaking scenery. Visit villages of Thai peoples.

*Afternoon:* Continue visit to Mai Chau valley. Travel to Hoa Binh: Evening cultural performance by local minority peoples.

**Jan 8.                      HOA BINH**

*Morning:* Boat cruise on the Da reservoir built for the generation of hydroelectric power, irrigation, aquaculture and water regulation. Visit villages of Da and Muong minority peoples.

*Afternoon:* Return to Hanoi.

**Jan. 9.                      HANOI**

*Morning and Afternoon:* Conference at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy or alternative activities.

**Jan. 10.                      HANOI**

*Morning and Afternoon:* Conference at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy or alternative activities.

**Jan. 11.                      HANOI**

*Morning:* Conference at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy (conclusion) or alternative activities.

*Afternoon:* Meet with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor and the Vietnam Women's Union.

**Jan. 12. HANOI—HAI DUONG—HA LONG**

*Morning:* Visit Bat Trang Pottery Village. Visit Ford Vietnam in Hai Duong.

*Afternoon:* Depart for Ha Long. Overnight at Bai Chay Beach in Ha Long.

**Jan. 13. HA LONG—HANOI**

*Morning:* Boat cruise on Ha Long Bay, lunch on boat.

*Afternoon:* Return to Hanoi, visit Dong Trieu Ceramic Factory en route.

**Jan. 14. HANOI**

*Morning:* Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum; Ba Dinh Square; Presidential Palace; President Ho Chi Minh's House on Stilts; Ho Chi Minh's Museum; One Pillar Pagoda.

*Afternoon:* Free time for shopping or independent exploration in Hanoi.

**Jan. 15. HANOI—HUE**

*Morning:* Flight to Hue.

*Afternoon:* Visit Tombs of Kings Tu Duc and Khai Dinh.

**Jan. 16. HUE—HOI AN**

*Morning:* Visit the Imperial City. Depart for Hoi An. Stopover at Hai Van Pass overlooking Lang Co Beach. Arrive in Hoi An.

*Afternoon:* Visit ancient town of Hoi An.

**Jan. 17. HOI AN—DA NANG—HO CHI MINH CITY**

*Morning:* Depart for Da Nang. Visit China Beach and Marble Mountains.

*Afternoon:* Flight to HCM (Ho Chi Minh) City. HCM City tour.

**Jan. 18. HCM CITY—BINH DUONG—HCM CITY**

*Morning:* Meeting with the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City. Visit the War Museum.

*Afternoon:* Visit American Home Factory (producing commercial ceramic tiles) in Binh Duong province.

**Jan. 19. HCM CITY—MY THO—HCM CITY**

*Morning:* Depart to Cai Be. Boat cruise to visit Cai Be Floating Market. Continue to An Binh and Binh Hoa Phuoc islets in Vinh Long province. Visit the orchards and local homes. Sample various tropical fruits in the orchards and enjoy Don Ca Tai Tu folk music (popular in the Mekong Delta).

*Afternoon:* Visit town of Vinh Long. Return to Ho Chi Minh City.

**Jan. 20. HCM CITY**

*Morning:* Transfer to airport for return flight. Eastward crossing of International Date Line. Afternoon/evening arrival in US cities.

# Changes in Capitalism since the *Communist Manifesto*

Nguyen Ngoc Dzung

The *Communist Manifesto* has had a very significant influence on the establishment and development of the international workers' movement. Inevitably, it still has valuable implications for our current era.

Many profound changes in human society have occurred in the 157 years since the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*. Some partial solutions have been made to the problems that existed. But human society has also been confronted with problems not foreseen at that time. We need, therefore, to have dialectical and developmental points of view in studying the *Manifesto* rather than applying it to real life within a limited framework. The point is to analyze the development of human society from a scientific viewpoint. It is worthwhile to quote here what Marx and Engels wrote in their preface to the 1872 edition of the *Manifesto*:

However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this *Manifesto* are, on the whole, as correct today as ever. Here and there some detail might be improved. The practical application of the principles will depend, as the *Manifesto* itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the obtaining historical conditions. (Marx and Engels 1988, 174)

In this spirit, I will discuss some changes in the capitalist system since the *Manifesto* and their practical consequences today.

First, it is necessary to use the abstraction method in studying capitalism as discussed in the *Manifesto*. What is capitalism as defined in the *Manifesto*? According to the *Manifesto*, capitalist society is operated, monitored, controlled, or governed by the capitalist class, whose mission is to play the leading and progressive role in the abolition of feudalism and the establishment of a modern capitalist society. Although capitalism is an advance over feudalism, socialism is a still greater advance. Nevertheless, capitalism has led to great achievements such as increasing human productive capacity, opening up freedom of thought, razing the boundaries between nations and territories, and integrating productive forces and economies worldwide. In relation to feudalism, capitalist society is an advanced stage of development of human society.

At the time the *Manifesto* was written, capitalism was basically a competitive industrial system. The bourgeois class owned the factories and mills, and the working class was largely industrial. Brought together in large numbers for exploitation, the working class was in an increasingly antagonistic relationship to the capitalist class that employed it. The privileges acquired by the bourgeoisie through their ownership of the means and product of production have led to a social inequality that increases as technology develops to a higher level. This inequality produces social conflicts, at times explosive, with demands to redistribute the wealth to reduce the existing social inequality.

The existence and evolution of social conflicts have brought forth various responses for their resolution. The *Manifesto* is a call to the working class for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. The alternative solution of resolution by negotiation, however attractive, is not effective and does not lead to the desired outcome since the bourgeois class never willingly gives up its interests.

The fundamental principles of the *Manifesto* remain valid. However, the forms and manifestation of social conflicts become diverse and numerous as capitalist society develops to highly

advanced levels, particularly at the stages of monopoly capitalism and state monopoly capitalism. In the stage of state monopoly capitalism, the bourgeoisie has gained overall control over industry, trade, and finance, and full control over the state. Competition changes from free competition to controlled competition governed by the laws of the interventionist bourgeois state. Finance capital becomes the dominant force.

The 1950s can be regarded as the beginning of the modern stage of capitalism. In the time since then, the capitalist class has expanded its control and activities from the industrial sector to all other sectors (such as service and transportation) and to other countries. Capitalism is not only monopolistic and nationally based, but also transnational with global integration. The working form of capitalism is financial capitalism with its activities concentrated in the monetary and banking sector. These activities not only exploit wage labor, but also profit from monetary and knowledge services.

The increasing share of the service sector in the capitalist economy as capitalism advances to its current high level of development was not foreseen in the *Manifesto*. The service sector includes diverse forms of activity such as education and science.

Changes in class structure accompany the development of capitalism. The path of entry into the wealthier ranks of the capitalist class is largely through accumulation of wealth in capitalist production. In the modern stage, however, the bourgeois class consists not only of the owners of the means of production, but also politicians and intellectuals who serve them, and some artists and workers who become bourgeois after acquiring wealth from special opportunities opening up in the marketplace.

At the same time, changes in the nature of the labor process have led to new ideological approaches by the bourgeoisie. The owners of capital feel a greater need to extend their supervision, monitoring, and control over workers through laws and state regulation. In the past, they focused on competition in the market for the maximization of profit. Today, they seek to combine all means for the maximization of profit, including the destruction of the trade-union movement and cutbacks in social welfare.

Among the changes in capitalism since the *Manifesto* are changes in the forms of ownership and management. Individually owned and managed factories, mills, and workshops are no longer the dominant structural form of capitalist enterprises. Under conditions of state monopoly capitalism, the forms of ownership and management have become much more diverse. In volume one of *Capital*, Marx already noted the growing role of joint stock companies. Today, the stockholders of the corporations rely on highly paid professionals for the management of production and marketing of products and services, so that management and distribution relations become increasingly important as compared to ownership relations. This situation requires us to have better insight into the content of the relations of production. Capital, in its monetary equivalent, need not be invested in the form of constant and variable capital (the latter being the sole source of surplus value), but can parasite on productive capital with or without the direct employment of labor as “casino capitalism”—monetary manipulation and other forms of speculation.

The *Communist Manifesto* declares that private capitalist ownership is the root of all inequality, oppression, and exploitation. “Ownership” implied the combination of property rights, use rights, and the right to designate heirs. In the past, all three rights belonged to one capitalist. Today, this is no longer necessarily the case. One set of owners could have the property rights over some amount of capital—for example, a factory—but its use rights and beneficiary rights could belong to many people depending on many factors: the hired management, the state, and other social forces. This also means that the socialization of capitalist ownership has increased. Moreover, ownership of the means of production is not as secure as in the past; the growing dependence on the credit sector has increased the risk of bankruptcy, especially when insufficient funds are put into updating technology.

The components of the relations of production also change because of management relations. The capitalists in the past managed their production process by themselves. They now hire

managers who must obey the rules of society such as regulations on minimum wages, working hours, and working conditions. Distribution rights have also changed and no longer are the exclusive domain of the individual entrepreneur.

All these changes have led to changes in the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the working class. The changes in the conflict between capital and labor are not rooted solely in the relations of production, but also in the technological relations of production:

Workers today are less likely to be employed in large-scale industrial enterprises with many thousands of workers under one roof. In the industrialized capitalist countries, the percentage of workers employed in manufacturing is decreasing, while the number employed in production of nonmaterial commodities (software, information technology, etc.) is increasing. Such changes are used by the bourgeoisie to obscure the common class bond of these new workers with industrial workers as producers of surplus value, so that different definitions have been put forward to limit the term *working class* to industrial workers.

The effort to deny the common class bond of industrial workers, knowledge-industry workers, and service workers is used to divide them in their struggle for equitable social welfare.

At the time of the *Communist Manifesto*, no attempt had yet been made by the working class to wrest power from the bourgeoisie. The struggle was for redistribution of funds for the workers' welfare. Today, as we enter the knowledge economy, the ownership of intellectual property is taking on an importance that can even override ownership of financial assets.

Knowledge, however, has an abstract aspect that cannot be kept for itself by the bourgeoisie, but rather can belong to each individual. The capitalist class therefore must confront the problem of retaining its class dominance over the relations of production on the basis of ownership of the means of production when these means of production include highly socialized organization of knowledge with its continuous dynamics.

To have a correct understanding of capitalism, we need to keep in mind that the nature of profit maximization is unchanged despite

very different forms of embodiment. We need new approaches to deal with this. The *Communist Manifesto* has given us a basic approach to understand the nature of the basic contradiction in the development of capitalism. It is the contradiction between the high level of socialization of the forces of production and the private ownership of the means of production.

*Capitalism continues to exist. The immediate difficult question placed before us is how to solve this problem, and not how and where a revolution should be carried out, and by whom.* Capitalism continues to develop and appears to some to have great vitality. We need more research to gain better understanding and explanation of *this reality* in order to best determine the developmental path of our country in the context of the world economy, especially our developmental strategy, avoiding dogmatic thinking while being more realistic.

*Hanoi, Vietnam*

#### REFERENCE LIST

Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. 1988. Preface to the 1872 Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In vol. 23 of *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, 174–75. New York: International Publishers.

## Book Reviews

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*The Soviet Century*. By Moshe Lewin. New York: Verso, 2005. 424 pages, cloth \$35.00.

Moshe Lewin was a collective farmer in the USSR and a soldier in the Soviet army. He later became director of studies at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, a fellow of the Kennan Institute, and a senior fellow of Columbia University's Russian Institute; he is now emeritus professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. This book is not the work of a hack anti-Soviet propagandist, but a very well-researched account, both tragic and sobering, of the rise and fall of the USSR. It is a hard read for any present, former, or future Communist or left socialist. However, after facing up to the economic, political, and criminal character of Stalinism and the Stalinist state, without lapsing into the stupidities of latter-day Trotskyism and Maoism, Lewin skillfully draws a well-documented and welcome historical line clearly separating Leninism and Bolshevism from what came after.

Some will argue he overstates the distinction in some respects, but he makes a powerful argument. It is an important contribution to rescuing communism and socialism, the ideology of the emancipation of labor from wage slavery to capital in an advanced technological society, from the unredeemable fate of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the century's most notable effort to advance these very ideas.

I have little doubt as to the book's basic accuracy. It extensively and professionally surveys a vast amount of recently available juridical records from the Soviet era, both at the national and republic levels. The author's economic and historical analysis is

complex, well balanced, and in general accord with the available data series published and analyzed extensively by R. W. Davies (UK) and William Easterly (U.S.). His analysis of the post-Stalin years shows how, despite major efforts at reform and important successes in recovering quickly from World War II in space and defense technology, fateful decisions in the transition to Stalin's dictatorship had fundamentally hampered the quality and efficiency of economic development. The USSR needed politics. But it turned out that Stalin's chief legacy was not a single political party, but really *no* political party—only a combined state-party bureaucracy.

The author inadvertently underplays the positive role played by the Soviet state in the postwar struggle against imperialism and colonialism, but this is less an error of perspective than the natural result of largely omitting foreign policy from the scope of the book.

Lewin's narrative of the Soviet century clearly seeks to demarcate the points where Bolshevism as a political tendency within the broader European and Russian social-democratic movement arose, came to power, and was then obliterated by the Stalin dictatorship. He defends the genuine historical and political legitimacy of the movement's rise to power and prominence, as well as Lenin's political leadership. The demarcation is defined in Lewin's review of Lenin's extensive correspondence and reports in the post-War Communism period (1920 following) until his disability and eventual death from stroke in 1924. In these documents, Lenin is in sharp opposition to Stalin on fundamental questions of economic policy (the NEP), the independence of nations within the USSR, and Party-state leadership issues. Some of these pieces are not unknown to students of Lenin, but Lewin also provides the contexts of previously unpublished, concurrent letters, and reported actions of Stalin, Bukharin, Trotsky, and others in this same period that greatly accentuate the depth and significance of these differences.

The demarcation is not completely elucidated. Lewin convincingly documents the degeneration of Bolshevism into Stalinism, and links its ultimate collapse to a series of disastrous

choices made following Lenin's death, choices that set in motion an immense, often lawless, state machine and economic planning mechanisms that were never able to correct or dismantle themselves sufficiently, even after they had become a blatant hindrance to social and economic development. To what extent politically practical alternatives (for example, as Lenin wished, the removal of Stalin) were available to the Bolsheviks after Lenin's passing may never be known. But for the communist and socialist movement in general, Lewin's analysis provides a fundamentally sound historical foundation for parting company fully with the legacy of Stalin while keeping (most of) its ideals and principles intact.

If one accepts Lewin's historical analysis, then the crimes of the Stalinist state can never be redeemed. Their scale, plus the system's ultimate economic and political collapse, will defy any attempt to escape by justifying Stalin's measures by a "lesser evil" argument, or under the cover of a scapegoat—that is, by excusing the crimes of the state by reducing it to "human error" or to Stalin's particular personality. The principles of communism must be forever separated from these crimes. If this cannot happen, the ideology is doomed. My own confidence that this transformation is both possible and desirable is based on the proposition that wage slavery is in fact incompatible with the progress of advanced technological society.

One may easily draw from Lewin that the political path of redemption for Bolshevism thus becomes an open return to the framework of social democracy and internationalism wherein it originally defined itself, and to which it remained committed until its destruction in 1927–29, as dated by Lewin, by Stalin's assumption of power and subsequent mass executions of his political opponents. The split between Lenin and Kautsky over World War I, and the arguments later over the dictatorship in the early years of the revolution and civil war, have arguably been made moot by the progress of modern globalization. Imperialism itself, as depicted by Lenin himself, has been the chief vehicle of global economic and political integration throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When ungoverned and unrestrained, it has always led to war. But this integration itself is an objective and irreversible

process, by whatever means it occurs. World governance, and thus world social democracy, are the only survivable outcomes of the process that can, in concert with technological progress, advance the interests of labor, and establish conditions for the sustained emergence and growth of “communist” forms of work, enterprise, social, and political organization.

While Lewin’s book is important, it may not be the best place to *start* the discussion of a communist and socialist program and analysis for the twenty-first century—for the same reasons that using for such a purpose the book *Socialism Betrayed* (Keeran and Kenny 2004), which represents an apology for Stalinism opposed to the Lewin analysis, would also be wrong.

The challenges of 1921–27 are highly relevant, but they are not the same as the ones faced by socialists, or Leninists, in 2005. Judging by the recent discussions on some of the left lists and publications, the collapse of the USSR is *still*, fifteen years later, too raw a subject on which to base a very constructive conversation. Test yourself: Lewin’s book will be an intensely emotional experience for anyone who shared the dreams of the working class for emancipation, progress, and peace that inspired the Bolshevik Revolution.

Joseph E. Stiglitz’s book *Whither Socialism?* (1994) is a better starting point for a discussion. He uses the twentieth-century history of both Soviet and bourgeois neoclassical economics to *abstract* the fundamental and real economic challenges confronting the global economies from their most controversial historical entanglements. He misses some questions. After all, he’s a bourgeois economist. But pondering and discussing them better helps bring the future more firmly in sight. When that happens, discarding an error of the past is not so painful.

#### ***Addendum: What is “Leninist” social democracy?***

In reviewing Moshe Lewin’s *Soviet Century*, I made the following inference from the author’s analysis:

that the political path of redemption for Bolshevism thus becomes an open return to the framework of social

democracy and internationalism where it originally defined itself, and to which it remained committed until its destruction in 1927–29, as dated by Lewin, by Stalin’s assumption of power and subsequent mass executions of his political opponents. (305)

Clearly this is my own inference. A reader may ask for clarification: am I promoting this “framework of social democracy and internationalism” as the same Bolshevik notion of social democracy Lenin advocated and understood? This is a most serious question, I believe, to which my own best answer is a “Yes, . . . but.”

A brief digression to 1918, and a little further back to 1875.

What is, or was, “Leninist” social democracy? I do not know of any short, definite, or noncontroversial answer. Lenin’s views of social democracy underwent several revisions and evolutions reflecting the development of his party, the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party, its program, and the course of the struggle against czarism. On questions of party organization, internationalism, the evaluation of the progress of the expected (by all) bourgeois-democratic Russian revolution, and focus on proletariat over more or less petty-bourgeois elements within and around the labor movements, Lenin led the creation of the Bolshevik wing of this party, which eventually became a wholly separate party. All trends in Russian social democracy claimed scientific authority from Marxism and moral authority from their programs for advancement of the working class in society. All were revolutionary—difficult to be otherwise under the czarist autocracy. While those familiar with social-democratic parties in bourgeois democracies may know them to be distinctly nonrevolutionary, recall that one of Karl Kautsky’s last works was a piece proclaiming the modern relevance of the *Communist Manifesto*. Of course, Tony Blair once said that too!

The only objective test of competing political agendas is to evaluate which one delivers the goods—the goals of the program—to the political base. Certainly for Russia, and many other countries as well, Leninism clearly wins as the *stronger* social-democratic ideology on these grounds. In the cauldron of World War I Russia, it delivered “bread, land, and peace” when it is

doubtful any other party could have done so. Up until this point—as long as it is not held responsible for the ultimate consequences of the subsequent (using Lewin’s calendar) dictatorship—Leninism/Bolshevism is arguably “true” social-democracy.

But let us pause for a moment, circa 1918, in the debate between Lenin (1974) and Kautsky (1964)—Lenin’s *Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* is one of the greatest pamphlet titles of all time. The twin issues of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR and the effective support for imperialism within the Second International marked the point after which the split in international social democracy became unbridgeable.

Beyond the theoretical issue, Lenin never doubted for a moment the correctness of the seizure of power by the workers in the terrible crisis created by the imperialist war in Russia. But let us recall that Lenin sourced his argument for the *Marxist* view of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Here Marx, in his debate with the Lassalleans, most emphatically asserts:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*. (1989, 95)

Lenin’s interpretation of Marx was correct.

But we all now know that Marx’s categorical position on this matter, and whatever rests upon it, are at best far less than the full story, and at worst fully compromised.

I think it can be convincingly argued that Lenin himself had clearly reached the best of these assessments as early as 1921. Following this time, as Lewin observes, Leninism becomes something quite different from formerly, when the hoped-for rising European revolutionary tide had not receded from view.

Also correct, and in the long run more sound, was Lenin’s effective linking of Kautsky’s position as, in part, a cover for his already established effective support for German imperialism in the labor movement. This argument dates back to 1912. There is no corresponding redemption for Kautsky as he became increasingly confused and bitter over the split.

Nonetheless, the change in tone from Kautsky's oddly sentimental epitaph for Lenin (1924), to his essay "Communism, Social Democracy, and the Rise of Nazism in Germany" (1946), written in the 1930s, tells a horror story worth rereading. If one believes, as I do, that had not German social democracy been so bitterly split, Hitler could not have come to power, then a due portion of the burden for forty million lost lives in the conflict that followed must fall on the shoulders of both sides.

Georgi Dimitrov and others saw this danger coming and tried, I believe, to fix the problem in the sixth and seventh congresses of the Third International via the United Front program—a program almost wholly synonymous with traditional social-democratic party agendas as far as domestic policy was concerned. But subsequently, the Third International was dissolved.

Nonetheless, the agenda of the United Front and Popular Front against fascism became the inspiration of millions of new generations of Communists, socialists, and national-liberation fighters, including many of the most militant and most successful anti-imperialist cum socialist revolutions of the post-World War II world. Established social-democratic parties, however, often remained divided and persisted in compromised positions regarding the murderous actions of their own governments to suppress these movements. One might argue that the split between left and right social democracy should persist because of their historical differences on the question of imperialism. But against that argument, I submit that globalization and the rapid spread of high technology are steadily and rapidly eroding the economic basis of these compromised, more-or-less liberal, positions in the labor movements. That basis is the protection of native local labor markets in the economies of the advanced capitalist (imperialist at one time or another) countries. Increasingly, labor and popular rights cannot be protected at all unless global protection is possible, which itself depends upon the possibility of global labor cooperation. With that erosion, new opportunities and possibilities for unity in the future of both social democracy and communism are reawakened.

The first part of *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, over which Lenin and Kautsky are debating, happens to contain Marx's most mature exposition of the chief economic tasks of the Communist Party throughout the transition to communist society: first among them is the fulfillment of bourgeois right to the producer. Realization of the slogan, "to each according to his work," is measured by an equal standard—the quantity and quality of labor. Around this principle, all of social democracy and the communist movement should *still* be able to agree. The second part of *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, quoted above in reference to the dictatorship of the proletariat, addresses the means of achieving the transition to communist society. In 2005, I think all would agree that the latter question has been reopened for discussion. Globalization has cast us all pretty much in the same boat now—there is a lot to talk about.

John Case

*Harpers Ferry, West Virginia*

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*The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome.* By Michael Parenti. New York: New Press, 2003. 276 pages, cloth \$24.95, paper \$16.95.

You act like a tame herd, notwithstanding your great numbers, allowing yourselves to be possessed and fleeced by the few. . . . I do not recommend armed violence or a secession but only that you refuse to shed your blood in their behalf. . . . Let those of us who have no share in the profits be free also from danger and toil. (116–17)

These exhortations could very well be heard from a bullhorn today; they were, however, delivered over two thousand years ago by a Roman tribune, Licinius Macer, to an assembly of the Roman people. This scene, along with many others like it, can be found in Michael Parenti's *The Assassination of Julius Caesar*. The reasons for the striking parallels between then and now must be ascribed to something more than coincidence; class conflict has its enduring attributes and it is the depiction of the interepochal parallels arising from these struggles that makes Parenti's book so instructive and fascinating.

Although, as the title suggests, the book culminates in the assassination of Julius Caesar, it is the historical and social background enhanced by acute political analysis that gives it a unique significance. It becomes quite clear that Julius Caesar is in many important ways a truly legendary figure whose image in traditional history and literature diverges from the historical reality. The prevalence of Caesar's fictitious persona and the multifarious misrepresentations of reality found in conventional descriptions of important aspects of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations are the result of class-oriented perspectives on historical processes. These class-induced distortions have characterized the writings of ancient historiographers down to most modern historians. The rest of the book gives substantial support to these two fundamental propositions: (1) class conflict is a very significant determinant in the development of historical events; (2) class-oriented perspectives influence and often distort the interpretation and portrayal of these events.

***Tyrannicide or treason?***

Parenti opens with a brief account of the assassination of Gaius Julius Caesar on 15 March 44 BCE by his fellow senators. He then writes:

The question that informs this book is, why did a coterie of Roman senators assassinate their fellow aristocrat and celebrated ruler, Julius Caesar? An inquiry into this incident reveals something important about the nature of political rule, class power, and a people's struggle for democracy and social justice—issues that are still very much with us. The assassination also marked a turning point in the history of Rome. It set in motion a civil war, and put an end to whatever democracy there had been, ushering in an absolutist rule that would prevail over Western Europe for centuries to come. (2)

The prevalent notion, implicit as well in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, is that the senate did the deed with the intention of restoring the republic by eliminating a power-hungry usurper with royal ambitions. The author rejects that accepted approach:

In this book I present an alternative explanation: The Senate aristocrats killed Caesar because they perceived him to be a popular leader who threatened their privileged interests. By this view, the deed was more an act of treason than tyrannicide, one incident in a line of political murders dating back across the better part of a century, a dramatic manifestation of a long-standing struggle between opulent conservatives and popularly supported reformers. This struggle and these earlier assassinations will be treated in the pages ahead. (2)

***Gentleman's history: Empire, class, and patriarchy***

Parenti begins with a discussion of the writing of Roman history; he demonstrates how the social and ideological context in which historians labor greatly influences the kind of history produced. One prime example is Edward Gibbon, author of the classic *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. As a

“gentleman scholar,” raised in the comfortable life of the English aristocracy, he could view the acquisitive senatorial class with approval; as a firm supporter of the British empire, he could create an idyllic image of the Roman empire, while the cost and suffering of empire’s creation was certainly not a major consideration. Male chauvinism and racism were, of course, concomitant characteristics of the perspective of Gibbon and subsequent gentleman historians.

The chroniclers and historians of Greece and Rome also enjoyed aristocratic backgrounds themselves or were, in several instances, clients under the patronage of aristocrats. Parenti’s list of the best-known gentleman writers is fairly long and inclusive: Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Cicero, Livy, Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian (whose histories Karl Marx purportedly read in the original Greek for relaxation), Dio Cassius, Valerius Maximus, Velleius Paterculus, Josephus, and Tacitus. Questions could possibly be raised about two of them. Homer is a very elusive figure. If he were a traveling singer of tales (*rhapsode*), he definitely would not have been an aristocrat and, although his epics tell of the great deeds of aristocratic warriors, there is in the *Iliad* a pervasive, underlying current of satire and protest against war and an incompetent and arrogant ruling class. Cicero, although he was a senator and had been elected consul, was a “new man” (*novus homo*) and not of aristocratic background. In fact, he was never really accepted by the old-line nobility. Much of his notorious career seems to have been a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to be accepted by the nobility. In this attempt, he became “more aristocrat than the aristocrats.”

In the writings of these gentleman historiographers of antiquity, the common people get little mention, and when they do, they are treated with contempt as an ignorant, fickle, undependable mob. Fortunately, one type of historical writing from the classical period does on occasion provide some insight into the thoughts and real circumstances of the oppressed: the speeches. The writing of history was essentially a branch of rhetoric. Since on most occasions there was no record of what was really said by a speaker, the writer would compose the speech, all the while

attempting to express what the speaker would (or should) have said in the given circumstances. The writer then would often have occasion to express thoughts inimical to the ruling-class perspective. Parenti includes the famous passage from the *Agricola* of Tacitus in which the Caledonian chief Calgacus inveighs against Roman imperialism:

You find in [the Romans] an arrogance which no reasonable submission can elude. Brigands of the world, they have exhausted the land by their indiscriminate plunder, and now they ransack the sea. The wealth of an enemy excites their cupidity, his poverty their lust of power. Robbery, butchery, rapine, the liars call Empire; they create a desolation and call it peace. . . . [Our loved ones] are now being torn from us by conscription to slave in other lands. Our wives and sisters, even if they are not raped by enemy soldiers, are seduced by men who are supposed to be our friends and guests. Our goods and money are consumed by taxation; our land is stripped of its harvest to fill their granaries; our hands and limbs are crippled by building roads through forests and swamps under the lash of our oppressors. . . . We Britons are sold into slavery anew every day; we have to pay the purchase-price ourselves and feed our masters in addition. (17)

### ***Slaves, proletarians, and masters***

The popular perception of ancient Rome, influenced by the silver screen and superficial treatment in most textbooks, does not convey the historical reality. For most of its inhabitants the city was not a pleasant place. Many, probably one-third of its inhabitants, were slaves (*servi*); of the citizens, most were propertyless (*proletarii*); in contrast, a relatively small stratum of wealthy possessed the lion's share of the city's wealth.

Living conditions for the masses were deplorable; flimsy and dangerous apartment houses (*insulae*) were crowded firetraps with, until late in the empire, no public provisions for fighting or preventing the very frequent fires. Employment was always uncertain and poorly compensated, largely because it was in

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competition with the slave labor that performed many of the city's tasks. Despite attempts by Roman and modern historians to paint a more favorable picture, slavery in antiquity, was, as Parenti correctly insists, dehumanizing and cruel:

All slavocracies develop a racist ideology to justify their dehumanized social relationships. In Rome, male slaves of any age were habitually addressed as *puer* or 'boy.' A similar degrading appellation was applied to slaves in ancient Greece and in the slavocracy of the United States, persisting into the postbellum segregated South of the twentieth century. The slave as a low-grade being or subhuman is a theme found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. In the minds of Roman slaveholders, the *servi*—including the foreigners who were the larger portion of the slave population—were substandard in moral and mental capacity, a notch or two above animals. Cicero assures us that Jews, Syrians, and all other Asian barbarians are "born to slavery." The Roman historian Florus saw the Spartacus slave rebellion not as a monumental struggle for liberty but a disgraceful undertaking perpetrated "by persons of the meanest class" led by "men of the worst character . . . eager to take vengeance on their masters." Gibbon describes Rome's slave population as "a mean and promiscuous multitude." More recently, we have Sir Ronald Syme asserting that the Roman slave market was flooded with "captives of alien and often inferior stock." Most present-day classical writers, however, do not embrace the slaveholder's supremacism, at least not overtly. (35)

I do think it is important to make some distinctions between ancient Greek and Roman slavery and the institution as developed in the United States. Among both the Greeks and Romans, slavery arose before widespread foreign conquests occurred. This meant that slaves were linguistically, culturally, and ethnically the same as the enslavers, making the elaboration of a theory of racial inferiority to justify slavery impossible. In fact, the similarities of slave to free were a source of tension, especially to the Greeks,

constantly reminding them of their vulnerability to adverse fate and enslavement. In my opinion, a fully developed theory of racial, as compared to cultural, inferiority, was a product of more recent times. We should note that racial prejudice as practiced in modern times was apparently not widespread in ancient Rome. Even during the empire, when many persons with Roman names were of varied ethnic backgrounds, identification by race rarely occurs in literature or historiography. This in no way vitiates the description of the dehumanizing character of slavery in the ancient world.

### *A republic for the few*

From its very beginnings Rome was steeped in conflict, as Parenti describes:

As legend has it, Rome was founded in 753 B.C. and named after its first monarch Romulus. Early in the sixth century B.C., a succession of Etruscan kings reigned over the city. Detested by the common people because of its exploitative rule, the monarchy was overthrown around 510–509 B.C. and a republic was proclaimed. Executive rule passed to a pair of consuls, elected for one-year terms and subject to each other's veto. The consuls remained the highest magistrates throughout the history of the Republic. They levied and commanded Rome's armies, enforced the laws, gave audience to foreign delegations, and presided in the Senate and over the popular assemblies. (45)

Early Roman society was sharply divided between a landed aristocracy of patricians and a mass of commoners called plebeians. The division in wealth between plebeians and patricians was reflected also in their social and political relations. Only patricians could enter the senate or hold politically crucial religious posts. The plebeians served in the infantry and bore the brunt of the territorial expansion that was occurring. By the fourth century, however, many of the plebeians had acquired property and entry to the senate. These two, patrician and wealthy plebeian families, became the aristocracy and the ruling class in an ever-intensifying class division in the republic.

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A crucial change occurred following the defeat of Rome's archrival, Carthage, the only other superpower in the Mediterranean area. The contest was long and protracted: First Punic War (264–261 BCE), then the Second Punic War (218–202 BCE), in which the famed Carthaginian general Hannibal led a mighty army across the Alps and delivered two severe defeats to Roman armies only to dissipate his advantage as he attempted to persuade the cities of southern Italy to join the effort against Rome. When the Third War ended in 146 BCE, Rome became the master of the Mediterranean world. One would naturally expect that a period of economic prosperity and concomitant social harmony would characterize the ensuing period. Instead, this was the beginning of troubles:

As with other imperial powers before and since, the Roman empire brought immense wealth to its ruling class and imposed heavy burdens on its common citizenry. The aristocracy pursued a policy of almost continuous warfare. War offered opportunities to plunder the treasure of other countries and take advantage of depressed land markets in Italy itself. Many small landholders, the mainstay of the Roman infantry, fell in battle. Many more had to serve long enlistments that left them unable to tend their farms. Wealthy investors bought up these holdings for a pittance. War also brought a replenished supply of captive slaves to till the newly acquired tracts.

The *ager publicus*, publicly owned fertile lands in regions south and east of Rome, had been farmed for generations by collectives of smallholders who paid a modest rent to the state treasury. These collectives, run by free labor, had produced enough to victual the entire city. That Rome could be fed by common farmers, with not a penny of profit extracted by the rich, was more than the rich were willing to tolerate. To protect the smallholders a law was passed that forbade any individual to hold more than 500 *iugera* (about 310 acres). “For a while,” writes Plutarch, “this law restrained the greed of the rich and helped the poor. . . . But after a time the wealthy men, by using the

names of fictitious tenants, contrived to transfer many of these holdings to themselves, and finally they openly took possession of the greater part of the land under their own names.”

By the second century B.C., through a combination of opportunistic buyouts and sheer violence, the wealthy few carved out from the *ager publicus* vast estates for themselves, to which they had no right except that imposed by their money and their hired thugs. In time the laws were changed to allow unlimited concentration of public and private lands in their hands. As Appian reports, “the powerful [landholders] were becoming extremely rich, and the number of slaves in the country was reaching large proportions. Meanwhile the Italian people were suffering from depopulation and a shortage of men, worn down by poverty, taxes and military service.” (47–48)

The defeat of Carthage and the ensuing process of displacement of the small-scale farmers led to massive migration to the cities, primarily to Rome. In the city, these former farmers became unemployed and demoralized by the conditions that they found there. In their despair, they looked for remedies. What remedies were available? What could or would the republic do to relieve their plight?

Lacking a representative system, the assemblies were open to all citizens. In actual practice, only a relatively small portion of the eligible population could be accommodated in the open-air venues, usually the more prosperous and mobile who had the time and wherewithal to attend. Yet common plebs and to a much lesser degree even foreigners and slaves sometimes made their presence felt. In the Centurial Assembly (*comitia centuriata*), which elected consuls and praetors, voting took place in block units organized around traditional military groupings that were heavily rigged to favor the propertied classes. More democratic was the Tribal Assembly of the People (*comitia tributa*), in which each family tribal group voted as a unit. It however was weighted to favor rural over proletarian

voters. Reformers like the Gracchi brothers and Julius Caesar regularly preferred the Tribal Assembly to the Centurial Assembly when trying to pass reform legislation. With enough unity and mass mobilization, poor city dwellers in alliance with voters from outlying districts might pass measures that were opposed by the dominant aristocratic faction in the Senate.

The various magistrates (consuls, praetors, aediles, and quaestors) were elected by the assemblies. To be elected to any of these top four ranks of magistracy carried life membership in the Senate. The closest thing to a popular democratic office was the Tribune of the People, created after decades of popular agitation and threats of armed secession. Ten tribunes elected each year by the assemblies were to act as the protectors of popular rights. They could veto bills and even senatorial decrees. They eventually gained the right to submit legislation themselves and prosecute errant officials. One had to be of plebeian lineage to qualify as a tribune, one of the few instances in the Late Republic when the patrician-plebeian distinction still obtained. (50–51)

In the second century, the senatorial nobles began to divide into two different tendencies: the *populares* and the *optimates*. The former perceived the need for reform and supported popular measures to improve the lot of the Roman masses. The latter guarded the prerogatives of the senators and other wealthy groups. Parenti calls attention to the sympathy of many modern classicists and historians for the *optimata* faction, reflecting the conservative bias that tends to characterize the perspectives of most classical scholars.

***Demagogues and death squads: The senate's hit list***

To read this chapter with an open mind can be a disconcerting experience. During the period extending from the assassination of the popular leader Tiberius Gracchus (133 BCE) to the assassination of Julius Caesar (44 BCE), thirteen popular leaders were murdered either by the senators themselves or by their hired

death squads. This period should be viewed as a dire reminder of the extent to which a ruling class will go to preserve its prerogatives and material interests. Yet, throughout the ages the gentleman scholars have regarded the Roman masses with contempt and referred to those who have taken up the causes of the people as demagogues and rabble-rousers. This horrendous era began with Tiberius Gracchus:

One of the more prominent of these agitators was Tiberius Gracchus, a man of aristocratic birth and strong democratic leanings. More than three decades before Julius Caesar was born, Tiberius addressed some of the afflictions that beset Rome and Italy, most notably the crying need for a more equitable land distribution. Elected to serve as a tribune in 133 B.C., Tiberius Gracchus mobilized people from within and without the city in order to pass his *lex agraria*, which sought to revive the dead-letter law of 367 B.C., limiting the amount of public land that could be leased to any individual. The surplus acreage expropriated by large holders was to be redistributed to the poor by three elected commissioners.

In drafting his law, Tiberius consulted a number of eminent citizens including magistrates and former magistrates. Wealthy individuals who deserved to be penalized for the crimes associated with their land grabs were only obliged to surrender their illegal holdings to those most in need of land. "And for this they were compensated. Surely many would agree that no law directed against injustice and avarice was ever framed in milder or more conciliatory terms," argues Plutarch in a surprisingly sympathetic cast. The land was being bought back at a fair market price from those who had stolen it. "Even though this act of restitution manifested such tender regard for the wrongdoers, the common people were content to forget the past so long as they could be assured of protection against future injustice." The wealthy landowners, however, detested the *lex agraria* "out of sheer greed," and they hated Tiberius for proposing it, continues Plutarch. They did their utmost to

turn the people against the law, alleging that Tiberius' real intent was to foment revolution, impose his autocratic will, and undermine the foundations of the Republic. These same charges were to be leveled against Caesar almost a century later. (60–61)

As has been observed above, it is in the speeches that positions opposed to ruling-class interests and ideology may be found in the writings of the Roman historiographers. Plutarch, who was the most unbiased in his treatment of Tiberius, composed this dramatic appeal, in which Tiberius is portrayed as describing the lot of the dispossessed farmers, many of whom were army veterans:

Hearthless and homeless, they must take their wives and families and tramp the roads like beggars. . . . They fight and fall to serve no other end but to multiply the possessions and comforts of the rich. They are called masters of the world but they possess not a clod of earth that is truly their own. (61)

Tiberius and three hundred unarmed companions were slaughtered by Publius Nasica, an optimate senator, assisted by a gang of hired thugs.

Ten years later his brother Gaius Gracchus attempted to enact an even more liberal program. He was murdered along with three thousand supporters. Following this outrage, eleven other leaders were assassinated by the senators for attempting to advance programs that would not only bring some relief to the oppressed but may have offered the possibility of saving the crisis-ridden republic. The murder of Caesar, the last in the list of reformers, signaled the end of the Roman Republic.

### ***Unmasking Roman history's eloquent hypocrite***

Anyone who has taken Latin III, a college course in Roman history, or an introductory humanities course has undoubtedly been subjected to uncritical and undeserved adulation of this character. I particularly enjoyed Parenti's excellent refutation of the probably fictitious plot from which the hypocrite claimed incessantly that he had saved the Roman Republic:

The great orator Marcus Tullius Cicero looms large in any consideration of the Late Republic. He was a key participant in its affairs, and his writings constitute by far the largest surviving primary source we have of that era. Moreover, his ideological proclivities dovetail with those of regiments of historians down through the ages, making him a great favorite among them. Sir Ronald Syme hails Cicero as a “humane and cultivated man, an enduring influence upon the course of all European civilization.” Other admirers trumpet him as a “constitutionalist” of “honorable and unselfish ideals,” a leader devoted to “standards of duty, kindness and public spirit,” “singularly genuine, refined and lovable,” “one of Rome’s leading Sons and most precious gems,” who refused “to live under a tyranny.” (85)

This uncritical view is not universal among scholars, however.

Almost everyone shares that opinion of Cicero. “Contemporary American and British ancient historians are divided between Ciceronians (95 percent) and Caesarians (a mere handful), and the division reflects their current political attitudes,” observes Arthur Kahn, one of the handful. Another of the handful is Frederick Engels, who called Cicero “the most contemptible scoundrel in history.” (86)

If you read Cicero’s writings from after 63 BCE, you will be reminded constantly of how Cicero through his vigilance and decisive action preserved the Roman Republic. Indeed, most gentleman scholars have accepted his account uncritically. Yet upon under careful and unbiased scrutiny, his case falls apart, as Parenti writes:

A different conclusion is reached by the few dissenting historians who note that the “evidence” against the five had been proffered by informants of questionable credibility, and that the accused had not been allowed to cross-examine their accusers in any systematic fashion. “To any senator retaining a modicum of common sense it was clear that the

hullabaloo was out of all proportion to the events.” A coterie of sympathizers had tried to mobilize support for their friend Catiline, but were they planning arson, murder, and revolution? If so, by what means? It was not with an invisible army of plebs and slaves, nor was it with Manlius and his veterans who petitioned the Roman proconsul only for land reform and relief from taxes and debts, nor with the Allobroges who were petitioning for grievances of their own and who gave no evidence of planning a Gallic invasion of Rome. (102)

Some of Cicero’s allegations assume an almost comic-opera character, as when two potential assassins were alleged to have come to his house to kill him but left disappointed, because they were not allowed to enter. In spite of Cicero’s fervid descriptions of the “monster” Catiline and his band of “cutthroats,” no one was killed by them, no buildings were burned, but a poorly armed band of protestors consisting mainly of army veterans was slaughtered, and at Cicero’s direction, five purported leaders of the “conspiracy” were strangled without a trial or the presentation of any real evidence. Parenti’s description of Cicero and his “conspiracy” would by itself make the book well worth reading. Here is a lesson of great contemporary relevance, illustrating how a mendacious politician can create a crisis and exploit it to gain the goals of a ruling class. The Roman senate’s “hit list” also gives clear evidence of the viciousness a ruling class will employ to preserve its dominance and prerogatives.

### **Conclusion**

The murder of Caesar was the final blow to the Roman Republic and signified its overdue terminus. In his treatment of Caesar, Parenti points out how many historians have distorted the nature of the man and have sanctioned the lies that are used to justify criminal acts in defense of ruling-class dominance. He makes a strong case that Julius Caesar was indeed a *popularis* (supporter of the people) whose program, if he had lived longer, might have preserved and transformed the republic for a time, and in so doing altered history.

As a classicist, I was impressed with the quality and thoroughness of Parenti's research. I recommend this book also for its great relevance to our troubled times.

Gerald M. Erickson

Department of Classical Languages and Near Eastern Studies  
University of Minnesota

### LEFT CURVE No. 28

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## ABSTRACTS

**Victor G. Devinatz, “An Analysis of Strikes Led by the Trade Union Unity League after Passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act, 1933–1934”**—One standard historical view is that strikes led by the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) failed to make real gains for the strikers. This essay tests the veracity of this historical interpretation by investigating TUUL-led strikes in 1933 and 1934 after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). Most of these strikes, the author concludes, successfully achieved economic and trade-union gains. The federation experienced considerable success leading strikes in smaller shops in urban light industry, particularly the needle trades and shoe manufacturing.

**Brian Miller, “Praxis and Postmodernism: Nine Theses on History”**—This article poses nine theses on the relationship of historians to science as the practical activity of mastery, and the incompatibility of this relationship with various stands taken by some of those called postmodernists.

**Mauricio Schoijet, “The Metatheory of Scientific Revolutions and the History of Biology”**—The author attempts to extend Thomas Kuhn’s idea of discontinuous conceptual changes in scientific theory to biology. In doing so, he finds it necessary to add to Kuhn’s concept of *scientific revolution* the concept *scientific counterrevolution*, in order to reflect the continuing attempts by neo- and anti-Darwinists to undermine theoretical progress in understanding the nature of biological evolution.

**Rafael Hernández, Francisco Brown, Ariel Dacal, Julio A. Díaz Vázquez, and Fernando Rojas, “Cuban Discussion of Why Eastern European Socialism Fell”**—Transcript of a

panel discussion by five Cuban scholars and writers on the collapse of the the socialist systems in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

**Georg Polikeit, “The EU Constitution: Transforming the European Union into a Great World Power”**—The author exposes, in a detailed critique, the antidemocratic character of the proposed EU constitution, which has subsequently been rejected in referenda in France and the Netherlands.

**Nguyen Ngoc Dzung, “Changes in Capitalism since the Communist Manifesto”**—A Vietnamese scholar presents her view of changes in some characteristics of the capitalist economy and ideological approaches since the writing of the *Communist Manifesto*.

## ABREGES

**Victor G. Devinatz, «Une analyse de grèves conduites par la Trade Union Unity League après l’adoption du National Industrial Recovery Act, 1933–1934»**—D’après un point de vu historique répandu, les grèves conduites par la Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) n’ont pas apporté de gains réels aux grévistes. Cet essai examine la véracité de cette interprétation historique en étudiant des grèves conduites par la TUUL en 1933 et 1934 après l’adoption du National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). L’auteur conclut que la plupart de ces grèves ont apporté des gains, à la fois sur le plan économique et syndical. La fédération a rencontré un succès considérable en conduisant des grèves dans l’industrie légère en environnement urbain, en particulier dans le commerce d’aiguilles et la fabrication de chaussures.

**Brian Miller, «Pratique et postmodernisme : Neuf thèses à propos de l’histoire»**—Cet article énonce neuf thèses à propos de la relation entre historiens et la science en tant qu’activité pratique de maîtrise, et l’incompatibilité de cette relation avec diverses positions assumées par quelques uns appelés postmodernistes.

**Mauricio Schoijet, «La métathéorie des révolutions scientifiques et l'histoire de la biologie»**—L'auteur essaie d'étendre à la biologie l'idée de Thomas Kuhn à propos des changements conceptuels discontinus dans la théorie des sciences. Ce faisant, il éprouve la nécessité d'ajouter au concept de *révolution scientifique* de Kuhn, le concept de *contre-révolution scientifique*, afin de tenir compte des tentatives répétées des néo- et anti-Darwinistes de saper le progrès théorique dans la compréhension de la nature de l'évolution biologique.

**Rafael Hernández, Francisco Brown, Ariel Dacal, Julio A. Díaz Vázquez, and Fernando Rojas, «Discussion à Cuba : Pourquoi le socialisme de l'Europe de l'Est a échoué»**—Transcription d'une discussion publique de cinq chercheurs et écrivains cubains à propos de l'effondrement des systèmes socialistes de l'URSS et l'Europe de l'Est.

**Georg Polikeit, «La constitution UE : Transformer l'Union Européenne en une puissance mondiale»**—L'auteur expose, dans une critique détaillée, le caractère antidémocratique de la constitution européenne proposée, qui a été par la suite rejetée par référendum en France et aux Pays-Bas.

**Nguyen Ngoc Dzung, «Les changements dans le capitalisme depuis le Manifeste Communiste»**—Une chercheuse vietnamienne présente son point de vue à propos des changements de quelques caractéristiques de l'économie capitaliste et approches idéologiques depuis la rédaction du *Manifeste Communiste*.