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# NST

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# The Irrevocable Presence of Marxist Philosophy in Contemporary Thought

András Ged

*He is still the only one after Hegel who, for good or ill,  
has pursued philosophy in the grand style, that is, as a  
philosophy that moves the world.*

Ferdinand Jacob Schmidt  
on Marx in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 1913

## I

To reflect about the position of Marxism in philosophy and about the content and status of philosophy in Marxism—although these matters have been part of intellectual history for more than a century—seems today to have become inappropriate, even obsolete.

Is it still meaningful to inquire into the philosophy of Marx and Marxism and into materialist dialectics, not as irrevocably antiquated artifacts of intellectual history—sunk deep in the well of the past—but as matters of philosophical-theoretical knowledge that are relevant to the current situation and that may help us find paths to a more promising future? Must the failure of the first attempt at socialist reconstruction of society be regarded as the only true perspective within which not only the entire present but also the past and the future of social contradictions and of the intellectual heritage of Marxism must all dissolve into thin air? Does socialism's defeat constitute the sole outcome that could

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have been expected? Was it a *dénouement* that was inherent in its history, a preordained fate, as is now alleged? Or is there a broader historical and cognitive context—a context that embraces the development and theoretical shaping of materialist dialectics in its philosophical specificities and in its relationship to the entirety of Marxism and to the history of scientific knowledge—that will permit us to understand more clearly the events of class struggles, their ebbs and flows, successes and debacles, new beginnings and setbacks?

The search for Marxism in philosophy and for philosophy in Marxism—beyond yesterday’s idolatry and today’s condemnation—conflicts with the *Zeitgeist* of our times. Just as happened in the age of Goethe, *our* *Zeitgeist* is “the Lord’s own spirit,” though it uses not merely spiritual means (for example, an abstract-neutral entity or unhistorical, predestined, and mysterious phenomenon). Not a few of those who formerly declared their support for Marxism now proclaim this new *Zeitgeist*. It calls to mind the derisive words of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*:

. . . . . Who deserves greatness  
Deserves your hate . . . . .  
With every minute you do change a mind,  
And call him noble that was now your hate,  
Him vile that was your garland. (1.1.182–83, 188–90)

It is a paradox that the effects of disruptions, fiascoes, and breakdowns often appear to overshadow the long-term tendencies of a historical process, while actually the same tendencies manifest themselves later on, with new intensity and in new shapes. In his biography of Marx, Walter Euchner writes: “In the 1870s Marx reproached the learned people of Germany for having treated standstill Hegel as a ‘dead dog.’ From now on, that is, since the collapse of ‘real socialism,’ perhaps Marx himself will suffer the same fate. At least conservative philosophers are forcefully tolling the death knell.” Euchner adds: “But it has not happened yet and I do not think it will. Marx said far too much that was significant about the social and economic systems that have now become dominant to permit the grotesque failures of his epigones to bring interest in Marx entirely to a standstill” (1993).<sup>1</sup>

The breakdown of socialism was not a result of a theoretical refutation of Marx's ideas or Marxism's conceptual framework in a confrontation of ideas, or of its replacement by another current or conception. But while Marxism in general and Marxist philosophy in particular did not suffer an *intellectual* defeat, they are now confronting a difficult situation as a result of the reversal and destruction of socialist transitions in Europe and in a large part of Asia. The general *philosophical situation* has hardly changed. There have been no fundamental shifts in contents, tendencies, lines of argument, interrelationship of categories, distinctions and convergencies, status and weighting of problems and debates—except perhaps the oft-repeated formula about “the end of Marxism,” that is, the implication that the debacle of the first historical attempt at socialism has falsified materialist dialectics and forced its withdrawal. However, *the situation around philosophy in Marxism and Marxism in philosophy* has altered considerably. Not only are confusion, lethargy, disappointment, and renunciation of a whole body of thought spreading through yesterday's supporters of Marxist philosophy. Marxism seems to have lost its entire power of attraction. The fundamental conclusion of the whole theory of Marxism, according to which the overcoming of capitalism becomes historically necessary because of the movement of its immanent contradictions, is not invalidated as a *cognitive result*. These contradictions continue to manifest themselves in the reality of world capitalism, and the need to surmount them continues as well. However, the conclusion that bourgeois society produces its own negation “with the inexorability of a law of nature” (Marx 1933, 846) cannot refer at this time to an *immediate experience* of its being surmounted by socialism. As historical experience, socialism is still partly submerged; remembrance of it oscillates between nostalgia and curse; and the prospects of a new attempt at socialist reconstruction has not yet gained clearly recognizable outlines. Marx's concept of the dialectic of history included the setbacks, the disruptions, and the temporary failures as moments in the process of overcoming bourgeois society: proletarian revolutions

criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently

accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, and recoil again from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims. (Marx 1979, 106–7)

It is part of the dialectic of history that from time to time events arise that are then superseded by contradictory events that seem to demonstrate the *impossibility* of rational-theoretical dialectics; but the effort of deed and idea to break through this appearance and to destroy it inheres in the same dialectic of history.

## II

Vulgar followers of Marx and vulgar critics of Marx are inclined to transform political events and processes into the realm of philosophy directly. But political processes are located in the history of society and knowledge, and are not floating in a vacuum of pure spirit. They follow their own paths, forming their own shapes, finding their own historicity, their own dimensions. Marxism's content and its position in contemporary philosophy are sometimes disputed and its materialist dialectics sometimes entwined in a net of diverse interpretations that partially conceal its meaning.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, its *irrevocable presence* is a fundamental trait of philosophical thought. The presence of Marxism is a *philosophical-historical fact*. Following on the fulfillment of classical bourgeois thought, its emergence from that thought is ineradicable in the evolution of philosophy. As a reflection of this fact, the studies of Hegel (and Feuerbach) in recent decades have been largely stimulated by the problem of Marxism—though of course not exclusively. This has been observed by Karl Löwith. He respected the philosophical work of Marx though he was inclined to accept the view that Marx had announced the end of philosophy, paralleling in this respect Heidegger's philosophy of being. "The study of Hegel was, paradoxically, revitalized by Marxism, though it was not always realized that Marxism in the sense of Marx was not a new philosophical school but had abolished philosophy as such" (1988a, 244).

The philosophy of Marx appears in some of the contemporary inquiries into Hegel too. Findlay, who fought for the philosophical rehabilitation of Hegel in the English-speaking world and approved of Hegel's rational dialectics, understood the relevance of Marx's materialism to the interpretation of Hegel. At the end of the 1950s, characterizing the place of Hegel's realistic idealism, Findlay stated: "Hegel as an idealist is infinitely far from Berkeley and Kant, and he is more nearly a dialectical materialist than most Hegelians have realized" (1963, 226).

The materialist dialectic, with its own many-sidedness and far-reaching history, has been a *philosophical current* on the intellectual scene for at least a hundred years. It argues with both positivism and life philosophy (*Lebensphilosophie*). The former includes the philosophies of Comte, J. S. Mill, and Spencer in the last century; Mach's and Pearson's theories of knowledge and science; logical empiricism and logical atomism; ordinary language philosophy; Popper's critical rationalism; and the basic tenets of contemporary analytic philosophy. Life philosophy—the wide current in the philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries referring to the allegedly irrational life or existence or being—has been held by, among others, the later Schelling and Schlegel, by Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Dilthey and Simmel, Bergson and James, Jaspers and Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.<sup>3</sup> But while materialist dialectics is situated *within* contemporary thought, it exists *prior to and outside of* the philosophical patterns that are conditioned by the controversy and complementarity of positivism and life philosophy. "Prior to" because the rise of the philosophy of Marxism did not depend on the currents of positivism and life philosophy and in fact preceded their dominant position. "Outside of" because Marxist philosophy is capable of grasping and decoding the motives and consequences of those frameworks; it develops its own contents in debates with *both* currents and raises itself conceptually above *both*. Although Marxist philosophy is deemed now and then to be nonexistent or irrelevant, as happened for a long period in the English and U.S. intellectual world,<sup>4</sup> it is nevertheless a *central point of reference* in the *whole* of contemporary philosophy.

Some of the foremost thinkers, Husserl for example, have ignored Marx and his philosophy. But later, their followers have felt compelled to relate their work to Marxism, as with “phenomenology and Marxism,” which became a subject that was repeatedly picked up in the literature of the Husserlian trend (see, for example, Waldenfels et al. 1977; Henry 1976; Paci 1963, 1972; and Bologh 1979). Philosophers who were contemporaries of Marx but did not encounter his work or interact with him as philosophers—for example Schopenhauer, John Stuart Mill, and Nietzsche—are nowadays expounded in their relationship to the thoughts of Marx (see, for example, Ebeling and Lutkehaus 1980, Duncan 1973, Grimm and Hermand 1978). The work of Max Weber is rightly regarded as the antipode to Marx’s ideas (see Löwith 1988b, 324ff). Weber is also perceived to have been philosophically influenced by insights of the materialist-historical theory of which he so disapproved. He admitted this influence himself in plain terms, unlike most of Marx’s adversaries. He saw himself as a theoretical opponent of Marx but, as Wilhelm Hennis puts it: “It was for him [Weber] a matter of intellectual honesty that any ‘objective’ understanding that was oriented toward cultural values of the world in which we live should have been originated in Marx or Nietzsche” (1987, 107). “Certainly no one besides Nietzsche had such a powerful impact on Max Weber’s work as had Marx. Weber never denied the creativity engendered in him by the questions that Marx posed. But he did not borrow Marx’s answers nor the prophetic conclusions Marx drew from his analyses” (181). Popper formulated his philosophical starting points with contempt for Marx and Marxism, as he stated in his own intellectual biography (1957, 1976). Not only his later polemics against “historicism” and “false prophets” and his search for a refutation of dialectics, but also his early attempt at solving “both problems of the theory of knowledge” treated in his first work were induced by his opposition to Marxism. There is dispute in the literature on Heidegger concerning when Heidegger began to reflect on Marx and Marxism and whether he considered *Being and Time* as a view opposite to Marxist philosophy and social criticism (Goldman 1973).<sup>5</sup> But from the time of his “Letter on Humanism,” his critical refer-

ences to Marx and his philosophy became obvious. It is an unintended and paradoxical consequence of the philosophical confrontations with Marx that materialist dialectics and its impact showed up even in the works of Marx's antagonists. Furthermore, the intensity, tenacity, and scope of the philosophical contention with Marxism confirm its profound significance in contemporary thought.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, philosophical discussions took place in Italy about the thesis that "Marx is a *decisive* fact in the history of philosophy" (Balbo 1949).<sup>6</sup> In France in the second half of the 1950s Sartre also gave close scrutiny to the work of Marx. Drawing on his own past struggles with and for Marxism and his observations of the fate of Marxist philosophy in French intellectual life, and still maintaining his earlier criticism of Marxist philosophy, Sartre wrote:

There is the "moment" of Descartes and Locke, that of Kant and Hegel, and finally, that of Marx. These three philosophies each in turn have become the humus of all thought and form the horizon of all culture. They are insurmountable as long as the historical moment they express is not itself surmounted. I have noticed that an "anti-Marxist" argument often turns out to be the resurrection of a pre-Marxist idea. An alleged "surmounting" of Marxism is at worst a return to pre-Marxism, at best a rediscovery of an idea that is contained in the philosophy deemed to have been "surmounted." (1957, 341)

That Sartre thought he could see a return to pre-Marxist philosophy in the turn to post-Hegelian idealisms was a reflection of his ties with Kierkegaardian existentialism and of his abridgement of Marx's dialectics. Nevertheless, he formulated here a significant insight, the reach and force of which go beyond the hopes and disappointments of individual thinkers, Sartre included, and go beyond the fluctuations of ideologies, undergoing booms and recessions. Since the 1970s French interest in Marxism and its philosophy has flagged. The poststructuralist philosophy of postmodernism (against Sartre, among others) pronounced the slogan "Marx is dead" (Benoist 1970), setting in motion a

fashionable current that had an international effect. In the mid-1970s Lindenberg's book *Le marxisme introuvable* (1975) polemicized against Marxism although it refused to bear witness openly to anti-Marxism.<sup>7</sup> While the 1980s appeared to be dominated by the postmodern rejection of Marxism and by the decline of philosophical Marxism, there still remains to be examined Marxism's suppressed presence in and subliminal influence on French philosophy. "Marxism functions as the subconscious of French intellectual life. It is the thing that respectable authors avoid naming, or do so only with distaste; yet much of the time it is the dynamic force to which they are directly or indirectly responding" (Kelley 1982, 225).

But while French and Italian philosophical discussions were resulting in these premature obituaries of the philosophy of Marxism, the philosophical situation in the English-speaking world was changing in favor of Marxism. From the quite heterogeneous response that the New Left and the student movement of the 1960s gave to Marxism, it evolved as "the phenomenon of re-Marxisation," i.e., "the wide rediscovery in the West of Marxism as a vital philosophy, theory and ideology" (Sprinzak 1977, 373).<sup>8</sup> Two motives—one moral and one scientific—led to the rediscovery of Marxism in circles of left intellectuals: a realization of the depth of the social conflicts of the postwar age and a refusal to adopt relativistic positivism. The student movement diminished and the wave of the New Left abated; however, since the 1970s, academic research and discussion have displayed a continuing interest in and preoccupation with the philosophy of Marxism. Symptomatic of the shifting situation of Marxism was the fact that it became a recognized and valued topic of investigation and debate even in analytic philosophy. "By the early 1960s, Marx was a dead issue in virtually every philosophy department in the United States. . . . In 1983, Marx is a powerful, if often unlabeled, influence in fields as diverse as ethics and philosophy of science" (Miller 1985, 846). The old schemata did not disappear, of course; with reference to the Humean and the positivistically interpreted Lockean tradition, Marxist philosophy is now and then spurned even in these days (see Flew 1991, 269ff). Yet the discussion about Marxism is under way, instead

of being ignored as it was before—a novelty in U. S. and English philosophy. This manifests itself not only within the analytic school of thought, but also in disputes about the materialism of Marx, in which the attempt to recover and to think through his dialectics has created controversies with positivism (see, among others, Ruben 1977; Mepham and Ruben 1979; Norman and Sayers 1985; Bhaskar 1986; Levins and Lewonton 1985; Priest 1987, 1989/90; Smith 1990; Sayers 1990).

### III

The euphoria at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s is beginning to wane. The late crisis of bourgeois consciousness, which was veiled and put into the background by the blissful frenzy of the triumph over socialism, is again coming to light. It appears as a new experience but it evokes enduring traditions. Botho Strauss and Oswald Spengler, “the pompous postmodern and his forebear who has long since sunk into the shades,” are meeting in “the chant of decline.” An ecstasy of decay, *angst*, and fear celebrates its return, reliving its *fin de siècle* mood of decadence, of the collapsing world, of the dissolving self. “The turn of the century appears as a hurdle, and beyond it lurks a historical abyss waiting to engulf the feeble, weak, and small boat of humanity” (Kilb 1993, 57). The watchwords of the conservative paroxysm of decline are emulated and reiterated as requirements of postmodernity. Botho Strauss announces the wiping out of dialectics: “It must be: away with it!” (quoted in Radix 1987, 15). He rejects humanism and demands that we go “back to non-understanding!” (1989, 50). He decries the falsity and enlightenment arrogance of what calls itself “Left.” He esteems “rightist fantasy” and praises the Right for its opposition “to the total rule of the present, which wants to rob and rid the individual of all *presence* of an unenlightened past, of what has come about historically, of mythical time.” Strauss pleads for an attitude that would try “to re-establish contact with prolonged and unmoved time, . . . being essentially deep recollection and in that sense a religious or protopolitical initiation”(1993, 204). It should be noted that the idea of decline is spreading over the world of thought of left intellectuals.

It passes step by step from the corners and circles of the academic Right, where it had survived despite all the upturn, into the sphere still calling itself the Left. . . . The greed for alien thought grows together with the hatred of that which was previously ours. One breaks the spell of Camus and discovers Carl Schmitt, whose decision concept is so much closer to the “facts of life.” One exposes Horkheimer and Marcuse as drawing room intellectuals walking together with the knobbystick-thinker Heidegger through the spinney. One gives Bloch notice to quit and offers shelter to Gehlen in “our place.” (Kilb 1993, 57)

To Richard Rorty, the most influential U.S. advocate of philosophical postmodernism, the abandonment of comprehensive theory, of concepts that strive to grasp totalities of history and society, seems to be an urgent necessity, a promise of liberation and elucidation in the realm of ideas. Allegedly on behalf of left intellectuals, but actually speaking from the standpoint of conservative liberalism, he maintains the definite impossibility of a historical perspective that transcends capitalism and sees anachronism and futility in “*radical* criticism of existing institutions.” He wants to expel not only the term “socialism” but also the words “capitalist economy” and “bourgeois culture” from the allowed vocabulary. According to Rorty, Marxism failed entirely, once and for all, and one does not need any conceptual substitute for it. It is neither necessary nor possible to develop “a large, theoretical framework that will enable us to put our society in an excitingly new context” or even a conception of history as such. “I hope that we may stop thinking that, even if Marx got things wrong, we must keep trying to do the *sort* of things Marx tried to do. . . . I hope we have reached a time when we can finally get rid of the conviction common to Plato and Marx, the conviction that there just *must* be large theoretical ways to find out how to end injustice, as opposed to small experimental ways.” Thus there is no other choice than Popperian “piecemeal engineering”; one has to be content with the banal and pragmatic: “our thirst for world-historical romance—for deep theories about deep causes of social change” cannot be quenched; such a thirst itself is to be

regarded, in this philosophy of postmodernism, as hubris, temerity, arrogance of left intellectuals, an impossible demand, a sin of the mind (1992, 4ff).

Rorty appeals here mainly to the positivists' curtailing of the capacity to acquire knowledge. Stressing the positivist aspect of philosophical pragmatism, he emphasizes the empiricist-relativist ban on efforts to conceive of totality, essence, and history. However, in this reducing of the capacity to acquire knowledge, positivism meets up with life philosophy: the thought of postmodernism represents and radicalizes the conclusions of both trends by giving primacy to life philosophy. Rorty is unwilling to accept the breadth of the Heideggerian view of technological society; he disapproves of replacing "Heideggerian vacuity" with "Marxist vacuity" (1992, 15). But his own philosophy is the joining together of James, Dewey, and Wittgenstein with Nietzsche and Heidegger (see Rorty 1979, 1982). The abdication of "grand theory," the ban on knowledge of the whole, the "farewell to principles" (see Marquard 1982) are common to the different versions of postmodernism—whether those of Rorty or Lyotard, Marquard or Vattimo. It is a paradoxical homage to Marxism that the annunciation of its demise is tied to the renunciation of rational philosophizing about the reality of nature and society, and about history and knowledge in general. Though Rorty suggests that this double break—the announcement that Marx is dead and that the pursuit of grand philosophies is futile, vain, and void—brings new light and unleashes free thinking, it is actually a sign of deepening intellectual darkness.

Marxism and its materialist dialectical philosophy are proving to be a counterforce to intellectual darkness, making possible, through social analysis, an understanding of the reasons and motives for the crumbling of the whole in human consciousness. Objective appearances become transfigured and absolutized in the postmodernists' vision of mythicized decline. Even the "intellectual darkness," with its social and historical conditioning, its transitoriness, the difficulty of its surmountability, and its ever-recurring persistence, including even the ideology of the crumbling of the whole, becomes comprehensible only in the light of rational thought, and can be grasped only from the standpoint of the totality. Materialist dialectics as a counterforce

to the growing intellectual darkness is continuous—in the sense of Hegel’s concept of sublation—with the history of pre-Marxist rational philosophizing; the continuity requires above all that work on this history be done with a view to gaining theoretical knowledge. The sublation is an unfinished process of mutual questioning, while at the same time it maintains the intrinsic value of the historical forms of philosophy.

In spite of its breadth and density, the murky night of intellectual darkness cannot completely shroud the horizon of ideas. Out of the workings of scientific knowledge emerge philosophical beginnings and newly recognized needs that come into conflict with the rejection of comprehensive theories. The ways of thinking that characterize scientific realism, the re-emerging materialism within it, and the search for rational dialectics prevent the intellectual darkness from becoming total and revive themselves in spite of the darkness. The intellectual attitude that seeks to prevent the vanishing of the Enlightenment insists on its own vitality and relevance to the present. It declines to surrender the Enlightenment’s crucial ideas of reason and history to a counter-Enlightenment. According to Jürgen Kocka, “the word *Enlightenment* often means more than just an intellectual movement of the eighteenth century, and more even than that epoch. By uncoupling the Enlightenment from its specific historical connectedness one describes it rather as a starting point of thought, as a basic attitude characterized by public criticism, autonomous use of reason, and by efforts at emancipation and confidence in one’s ability to shape one’s own destiny” (1989, 141). Kocka resists the postmodernists’ hostility to these Enlightenment ideas; he contends that historiography should be oriented to a theoretical context and rejects the neoconservative mood. The origin of Marxist philosophy is tied historically to the Enlightenment and, in common with today’s enlightenment trends, opposes the swelling intellectual darkness, even though current enlightenment claims hold their distance from Marxism, that is, have reservations about some of its aspects.

#### IV

In 1913, in the organ of the German conservative nationalist movement *Preussische Jahrbücher*, Ferdinand Jakob Schmidt

published a paper, "Hegel and Marx," on the occasion of Johann Plenge's 1911 book *Marx and Hegel*. Writing against Marx and Marxism, Schmidt nevertheless recognized the existence of Marx's philosophy and its central status in the intellectual scene of the time, as well as its peculiar dignity as a *philosophy in the grand style* and as a *world-moving philosophy*. "Marx was not a school-room philosopher; he was too much of an agitator, a revolutionary, a fanatic for that, and yet he is still the only one after Hegel who, for good or ill, has pursued philosophy in the grand style, that is, as a philosophy that moves the world" (1913, 417). At the time Schmidt wrote, the *fin de siècle* mood was not yet over. The assumption that Marxism was in crisis, as had been announced at the end of the nineteenth century by Masaryk and Sorel, was still making a considerable impression. And the neo-Kantian interpretation of Marx, which impugned the actuality of a philosophical content in Marxism, was in the ascendancy. Thus it was all the more significant that Schmidt should record his insight that Marx's philosophy was of epochal historical relevance and possessed a world-moving power of thought. True, within a year, after the beginning of World War I, the Marxist labor movement was seized by crisis and decay. But does that prove the aforementioned insight to have been false? The world-moving powers of Marx's philosophy retreated for a time to the grounds of potentiality only to arise again with vigor in 1917. The amplitudes of historical fluctuations are sometimes larger, sometimes smaller; the phases in the alteration of situations may be delayed; more and greater defeats may be suffered by the Marxist labor movement. As these conditions unfold, the course of the dialectic of potentiality and the working out of the world-moving powers of Marx's philosophy are modified; nonetheless the dialectic of both moments and periods is not canceled and is not to be canceled.

The temporary loss in the effectiveness of Marxist philosophy in practice and the retreat of its socially transforming force to potentiality preceded the breakdown of socialism and the disintegration of the Marxist labor movement. This occurred in the course of the attempt at socialist transformation and became a predominant characteristic of the condition of Marxism in that

context. This characteristic resulted from a lengthy and uneven process crisscrossed by counteracting tendencies, in spite of the accomplishment of serious philosophical work. The defeat of socialism brought this process to a conclusion. It revealed the loss, destroyed the protestations to the contrary, the fine phrases and the understandable illusions of those involved in the process. This temporary loss of effectiveness was not a consequence of the philosophical content of materialist dialectics but of its *ahistorical-pragmatic implementation*, which degraded the philosophy of Marxism to *ancilla politicae* [a supplement of politics] and destroyed its connection with practice, that is, with the concern so overemphasized in the ahistorical-pragmatic attitude. This is substantiated by the discrepancy that existed between, on the one hand, the increasing interest among non-Marxists in the theoretical contents of Marxism and its philosophy, and, on the other, the decreasing attraction of Marxism as a guiding principle of action, of social organization, and of governing (see Holz 1992).

The participation of philosophical reflection in the cleansing of the Marxist movement has been long overdue. Brecht, one of the Marxists who realized early on that such a cleansing was inevitable, thought in the 1930s that it was necessary “to liquidate all faith in words, all scholastics, all secret teachings, all shrewdness, conceitedness—all of such snootiness being inappropriate in view of the real situation, which required the giving up of all pleas for ‘faith’ and going over to proof” (1982a, 117). By participating in rigorous criticism of the first attempt to approach socialism, materialist-dialectical philosophy is carrying out a self-examination of its own situation as well. The adopting of quasi-religious traits; the approving and presenting of philosophical theses as if they were articles of faith; the stubborn clinging to dogmatism derided so long ago by Hegel, that is, the tendency to reduce philosophical thoughts to a single proposition, disregarding the path of knowledge leading up to them and the dialectical-systematic context in which they are to be found; the assumed primacy of textbook over theory; explaining dialectics in a way that loses the dialectical movement of thought—the exciting, appealing, dramatic, and humorous moments that are

inherent in dialectics;<sup>9</sup> the aversion to critical self-reflection, which in accordance with Marx's favorite motto, "De omnibus dubitandum" [doubt everything], also includes theorems of Marxist philosophy in its investigative reflections, its connections and its results, and which recognizes gaps and inconsistencies within its own conceptual framework or exposition; the reluctance to take up topics not treated hitherto and problems and insights not incorporated into the textbook—all this led to the discrediting of the philosophy of Marxism, the surrender of materialist dialectics, and apparently warranted its capitulation to positivism and life philosophy. To get rid of these consequences of an ahistorical-pragmatic implementation, including all its unconscious and unintended byproducts, will involve the demands and imperatives of materialist dialectics, and the effort of regaining the world-moving powers of Marxist philosophy.

But instead of being pacified by philistine self-satisfaction based on vacuity and platitude, or shallow vaingloriousness and enervating boredom, there reigns in Marx's materialistic dialectic a kind of Faustian unfulfilled striving:

That I may detect the inmost force  
Which binds the world, and guides its course;  
Its germs, productive powers explore,  
And rummage in empty words no more!  
(Goethe 1930, 1.1.29–32)

Dialectics, from Heraclitus through Plato to Proclus, from Nicholas of Cusa through Leibniz, Diderot, and Deschamps to Hegel and Marx, has been and continues to be the *discovery* of the hidden, the path and outcome of a *thought effort* to penetrate the surface of phenomena, the *adversary* of the trivial, the customary, the obvious, and the palpable.

## V

Hegel's leading idea placed rational-dialectical philosophy in opposition to the irrationalist "elation in the eternal, the sacred, the infinite" that strolls around in a high priest's vestment. It also revealed the philosophical invalidity of the glorification of common sense coming along in a dressing gown. This Hegelian idea

hardly does justice to the current Zeitgeist's renunciation of the knowledge of the whole nor to its delight at the alleged impotence of rationality.

True ideas and scientific insight can be gained only through the work of the concept. It alone can bring out the generality of knowledge, which is neither the common indefiniteness and poverty of the ordinary human intelligence—but educated and complete knowledge—nor the extraordinary universality of the genius, whose inclination toward Reason is spoiled through indolence and self-doubt, but is truth that thrives in its native form—which is capable of being the property of all self-conscious Reason. (1970, 65)

Materialistic dialectics maintains this Hegelian idea by conceptualizing it not as the demiurge of reality but as its mediated, nonmechanistic, dialectical-historical, active reflection. It asserts this idea in its own work, striving for a *change in the form of Marxist philosophy*. This way of thinking, being in process, manifests itself in a diversity of researches, initiatives, and concepts; they do not create, however, an aggregate of philosophical Marxisms or “metaphilosophical Marxisms” that deny philosophy; rather they move within the dialectic of identity and renewal of Marxist philosophical theory. The necessity of working out the new form of materialist dialectics, the first steps of which stem from Lenin's study of Hegel, does not ensue from a failure of the earlier forms of this philosophy whose identity is maintained in, and on the basis of, change in the conceived *historicity of the philosophical theory of Marxism*. The change of form being a modification of content, the necessity for undertaking it arises from the development of its relationship to practice, from the total evolution of philosophy, from the logic of the history and theory of Marxist philosophy itself.

Work on the philosophy of Marxism nowadays is in a phase of *recommencement*, both in the sense of *resuming* the thought continuity of materialist dialectics and *insisting* on its systematic whole, and in the sense of *critically reflecting* on its own history and of a *new beginning* after the failure of the first wave of

socialism. This recommencement implies neither an inevitable break in the intellectual biographies of Marxist philosophers nor a caesura in the theoretical history of Marxist philosophy. The new beginning is a consequence of the changed situation of Marxism and of its philosophy and the altered constellation of the forces and movements that were oriented toward it, at times in a contradictory manner, in a mixture of serious commitment and rhetorical statement, and of Marxism's having been oriented toward them. Different topics and issues of recommencement are emerging and unfolding: historical-critical investigations and political-economic analyses; outlines of the history of socialism taken as movement and as social transformation; projections of socialism's future; reconsiderations of the categorical framework of comprehending capitalism; and reflections on elements of Marxism's political concepts and on their interrelations. The work on materialist dialectics, on its change of form, is one of the fundamental possibilities of the new beginning. It substantiates other elements and possibilities of the recommencement as well. Heilbroner, himself not a Marxist but nevertheless drawn to Marxism, claimed

to see Marxism as embodying the promise of a grand synthesis of human understanding—a synthesis that begins with a basic philosophic perspective, goes on to apply this perspective to the interpretation of history, moves thereafter to an analysis of the present as the working out of historical forces in the existing social order, and culminates in an orientation to the future that continues the line of analysis in an unbroken trajectory of action. Only a very few Marxists have tried to articulate or formulate this immense project. But the possibility lurks in the background of Marxist thought as a consequence of the connectedness of its central ideas. (1980, 22ff)

Materialist dialectics furnishes a basis for this synthesis and interlaces it.

Today it is particularly meaningful to inquire into Marxism in philosophy and philosophy in Marxism. The remembering of the historical experience of the world-moving thought capacity of

Marxist philosophy is not an indication for mourning or nostalgia. The regaining and unfolding of this capacity, of the dignity of a world-moving philosophy, will come only through an interweaving of theoretical insight and scientific understanding with social-historical knowledge gained in class struggles and actions that are aimed at the transformation of society. Times of weakness open up new perspectives on recovery of intellectual and practical strength. Materialist dialectics maintains its capacity for world-moving philosophy by the work that the concept stimulates, work that is silent and eager, passionate, and high-spirited.

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### *Budapest*

#### NOTES

1. Solange Mercier-Josa also objects emphatically to this treatment of Marx as a “dead dog” (1992, 55ff.).

2. In the 1970s John McMurtry stated: “Any serious inquirer into Marx’s thought, then, cannot help but be bemused by the situation in which he finds himself. On the one hand, the texts with which he is concerned are said to be full of conceptual muddle while, on the other, there seems to be no end of problems associated with his system’s fundamental positions and categories. Thus, in approaching his theory one might be excused for feeling somewhat like a worker at the building of Babel. Confusion seems everywhere” (1978, 5ff.).

3. For an detailed critique of life philosophies, see Gedő 1982.

4. Typical of this attitude is the dictum of A. J. Ayer: “As for Marxist philosophy, it does not exist” (quoted in McMurtry 1978, 6). “It is true that Marx and Engels had set out to ‘turn Hegel on his head,’ retaining his dialectic while converting his idealism into materialism, but their views had made little impact on the philosophical world and among their disciples only the Russian Plekhanov . . . had produced original work of any importance” (Ayer 1984, 19). Thus did Ayer finish with the philosophy of Marxism in the twentieth century.

5. Goldmann’s view is controversial and widely disputed.

6. See also Bobbio’s argument (1950) and Balbo’s reply (1950).

7. “Marxism being actually incomplete and unsatisfactory, anti-Marxism,

often with a left face, is used as an alibi of the worst conservatisms. One does not swap a one-eyed horse for a blind hack” (Lindenberg 1975, 245).

8. “The phenomenon of re-Marxisation is remarkable, indeed, because it came as a total surprise to many intellectuals and social scientists who have spoken with great confidence since the early nineteen-fifties about the ‘end’ or the ‘decline’ of ideology” (Sprinzak 1977, 373). See also Megill 1974.

9. Brecht described his reactions to reading Hegel’s *Science of Logic* when he had one of his characters in *Flüchtlingsgespräche* [Refugee Dialogues] say: “In case of humor I have always got Hegel the philosopher in mind. . . . He had what it takes to be one of the greatest humorists among philosophers. . . . His book, *The Great Logic* . . . is one of the most humorous works of world literature. It deals with the way of life of concepts, those slippery, unstable, irresponsible characters; how they are cursing at one another and fighting one another with knives, and then sitting down together to supper as if nothing had happened. . . . The concepts that one makes about something are very important. They are handles for moving things. Hegel’s book deals with the way one can join in the causes of the ongoing processes. He called the best of the jokes dialectics. He says all this, as all great humorists do, while looking deadly serious” (1982b, 1459ff.).

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**REPLACES AD PAGE.**

# **Patriarchalism in Historical Context: Milton and His Feminist Critics. Part Two**

**Leonard Goldstein**

*This two-part article approaches the controversy surrounding feminist critiques of Milton by attempting to historicize Milton's patriarchalism. The first part (Nature, Society, and Thought, vol. 7, no. 1 [1994]) considered the subordination of women under feudal and capitalist property relations and the ideology of the social relations of the period in order to lay the foundation for an elucidation of Milton's view of patriarchal marriage.*

## **V**

Sexuality among early hunters and gatherers was not a hedonistic relation between copulating partners; rather, sexuality is associated with procreation, with the vital need to maintain the size of a population large enough to guarantee its survival in a natural environment that gives no more nutriment than it has to. Among such peoples copulation is surrounded by rituals and practices the aim of which is to heighten fertility. Sexuality, as distinct from the purely biological sexual instinct, is thus embedded in a matrix of public practices inducing a corresponding mentality; the sexual instinct is governed by a mentality that is social rather than private. Sexuality among tribal peoples was thus not linked with any form of individual affection (Briffault 1927, 1:125–26, 131–32; 1934, 374–75). The linkage takes place with the individualization of sentiment attendant upon the

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development of private property. With the development of private property, competition led to the diminution of a diffused sense of social solidarity, as I have already argued. The needed surrogate was found in the attachment of one individualized member of the tribe to another, who could be trusted and depended upon, offering “release from painfully inhibited reactions, an eagerly desired liberation from strain of self-defense, watchfulness, and mistrustful antagonism which social life among ‘strangers’ imposes” (Briffault 1934, 375).

The male property owner sought and found companionship in a woman, for women in the past had been the object of release of the sex instinct. In the changing social structure the woman also experienced this individualization of sentiment and extended her maternal instincts to the man. This emotion became “the tender constituent” of the woman’s otherwise thoroughly practical relationship to the male she had married for his economic value—his strength, courage, and ability to hunt.

The maternal sentiment is . . . very much more primitive, fundamental and stronger than the mating instinct, the love, as we would term it, in the relation between the sexes. The latter is primarily an extension of the maternal instinct. The feelings of tenderness and affection of which the offspring is the direct object have become extended to the male associate for the biological utilitarian purpose of enlisting his cooperation in the discharge of maternal functions. Maternal affection and not sexual attraction is the original source of love. (Briffault 1927, 1:131)

The development of the patriarchal family was thus associated with both the individualization of the social instinct into individual affection and the development of mother love. From showering on the man the maternal feelings and the bodily contact that go with nurturing the child, it was a short step to sexual arousal and satisfaction. The individualization of affection in both men and women was now channeled into a sexual relation expressing mutual trust and release from the feelings of antagonism in the surrounding world of competition. Orgasmic release, in a naked and defenseless state, became a symbol of trust, eventually

separable from strictly utilitarian functions. Only then did the individualized sentiment become a powerful emotion.

According to this interpretation, love is not a natural but rather a historically generated sentiment or, more accurately, an emotion, the surrogate for adequate social activity. I am arguing that emotions develop with the decline of the solidarity of the social whole and the emergence of discrete and separate individuals out of the previous undivided whole. In other words, it is with the emergence of property, however small it may be in such cultures, that individuation takes place and this in turn gives rise to emotions.

The process by which the personality develops out of the anonymity of the individual in the disintegrating tribal group, and the way language becomes structured into a syntax as a result of the same process, have been analyzed by Jane Ellen Harrison for ancient Greek culture (1963). Through a painstaking study of the language, Bruno Snell has shown the ways that the changing social structure, from Homer to late archaic lyric poetry, produced concepts and emotions for which language had to be invented, and for which poetry was the best mode of expression.

Homer speaks of thoughts and of feelings only as far as they give impulses to actions and happenings. Sappho begins to dwell on moods and sentiments even if no activities originate out of them. Sentiments become worthy of utterance since they are an individual and significant state of mind and, above all, because men can join through them and can remain joined by remembrance, whose sole aim is to preserve and keep alive what once has been felt. (1961, 45)

This analysis confirms that when thoughts and feelings become separated from action, emotions are generated as surrogates for action. And, most importantly, it makes clear that emotions such as love or loneliness are historically generated. Such emotions, then, can and must be taught. Those in a situation to be responsive to this teaching do in fact learn these emotions, as can be illustrated in the seventeenth century. The emotions proper to what William Haller has called the *amour bourgeois* (1946, 45) were first experienced by those in the forefront of the

theory and practice of the English Revolution, the Protestant reformers, who had to teach others how to feel the emotions appropriate to the spiritualization of marriage taking place at that time.

The spiritualization of marriage was part of a new type of subjective religiosity, the calling of God through scripture to the individual soul, what William Haller calls the “vocation to the soul.” This type of subjective religion was new for this period and not yet universally understood among the saints, so, as Haller writes,

the preachers did not content themselves with merely explaining this doctrine, they went on to tell what emotions men and women might expect to observe within their breasts, supposing them to be truly called, and how, granting them to be of the elect, they should endeavor to behave. . . . [A] most important question requiring to be answered for the edification of the saints was how to feel and act in those relationships [of love and marriage]. (1955, 82)

The domestic conduct books offered instruction on love, marriage, and family life in all its aspects. This literature, however, did not offer advice on divorce; rather, “the preachers devoted themselves to teaching people how to suffuse relations between the sexes with religious emotion.”

Milton’s view of marriage as shown in the divorce tracts, *Samson Agonistes*, and *Paradise Lost* represents the outer limits to which the revolutionary bourgeois democrats could arrive at that time with respect to the family.<sup>1</sup> In certain respects the attitudes surrounding Puritan patriarchal marriage are similar to those we find in ancient Greece, specifically in Homer and Hesiod. Marilyn B. Arthur argues:

In the rising “middle” class which Hesiod represented . . . there was far greater fragmentation and far deeper divisions between class members [than in the aristocracy represented in Homer]. For these people a policy of aggressive individualism and fierce competition was

dictated; the nuclear family was a necessity of life for this group, and the wife was a part of a corporate effort which made possible her husband's ascent up the economic and social scale. In particular, the most important function of women, that of providing an heir, was crucial to the survival and continuance of the family in an era when availability of land was increasingly restricted, and continuance of rights over family land depended upon the existence of an heir. From the point of view of this class, women's sexuality emerges as a threat and as a potentiality which required regulation and supervision. (1973, 23–24)

Without heirs property was divided among remote kinsmen, and Arthur makes the additional point that possible philandering by women was feared because bastards could lay claim to the property. It was not female sexuality itself (out of which Ziegler makes a threat and a mystery), but female philandering that was the concern of the Greeks.

The nuclear family in seventeenth-century England had a somewhat different function. The monogamy of the patriarchal family assured the required male heirs, but of at least equal importance was the refuge provided by marriage with a trusted companion from the dread of competition in which each is out to destroy the other. The Puritan divines argued for marriage as a companionate relationship with love as the binding cement, and this emphasis on love and companionship was compensatory, as I have already argued. To understand what the Puritans were coping with when they structured marriage as they did we can glance at Hobbes's understanding of the market relations of his times:

Competition of Riches, Honour, Command, or other power, enclineth to Contention, Enmity, and War: Because the way of one Competitor, to the attaining of his desire, is to kill subdue, supplant, or repell the other. (1968, 161)

The state of nature referred to by Hobbes is an abstraction from actual competitive market relations, as Macpherson has shown

(1962, 19–29). Hobbes describes this state in a well-known passage from the *Leviathan* (chap. 13):

In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (1968, 186)

If Hobbes's political theory is the abstract representation of the then-developing market economy, one which would tear itself apart were it not for some control over the anarchic albeit rational individual pursuit of profit that directs it, we can understand the Protestant conception of marriage and domestic relations generally as a bulwark against the depredations a competitive society such as Hobbes describes would produce, a retreat and much-needed solace.

Milton emphasizes marriage as a solution to loneliness, a relation with a woman that externally presents a unified front against a harsh world, and internally an intensely companionate relationship as a solace and release from competitive activity in that harsh world. At one point Milton writes that "if [marriage] were so needfull before the fall, when man was much more perfect in himself, how much more needfull is it now against all the sorrows and casualties of this life, to have an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate in marriage" (*DDD*, 251)<sup>2</sup> that relaxation of the soul from "her severe schooling" (*T*, 597) in active life. Milton argues that marriage was implanted in Adam by God who (in Gen. 2:18) promised "a meet help against lonelines" (*DDD*, 240). Milton writes that in creating Eve as a helpmeet for Adam, "in Gods intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of mariage; for we find here no expression so necessarily implying carnall knowledg, as this prevention of lonelinesse to the mind and spirit of man" (*DDD*, 246). Marriage is thus defined as a relationship wherein a

man is provided with a helpmeet and a solace against the Hobbsean slings and arrows of outrageous competitive life. The ordinance of God in instituting marriage implied “the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the evil of solitary life.” Milton maintains that “marriage is a divine institution joyning man and woman in a love fitly dispos’d to the helps and comforts of domestic life,” held together by “conjugal love arising from mutual fitness to the final causes of wedlock, help and society in Religion, Civil and Domestic conversation” (*T*, 608). Only after “the apt and cheerful conversation of man with woman” comes the procreation of children, as “a secondary end in dignity, though not in necessity” (*DDD*, 235).

In an interesting reworking of Paul’s notion that it is better to marry than to burn (1 Cor. 7:9), Milton says that what God had implanted in Adam in Paradise was a desire to end loneliness—“that desire which God saw that it was not good that man should be left alone to burn in; the desire and longing to put off an unkindly solitarines by uniting another body, but not without a fit soule to his in the cheerfull society of wedlock,” needful against all “the sorrows and casualties of this life . . . [as] an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate in marriage” (*DDD*, 251).<sup>3</sup> Of the burning of the flesh for which Paul sees marriage as the solution, Milton scornfully says that it can be controlled through a strict life, labor, and diet. And he goes on to write that “this pure and more inbred desire of joyning to itself in conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul (which desire is properly call’d love) *is stronger then death*, as the Spouse of Christ thought, *many waters cannot quench it, neither can flouds drown it*.” This is that “rationall burning that marriage is to remedy.” (*DDD*, 251). Over and over again Milton stresses that marriage is to overcome loneliness—*alone* for Milton means “alone without a woman” (*T*, 595)—and this is always coupled with the view that the partner must be “a fit soule.” A reworking of a passage from Plato’s *Symposium* makes it possible for Milton to have Moses tell us that “*Love* was the son of *Lonelines* begot in Paradise by that sociable & helpfull aptitude which God implanted between man and woman toward each other” (*DDD*, 252). Marriage is nothing if not companionate, a means of

“prevention of lonelinsse to the mind and spirit of man” (*DDD*, 246).

Milton concludes that love in marriage must be mutual, and where there is no love “there can be left of wedlock nothing, but the empty husk of an outside matrimony” (*DDD*, 256). Unless the relationship be also one of minds, it is sinful. Milton’s views on sex follow from the logic of the relation. The mere burning of the flesh can be dealt with through a less luxurious diet and plenty of exercise; with typical Miltonic hauteur he observes that for the oversexed, “God does not principally take care for such cattle” (*DDD*, 251). This does not mean that Milton was not interested in the erotic side of marriage, “the Rites Mysterious of connubial love” (*Paradise Lost* 4.741–42), as even a cursory reading of the bower episode in *Paradise Lost* will show (see also Le Comte 1978 and Turner 1987). What I am emphasizing here is that Milton repeatedly refers to the companionship of marriage as its highest goal, in comparison with which the sexual side plays a secondary though by no means unimportant role. Milton writes that generous persons will be able to cope with some “unaccomplishment of the bodies delight” so long as the “mind and the person pleases aptly,” but if the bodies manage and the minds do not, you have something “unsavory and contemptible” (*DDD*, 246).

A marriage that does not meet the definition Milton elaborates, that does not achieve this divinely set end, that provides no meeting of minds and bodies—this marriage simply does not exist. If such a couple remains yoked together by compulsion, the unwilling pair will live in perpetual discord, not in any way fulfilling the intention of God for the married state. The solution is divorce, and Milton proposes, with the rationalism and individualism which constitute the essence of the capitalist spirit (Little 1984, 11):

that indisposition, unfitnes, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature unchangable, hindring and ever likely to hinder the main benefits of conjugall society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce then naturall frigidity, especially if there be no children, and that there be mutuall consent. (*DDD*, 242)

For a classic example of the contradictory nature of the bourgeois position, one need look no further than this, for here the bourgeois man in his simplicity seeks refuge from the deprivations of competitive society in love, which, as I have argued, is the individualized and shriveled form of a generalized social solidarity destroyed by bourgeois individualism. The bourgeois seeks the social through the individualistic, and he cannot see that individual passion is the surrogate for the *social* solidarity he seeks. Bourgeois men and women may feel intuitively that their refuge is in social solidarity, but the stability and durability of this solidarity constantly elude them precisely because of the individualism upon which their love rests. None of this prevents the Puritan from inventing the *amour bourgeois*, which is a solution to one set of problems but creates another.

This contradiction coexists with another, which we have considered in an earlier context: the exchange equivalent gave rise to the equality of the property owners, generalized as political equality. The woman property owner, however, was subordinated to the man to whom she surrendered control of her property when she married. No longer free to do with her property as she willed, she forfeited her rights. To this the women in William Gouge's parish, for instance, objected, as we have noted (Goldstein 1994, 53). Gouge wrestled with this problem, twisting and turning, arguing that the wife was as near equal to the man as it was possible to be, but was not his equal, as God had ordained. Gouge is forced to concede that under certain circumstances—if, for example, the husband is senile or long absent—the wife could dispose over the common goods of the family. He then goes on to face the circumstance where a husband's demand for subjection is extreme. The wife is to obey to the uttermost extent of the subjection that the husband insists on. Gouge goes on to argue the limits of this demand,<sup>4</sup> returning in the body of his text to the problem of equality. In a section entitled "Of a fond conceit, that Husband and Wife are equall," he writes:

Contrary to the forenamed subiection, is the opinion of many wiues, who think themselues euery way as good as their husbands, and no way inferiour to them. The reason

whereof seemeth to be that smal inequality which is betwixt the husband and the wife: for of all degrees wherein there is any difference bwixt [sic] person and person, there is the least disparity btwixt [sic] man and wife. Though the man be as the head, yet is the woman as the heart, which is the most excellent part of the body next the head, farre more excellent then any other member vnder the head, and almost equall to the head in many respects, and as necessary as the head. As an euidence, that a wife is to man as the heart to the head, shee was at her first creation taken out of the side of man where his heart lieth; and though the woman was at first *of the man* created out of his side, yet *is the man also by the woman*. Euer since the first creation man hath been borne and brought forth out of the womans wombe: so as *neither the man is without the woman, nor the woman without the man: yea, as the wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband, so the husband hath not power of his owne body, but the wife*. They are also *heirs together of the grace of life*. Besides, wiues are *mothers* of the same children, whereof their husbands are fathers (for God said to both, *multiply and increase*) and *mistresses* of the same servants whereof they are masters, (for *Sarah* is called *mistresse*) and in many other respects there is a common equity betwixt husbands and wiues; whence many wiues gather, that in all things there ought to be a mutuall equality. (1626, 158, A3)

There are columns, whole folio pages of this sort of argument. Clearly he felt he was arguing an untenable position here, for otherwise he would not have bothered to reply at all; but however much he would concede, he would not give up the main position: women were subject to male governance according to God's law. And here he simply hung on the horns of the dilemma, or more precisely he had to contend with the lived contradiction. She was not equal, but she should in good fellowship be the joint governor of the family. And when it is objected that "*Fellowship* betwixt man and wife cannot stand with a wiues *inferiority* and subiection," we are offered a column or so of

argument, near the end of which Gouge declares that “there are no vnequals betwixt which there is so neere a parity as betwixt man and wife: if therefore there may bee a fellowship betwixt any that are superiour, and inferiour one to another, then much more betwixt man and wife” (1626, 206–207). To be sure, he continues, wives are not servants to their husbands as some husbands use their wives, which is, he avers, “a conceit and practice sauouring too much of heathenish, and sottish arrogancy.” And when the women object to the concrete forms the subjection takes, Gouge dithers: “Other exceptions were made against some other particular duties of wiues. For many that can patiently enough heare their duties declared in general termes, cannot endure to heare their duties those generals exemplified in their particular branches. This commeth too neare to the quicke, and pierceth too deepe.” Indeed it did.

All these objections by women to one or another aspects of their condition (for example, the whole discussion around women's property in marriage), and those cited by Margaret George (1973) and others, lead one to surmise that the process of marginalization of women had proceeded to a point where the women were becoming more and more vocal in their objections, and that the entire Pauline hierarchical argument for the subordination of women was increasingly difficult to defend.

Thomas Hilder also wrestled with the problem of recalcitrant women. After quoting the usual biblical passages in which wives are commanded to submit to their husbands, Hilder writes that “some women may say, we are willing to submit our selves to our own Husbands, as is fit in the Lord; But what submission may be said to be fit in the Lord?” A nice point, but Hilder, armed with the whole armor of God, is not daunted, and answers as follows:

That submission is fit in the Lord that hath respect to any Command the Husband shall lay on his wife which is grounded upon Scripture Precepts or Presidents. Secondly, That submission of Wives to their Husbands is fit in the Lord, which is not forbidden in Scripture, neither expressly, nor implicitly, neither plainely nor by necessary consequence; but to answer such as would pretend

scrupulosity, (when they intend only the discharging of themselves from all submission to their Husbands,) let them ruminare or chew the cud upon the last terme, where Wives are commanded to submit to their own Husbands as unto the Lord, and see what they can gather from those words as a ground to satisfie their consciences for their non-submission. Now because the Holy Ghost did foresee that women (nay, some good women) would not fall down before this truth, but endeavour to maintaine that rotten and unsound maxim, viz. that the wife is the Husbands equall, therefore doth the spirit of God in Eph. 5:23 (which was last quoted) lay down an undeniable reason why Wives should submit to their Husbands. (1653, 101–2)

Hilder is tougher than Gouge, but the point is that Puritan men had to cope with the contradictions of patriarchal marriage, with protesting women, with recalcitrant children, with their own discomfiture, and withal erected a fragile institution, buttressed by law, theology, public opinion, and morality—an institution they desperately needed but one which was constantly falling apart and could only be held together by recourse to divine fiat—the New Testament prohibition of divorce (Mark 10:9).

It was not only theologians like Gouge and Hilder who argued the subordination of women on biblical grounds. So also did Milton, and he also struggled with the contradiction. In *The Christian Doctrine* he writes, “Marriage also, if it was not commanded, was at any rate instituted and consisted in the mutual love, delight, help and society of husband and wife, though with the husband having greater authority” (CD, 355), and he insists that “the wife is allowed to leave her husband if he is harsh and inhuman, which is a very just reason indeed” (CD, 374). In *Paradise Lost* Milton is aware of the problem of the equality of the sexes. After eating the apple, Eve debates whether she should share her knowledge of good and evil with Adam:

But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power  
Without Copartner? so to add what wants  
In Female Sex, the more to draw his Love,

And render me more equal, and perhaps,  
 A thing not undesirable, sometime  
 Superior: *for inferior who is free?* (9.820–25; emphasis  
 added).

Exactly. Milton is aware of the problem of equality, and earlier had come down on the side of the men. In *Tetrachordon* (589) he notes that in the account in Genesis God created first man and then woman. He created “him” not “them,” not “as if man at first had bin created *Hermaphrodite*: but then it must have bin male and female created he him. So had the Image of God been equally common to them both, it had no doubt bin said, In the image of God created he them.”<sup>5</sup> But Paul puts an end to any hope of equality of men and women when in 1 Cor. 11:3, he says that “the head of the woman is the man;” when in Col. 3:18 he says, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord”; and when in Eph. 5:24 he says that “as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” But having asserted the domination of the man, and having joined Paul in exhorting wives to be subject to their husbands, Milton goes on to write:

Neverthelesse man is not to hold her as a servant, but receives her into a part of that empire which God proclaims him to, though not equally, yet largely, as his own image and glory: for it is no small glory to him, that a creature so like him should be made subject to him. Not but that particular exceptions may have place, if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yeeld, for then a superior and more naturall law comes in, that the wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female. (*T*, 589)

What this establishes is not simply that Milton was, as Mary Nyquist would have it (1987, 107, 124),<sup>6</sup> a patriarchalist *sang pur*, but that Milton has to face the injustice of the subordination of women as the word of God. When Milton writes “for inferior who is free?” the argument stops, and the question of the equality of male and female is foregrounded in its absolutely

contradictory form, around which there is no way. This is the force of Eve's question. And Milton's sense of discomfort with the contradiction is acute.<sup>7</sup>

## VI

If we try to understand the underlying informing pressure which made Puritans like Gouge, Hilder, and Milton, among others, wrestle with the problem of the subordinate position of women, we need to return to the revolutionary movement in which they participated. We have already argued that in the Putney Debates some of the class contradictions were expressed in the confrontation between the army Grandees and the rank-and-file soldiers with respect to the franchise for the working people. The expressed theoretical positions were sharp and clear.

With respect to the position of women there was far less clarity. It is contradictory to speak of equality yet make women subordinate to men, giving the husband unlimited power over the wife. We have already argued that the contradiction emerges in the political struggle designed to limit the power of the king over the people and slips over into arguments about limiting the power of the husband over the wife.

For the bourgeois established the subordination of the woman, deprived her of her property rights as wife, only to find that the general revolutionary thrust of his class position tended slowly to force him to relinquish the full right of patriarchal domination. It is a well-known thesis that in challenging the authority of the king, whose ideologues claimed that once a contract has been made between king and people, the king had irrevocable hierarchic authority, the parliamentarians argued that the power conveyed to the king by the people could be taken back should the king (as tyrant) violate the terms of the agreement. The royalists invoked the useful analogy between social contract and marriage contract because, as Mary Lyndon Shanely argues:

it provided an example of a contract which established a relationship of irrevocable hierarchical authority between parties. Supporters of Charles I pointed out that marriage was a relationship which both man and woman entered by

their free consent, but in marriage God established the husband in a position of ruler over his wife. Neither the spouses' own agreement nor a violation of God's ordinances concerning marital duties could alter that relationship or free husband and wife from their obligations. Similarly, men might originally have freely agreed to establish a monarchy, but once the agreement was struck, the sovereign's powers were as fixed as those of the husband. (1979, 80–81)

To answer the royalists' claims concerning kingly authority, the parliamentarians had to debate the concept of marriage as well, arguing that "the authority of husbands over wives could be limited or even broken" (82). In doing so, however, they exposed contradictions in their theory.

The parliamentarians in the early seventeenth century developed their views in a situation where a split had occurred in Puritan thought with respect to divorce, for though marriage was no longer a sacrament, even the most liberal Puritans would grant divorce only on grounds of adultery and desertion with the right of the aggrieved party to remarry (divorce *a vinculo*). Shanley writes that the parliamentarians agreed with the royalists on the superiority of the husband to the wife in marriage.

But some argued that despite the husband's superiority there were *inherent* restrictions on his power. Bolder writers enlarged on this and asserted that if a husband transgressed those limitations, his wife had the right to oppose him and in extremity to separate herself from him. (1979, 83)

Puritans like William Bridge, Henry Parker, and Herbert Palmer argued in this way. Herbert Palmer and the coauthors of a pamphlet entitled *Scripture and Reason Pleaded for Defensive Armes* (1643) argued that as an act of self-preservation a wife could leave her husband. Shanley writes that "Palmer and his associates argued that the right of self-preservation gave an abused spouse the right to separate, just as the right of self-preservation gave parliament the right to raise an army under defensive arms"

(84). Milton also used the political argument, but went beyond it to argue for incompatibility as a ground for divorce.

Neither the arguments of the advanced parliamentarians nor those of Milton could persuade Parliament to liberalize the law. Shanley observes that

while parliamentarians continued to accept the injunction “wives, be subject to your husbands,” many wished to argue that parliament shared authority with the king. Parker was almost alone in allowing a wife any resistance to a violent husband other than absence, but many argued that men might take up arms against the king. And although the parliamentarians eventually argued that if the terms of the political contract were abused and broken then the contract must be revocable, they had serious doubts about divorce *a vinculo*. (1979, 85)

After the Restoration, the arguments on political power and the analogy to marriage shifted as scripture gave way to natural-law theory of social contract. Contract theory, Shanley points out, “called into question the natural hierarchy of husband over wife which both parties in the Civil War had taken for granted” (85). Without following Shanley’s detailed discussion on the maturation of contract theory, we can see that Locke takes the premises of the natural freedom and equality of family members more seriously than previous thinkers. Locke bases his notions on the origin and nature of “conjugal society” on the contractarian model of the natural law theorists. He argues that contract in conjugal relations meant not only the agreement to marry, but also that the contracting parties might set at least some of the terms of their relationship. Locke’s theory is based on the sovereignty of the individual, on strict rationality, and equality; that is, it is consistently bourgeois.

The contradiction here is evident: the basic tendency towards equality, inherent, as I have argued, in the market relation, is negated by the unwillingness of Parliament to extend that equality to women. One explanation is the conservative nature of the Presbyterians who were in control of Parliament—*conservative* here meaning simply that the egalitarian tendency of the

bourgeoisie was limited by its fear of the lower classes who might push *their* egalitarian and communistic demands far enough to constitute a serious threat to property. In practice, rights were limited that were clearly demanded in theory. Further, the argument for equivalency rightly sees the equivalent relation as the basis for political democracy, but it hides the extraction of surplus value that takes place prior to the market relation and is, moreover, hidden in the wage contract. The wage is set equivalent to the existential minimum while the product of the surplus labor is the property of the capitalist and far greater than the wage. No equality is possible here, for it is the nature of the property relation that the propertied get richer and the nonpropertied get relatively poorer. What Ireton understood was also understood by large property in Parliament: the extension of the franchise would threaten property. Thus the refusal to extend bourgeois equality to the nonpropertied arose out of the fear that if the lower classes had the franchise, they would outvote property.

We have already seen that the women of the period faced a similar contradiction: as parts of a developing capitalist society they were denied the equality rightfully theirs. Differentiating middle- from lower-class women makes the reasons for the refusal of the bourgeoisie to extend equality to women clearer. Chris Middleton points out that opportunities for women's activity in production narrowed as capitalism developed. He agrees with Alice Clark's early studies (1982 [1919]), that the elimination of women from various occupations was due to "the advancing capitalist organization of industries and agriculture."

But, in this event, capitalism was not operating in a "sex blind" fashion. The new industrial projects were *expanding* the range of opportunities for men with little capital, outside the traditional centers of craft, industry and trade. Women were unable to capitalize on the new possibilities because their surplus labour was being systematically drained off by their husbands or fathers. At the same time, in so far as they continued to engage in production, whilst losing many of their traditionally separate spheres of labour, they fell increasingly under the supervision of

men. . . . This shift in the basis of patriarchal power was crucial for its survival within the capitalist class that emerged from the ranks of petty producers. For whereas it is virtually impossible to imagine the establishment of a relatively stable structure of peasant landholding, under conditions of feudal exploitation, unless the patriarchal regulation of female procreativity is secured, there does not appear to be a similar necessity for the systematic exclusion of women from the ranks of [capitalist] employers or associated professions. The fact that so few women were able to resist the strategies of closure should thus be seen as a result of the rising male bourgeoisie's success in concentrating capital into its own hands; and it was the initial appropriation of household labour during the phase of primitive accumulation which made this patriarchal victory possible. (1983, 26–27)

Two types of women are being dealt with here. The wife of a cottager who is attempting to set himself up as a capitalist is exploited because her low wage is his capital, making it impossible for her to set herself up as an independent capitalist. The second type is the middle-class woman who has been forced out of the process of production, denied the craft or trade she had recently practiced, to become a housewife. Such a woman is oppressed since she cannot develop herself in the way that suits her, but she is not exploited since she shares in the consumption of the surplus value her husband extracts from his workers. Middleton sees no real necessity for the systematic exclusion of women from “the ranks of capitalist employers or associated professions.” A possible reason might be the desire of the developing capitalist to eliminate competition, with an appeal to the voice of God in His Pauline persona if the competition happened to be his wife and children. A more cogent reason might have been the need of the husband for a consoling and supportive (not a competing) wife in the survival struggle.

Among intellectuals and artists, the patriarchalism might well be ameliorated: oppressed in being unable to engage in professional or scholarly life, at least with full independence, these

women were not exploited. Feminists of the seventeenth century make the point that although perfectly competent in language and scholarship, they could not pursue such learning as a career, and we need only recall Germaine Greer's study of women artists to realize the nature and severity of the oppression. Women in business seem to have made out better than aspiring female painters, writers, or scholars.

## VII. Summary and conclusion

I have been trying to show that the position of women is, in the last instance, the result of objective historical forces, namely, the development of capitalist production relations in the stage of the transition from handicraft production in the cottage system to the extended manufacture in the *Kaufsystem*. This process affected the family structure and position of women in production differently from women among craftsmen and merchants, some of whom were becoming capitalists, increasingly organizing production and transforming the *Kaufsystem* into the putting-out system. The result was the proletarianization of the producer and the "capitalistization" of the craftsmen and merchants who were organizing and increasingly dominating the entire process. The process of capital formation meant for the producers changes in family structure and the position and function of women. Here the male could exploit the women and children of his own family out of the exigencies of capital formation and the pressure of the organizing craftsman or merchant capitalist, extracting her surplus labor and thus preventing her own activity as capitalist. In each of these stages the demographic pressures changed, and the women suffered not only exploitation but oppression as well. The separation of the workplace from the household pushed the middle-class woman out of production, and transformed her from Goodwife to Mistress of the competing entrepreneur. In middle-class marriage women were oppressed but not exploited.

The Puritan response to this situation was a new conception of love, marriage, the family, and divorce. The type of marriage and family proposed by the domestic conduct book writers met the middle-class need for a retreat, for a shelter from the *bellum*

*omnium contra omnes* of competitive private property. In the patriarchal family, the wife, deprived of her role in production and stripped of her property, provided for the husband a release from the loneliness of the defensive and aggressive competitors in the form of “wedded conversation” (C, 733). This partnership depended primarily on mutual compatibility, cooperation, solace, peace and quiet, and love, and, secondarily, though very importantly, on a shared economic interest. The highest expression of this relationship was to be a mutually satisfying sexual love, fully legitimated for both men and women, in contradistinction to the attitudes of the church fathers on the subject.

The Protestant patriarchal nuclear family was new in that it served functions beyond but including the transmission of property and procreation, which were the primary functions in feudal aristocratic and very early trading and artisan families. The ideologues of the nuclear family drew on the patriarchalism of the past, emptied it of its old misogynist content, desacramentalized it, valorized marriage (as against the virgin state preferred in Catholic theory), approved remarriage of widows, and, finally, legitimated conjugal sex for all. In a Calvinist like Milton the logical consequence of bourgeois individualism, contract, natural law, and reason led him to the notion of divorce on grounds of incompatibility, for which he vigorously fought in no less than four tracts. These grounds today constitute the most humane grounds for the dissolution of an impossible marriage. For all this Margo Todd (1980) has argued that Protestant marriage is not new, that “a substantial number of Catholics and Anglicans had strongly advocated the superiority of the married state over virginity, the religious duties of householders, the necessity of parents to catechise their children and the spiritual equality and didactic responsibilities of women in the family.” This argument has little merit. The statements from the few pre-Reformation and Renaissance Catholic tracts there are can in no way equal the quantity of Protestant literature on the family and, if we add Milton’s tracts, divorce. In any case, the *amour bourgeois* is not a Catholic idea.<sup>8</sup>

Milton was patriarchal in his attitudes towards women, and apart from a few religious sects so were all Protestants at that

time.<sup>9</sup> To fault Milton for his patriarchalism and by implication demand a more radical view from him than, say, that of the Familists, Quakers, Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchists, Ranters, Muggletonians, or Diggers is to fail to understand the impact of the emerging new mode of production in shaping the structure of the family and the position of women within it, and, further, is to underestimate the nature and power of ideology. How women were controlled by a developing hegemonic ideology may be illustrated in the political activity of some women in the Civil War.

Patricia Higgins writes that a number of women presenting petitions to Parliament were prepared to “accept the view that they were inferior to men”; indeed, in one petition the view is expressed that the notion that women were equal to the men “is a thing so gross that *even women* perceive the evil of it” (1973, 210–11). The grip of the notion that wives’ political views were included in the expressions of their husbands’ views was so strong that the women hardly conceived of political activity independently of their husbands. The power of ideology to make people act against their own interests is very strong and manifests itself in thousands of ways. Wives and children are indoctrinated in the patriarchal value system (in the seventeenth century through the domestic conduct books, of which Gouge and Hilder are typical examples; in our time through many women’s magazines, romance novels, and the like; and in both periods by their own mothers). In the middle class, at least, women have been conditioned to seek partners in terms of the “good provider” norm. Having married in these terms, many women have not felt dependence as loss. Fulfilling their part of the bargain, women often may not yearn for freedom, much to the puzzlement, chagrin, and disappointment of feminist activists. The notion of reciprocal rights and reciprocal duties in patriarchal marriage was as effective then as it is now in keeping many women happy in its confines.

I am arguing that Milton’s position on love, marriage, and divorce was conditioned by his class position. Christopher Hill has demonstrated that Milton’s ideas “were as radical as is possible without endangering the essentials of propertied

society" (1977, 250). In his Biblicism, Milton felt the need for "some restraints against the mere anarchy of individual interpretation" (248). He "wanted to preserve the authority of the Bible, because (among other things) he wanted to preserve private property and class distinctions" (249). Indeed, Hill insists that "recognizing Milton's contradictions, and placing them in their social context, is essential to understanding the poet," and these contradictions or tensions were never overcome. "He was in favour of marriage based on love, of freedom of divorce in case of incompatibility, but he insisted on the inferiority of women" (250). Aers and Hodge emphasize, as we have already seen, that Milton's attitudes towards women and marriage contained contradictions "he never fully resolved" (123). They put it this way: "*Paradise Lost* shows how far he was able to go in his heroic and radical struggle towards a more adequate view of sexuality and the relation between men and women" (123–24), but "although he made new demands on the marriage relationship and weakened the repressive forms of the basic ideology in this area, he did not bring himself to renounce an exploitative relationship which he as a male benefitted from in seventeenth-century society (as his descendants of male gender in the twentieth century continue to benefit)" (127–28).

The main point is this: no bourgeois, however far he may lean to the left, can fundamentally alter the relationship between the sexes without losing something essential to himself, without ceasing, that is, to be an oppressor, or a beneficiary of oppression. It is this fundamental contradiction *within* the class, that of offering universal equality without the possibility of achieving it so long as the benefits of a privileged position are retained by a part of the class, that creates both psychological and political tensions. One conclusion Hill reaches is that "after the eclipse of the traditional culture of court and bishops, Milton found his allegiance divided between the culture of the Protestant ethic and the lower-class third culture; and this may underlie many of the tensions revealed in his writings" (1977, 465). Since for Aers and Hodge the sources of the tensions are to be found in the contradictions *within* the revolutionary class itself, the resolution of

the tensions cannot be achieved by anything that class itself can do short of abolishing itself. Their view does not clearly explain, as does Hill's, the utopian elements in Milton's thinking, which came from the religious sects of the lower classes for which Milton had some sympathy.

Hill's analysis, then, suggests the following: Milton's views on sex and marriage were those of his class, specifically that part of the bourgeoisie that consisted of small property owners. The contradictory position of small property made the views of the Left attractive (a position much like that of social democracy today). As small property owners, the group was constantly threatened by large property, so that in self-defense it allied itself at times with the Left in political action against large property, partially accepting the Left's critique of large property. Milton's critique of the Presbyterians was based in part in the fact that they were big businessmen, and he distrusted them deeply, as David Quint has shown, either in their Commonwealth or Restoration monarchical forms (1987).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, as property owners, they did not go over fully to the lower classes, for to do so would be to lose their class advantage, the possibility of extracting surplus values from the lower classes. Milton was a petty-bourgeois revolutionary who came from small property. He became critical of large property when it (in the form of the Presbyterians in and out of Parliament) was ready to compromise with the Stuarts. The Revolution had achieved what the Presbyterians had desired, and they felt seriously threatened by the radicals in the army and elsewhere who were prepared to push the Revolution to the point that it challenged as a whole. This threat is evident in *Pride's Purge* as well as in the Putney debates. Milton's attacks on the Presbyterians are well enough known to obviate the necessity of rehearsing their politics here. The conclusion is that however far Milton leaned in the direction of a radical critique of property, which indeed takes very complex and subtle forms, he did not go over to the artisans, day laborers in shop or farm, and demand the abolition of property as some of the sects did. His attitude toward divorce flew in the face of the Presbyterian majority in Parliament, while his views on love, marriage, and divorce, much of them influenced by

radical thought, constitute the greatest statement we have on the *amour bourgeois*.

Feminists like Froula or Gilbert fail to see that the limits of Milton's views on sex and marriage are those of a class, that he was "progressive" in his views on gender in a way very few of his contemporaries were. Froula and Gilbert fault Milton for his patriarchalism, and in effect demand from him what would have been at that time a very left position, one that would have taken him clean out of his own class and, as we have already indicated, would have placed him in the ranks of the then-developing proletariat. This is rather like my asking them not only why they are not Marxists, but why they have not joined a Communist or other revolutionary party.

That Milton was patriarchal need not be denied; indeed, few people who read Milton today do so. The problem is to understand patriarchalism as a social institution that developed as a result of historically given economic, demographic, social, political, and ideological forces, rather than seeing it as a result of an essentialist drive of men to dominate women. To accept the latter explanation is to despair of a political solution to gender exploitation and oppression.

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## NOTES

1. For some earlier views on Milton's ideas on love, marriage, and divorce, see Allan Gilbert (1920), William and Malleville Haller (1942), Haller (1946), and Siegel (1950).

2. Biblical citations are taken from the Authorized (or King James) version. References to Milton prose works are taken from *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by Don M. Wolfe (1953–82) and are cited in the text as follows: *DDD=The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, edited by Lowell W. Coolidge, vol. 2, 217–356; *MB=The Judgement of Martin Bucer*, edited by Arnold Williams, vol. 2, 416–79; *T=Tetrachordon*, edited by Arnold Williams, vol. 2, 571–718; *C=Colasterion*, edited by Lowell W. Coolidge, vol. 2, 719–58; *CD=Christian Doctrine*, edited by Maurice Kelley and John Carey, vol. 6; *REW=The Readie and Easie to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, edited by Robert Ayers, vol. 7, 396–463. One of the critics of *DDD* argued that if companionship were the main cause for marriage, Adam had God and the angels to

converse with; hence, there was no need for a woman. In *T*, Milton takes the argument and simply turns it around: "lonelines is the first thing that which Gods eye nam'd not good. . . . And heer *alone* is meant without woman; otherwise *Adam* had the company of God himself, and Angels to convers with; all creatures to delight him seriously, or to make him sport. God could have created him out of the same mould a thousand friends and brother *Adams* to have bin his consorts, yet for all this till *Eve* was giv'n him, God reckn'd him to be alone" (595).

3. In a sermon entitled "*A Wife in Deed*," Thomas Gataker writes:

And if in Paradise then, a place of all delight, a garden of pleasure, there was need of helpe and societie, and of the helpe and societie of such a one, whom yet there was not then this use of: How much more then in this world, in this vale of teares, where crosses are so rife, which there were not, and where the more crosses Man is encombred with, and hath to encounter withall, the more need of comfort and Assistance he hath? (1637, part 2, 163)

4. Gouge complains in a dedicatory epistle to a sermon collection that his views had been taken

as if I had taught that an Husband might, and ought to exact the uttermost, & that a wife was bound in that uttermost extent to doe all that was deliuered as dutie, whether her husband exact it or no. But when I came to deliuer husbands duties, I shewed that he ought not to exact whatsoever his wife was bound vnto (in case it were exacted by him) but that he ought to make her a ioynt Gouvernour of the family with himselfe, and referre the ordering of many things to her discretion, and with all honourable and kind respect to carrie himselfe towards her, as if he be wise and sociable in obseruing them, his wife can haue no iust cause to complaine of her subiection. That which maketh a wiues yoake heauy and hard, is an husbands abuse of his authority: and more pressing his wiues dutie, then performing his owne: which is directly contrary to Apostles rule. This iust Apologie I haue been forced to make, that I might not euer be iudged (as some haue censured me) a hater of women. What is important here is not only that the women publicly objected to their subordination, but also that the bourgeois ideologues were sensitive enough to the inequality to have to reply to it. (1626, A3–A4)

5. McColley argues that in *Paradise Lost* "subordination is not inferiority," and makes a case for a tradition in which modern biblical exegetes soften the antifeminist rabbinical and patristic tradition, maintaining that "while retaining some degree of subordination, [Milton] purges that state of all suggestion of weakness or wickedness, inferiority or limitation, carnal precedence or unequal responsibility, and avoids the radically false dichotomy of opposing freedom and service" (1983, 35).

6. Nyquist has written a polemic against the modern liberal Christian

exegesis of Genesis that tries (as does McColley) to show that biblical subordination is not inferiority. Her article is old-fashioned methodologically in that it is, in spite of frequent claims to the contrary, unhistorical. The title claims to analyze the “genesis of gendered subjectivity” but does nothing of the sort. By analysis I mean not exegesis, biblical or deconstructivist, but a demonstration of a relation between the structure of the thought under discussion and the social structure out of which this thought emerges in its historical concreteness. There are also repeated references to “ideology,” but in none of the places where the concept is used does it mean anything more than a male bias. The term “bourgeois” recurs repeatedly without being used in any serious analytical sense. Nyquist’s polemic against McColley is also curiously old-fashioned. To argue whether Eve is equal to Adam using a method of close analysis of a few verses from Genesis that is an up-dated version of late scholastic or rabbinical disputation is to share the illusions of two past epochs, that of the writer of *Genesis* and that of seventeenth-century theologians. In the climate of his times Milton could use such a method: there was no other that could yet be effectively or even safely used (as Galileo found out). With an array of modern sociological, cultural, anthropological methods of analysis available today, one simply cannot use a theological method that tries to make religion rational. Once one accepts the fact that religion is based on faith, the whole rational approach becomes incompetent, immaterial, and irrelevant. Secondly, if one wants to know whether Genesis puts Eve second to Adam, one need only examine the social structure within which *Genesis* was written to find out.

7. Susanne Woods emphasizes the sense of discomfort Milton experienced in granting women the freedom to choose virtue and the Pauline assumptions which limit female autonomy. She also notes that “The tension modern readers continue to feel between Milton’s impressive portrayal of Eve’s dignity and freedom on the one hand and her stated position to Pauline doctrine on the other is not likely to go away (1988, 19). Nor should it. Milton was never comfortable with human hierarchy. The republican who abhorred an aristocratic system that gave authority by happenstance to birth of kings and princes could not be perfectly at ease with a gender hierarchy also dependent on both. Milton’s profound respect for human liberty had the ultimate effect of subverting his patriarchal assumptions” (1988, 19).

8. This may well be the view of some academic closet Catholics, but it suffers from a number of methodological difficulties. Phenomenological similarity of ideas does not make them the same ideas. This would be like saying that the atomic theory of Democritus is the same as that of Max Planck. Secondly, the Christian humanists may have anticipated some, not all, of the Puritan ideas on marriage and the family, but they did so not because they were Catholic but because the humanists, Christian or not, were the first *bourgeois* ideologues (see Von Martin 1944 [1932]). Thirdly, Todd picks out the relatively minor aspects of the Puritan conception of marriage to compare to the Catholic, leaving out what was new, e.g., marriage as a contract not a sacrament, that marriage was a relation whose primary function was not procreation, the whole notion of divorce if the relation failed, and the spiritualization of the sex

relation. Fourthly, even if it be granted that *some* of the Puritan notions had a Christian humanist filiation, there is an enormous difference between a sentence here or there in one book or another in an earlier period and a large number of books on the same subject in a later period constituting an adequate revolutionary response to a revolutionary situation. Still, Todd notes that Tridentine Catholicism, in rejecting Erastian humanism, abandoned the spiritualized household to the Protestants (19): "Christian humanism, not English Calvinism, laid the foundations of the spiritualized household" (34). Such arguments as Todd offers do nothing for modern liberal Catholics in their efforts to modify the Holy See's views on such matters as divorce, contraception, abortion, and homosexuality.

9. Hill writes that "to criticize Milton because he stated a theory of male superiority is like criticizing him because he did not advocate votes or equal pay for women. No one, to my knowledge, in the seventeenth century claimed that women were wholly equal to men, just as no one, not even Levellers, seriously proposed to give them the vote" (1977, 118).

10. What Quint calls "statist policies," namely, the rational analysis of economic forces for intelligent investment, were followed by Charles II to increase crown revenues. These policies were worked out on the basis of the new political arithmetic of John Graunt and William Petty, and their aim was capitalist development and commercial expansion. Quint writes that "Milton had seen this [application of statist policies] coming, this easy transition and slide from republican to royalist statism, just as he saw his countrymen's hunger for trade as a threat to their freedom." In his *Second Defense of the English People* (1654) he argues against a vigorous economic policy "rather than to administer incorrupt justice to the people, and to render every man promptly his own deserts." Quint cites this passage and comments that the "efforts of statist politicians to build England into an economic and military power, engaged in a dynamic foreign policy, would transform the republic into a mirror-image of the deposed monarchy—and, Milton implies, would pave the way for the king's return" (142). Quint argues that Milton's "fear of central authority is linked with . . . Milton's religious politics: his opposition to Presbyterianism, to tithes and a stipendiary clergy, to censorship, to a state religion, even one constituted by the Independents themselves." He maintains that the attack on the Stuart monarchy may well be part of an attack on monarchy "as part of the larger configuration of the modern nation-state, the sponsor, whether in royalist or republican guise, of a new statistical science and instrumental rationality" (142). Milton's fear, expressed again in *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Commonwealth* (1660), is that an aggressive economic policy demanded by tradesmen would force England "to foregoe and set sale religion, liberties, honour, safety, all concerns divine or human to keep up trading" (*REW*, 386). To put it differently: Milton's fear is that of the left-oriented petty-bourgeois intellectual who sees the connection between the state and capitalist enterprise and fears the consequent limitations on the freedoms of the people. The position is quintessentially social democratic, if one may use the phrase in this connection.

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# Nature and Emancipation

Werner Seppmann

The state-socialist bureaucracies have been discredited as models of socialist society that offer alternatives to capitalist global catastrophe partly because of their lackadaisical and irresponsible handling of natural resources. The widespread reduction of materialist social theory to economic equations alienated a public sensitive to the hazards of industrial society. In view of modern dangers, the explanations of traditional Marxism may seem incomplete and dated. Contrary to prejudiced and one-sided interpretations, the works of Marx and Engels actually contain many indications of the need to deal with ecological problems in the modern sense. They appear, however, to some readers (and among these are some partisans of Marxist theory) as mere footnotes within the structure of economic and political theory. Their real meaning has remained hidden by a dogmatic view of the concept of matter that caused nature to be seen as simple material for manipulation by a goal-oriented human species as well as by a functionalist social model of structuralist Marxist interpretation.

## *Mastery over nature and alienation*

Marx's treatment of the ecological problem is oriented on a perspective of human emancipation and in an all-embracing analysis of the dynamic of the socialization process. That an irresponsible attitude toward natural resources oriented on considerations of immediate "efficiency" is rooted in the same sociostructural conditions as a demonstrated lack of interest in

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human emancipation did not escape Marx's attention. The forms for relating to nature are a reflection of the ruling principles of socialization.

The destruction of nature and obvious social and human alienation result from strict orientation on the exchange value of the products instead of on their social usefulness. As long as the growth of capital and maximum profit are the standard of economic activity, laboring humans, like nature, function exclusively as objects of utility and cease to be a power for themselves (Marx 1953, 313). "Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth—soil and the labourer" (Marx 1967, 1:506–7). "Both by premature excessive efforts and exhaustion, by disturbing the balance between output and income, the future realistically can be wasted" (Marx 1956–1990, 26.3:303).

The increase in value, as the exclusive standard of social rationality, leads to a general recklessness toward the needs of the individual and society, as well as toward the demands of regeneration of nature. "All progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility" (1967, 1:506).

Although capitalist society historically helped rationality break through, it remains fundamentally irrational. Rational calculation is subordinated only to an orientation of individual goal-oriented behavior (enterprise economy). Social actions in their totality remain subject to the "free play" of the market. Without taking into account the general (social and ecological) consequences, purposeful rationality results in irrationality. "In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, are mostly quite the opposite in character" (Engels 1987, 463–64).

*Contradictions in developing the productive forces*

Beyond the critique of capitalism, Engels, especially, deserves the credit for fundamentally presenting the problem of the historically derived forms of mastering nature. Although he and Marx were tied to the technologically optimistic philosophy of the time, he saw the destructive course of the development of the productive forces. This would not be overcome simply by changing the relations of production, but required a qualitative change in the organization of labor and a modification in the technical apparatus (Marx 1987, 460–61).

This insight, however, should not lead to the conclusion reached by the fashionable “postmodern” consciousness that rationality and reason are outmoded. It is not “rationality” that has collapsed, but rather its reduction to simple “calculation” and economic “efficiency.” The political-programmatic consequences of this insight are to aim for conditions of socialization that exclude the destructive results of actions on the entire society as well as on the natural resources required for social existence. This achievement can only be brought about by a program of emancipation that recognizes the need for human self-realization and places aesthetic life at the center. Eating away at humanity is competition as a principle that makes the security of individual existence possible only by placing one’s neighbor at risk. Only through overcoming this competition can the members of society develop a new sensibility toward the issues of society and nature. Skepticism regarding “rationality” will have no basis when it is negated by a reasonable way of life.

The merely normative-moral critique of the “alternative” ignores the real dominating relationships and capitalism’s inner drive toward waste and destruction. The destructive forces released are not the result of technology’s own dynamic or an individual’s faulty activity, but rather are the result of a form of production whose goal is its own self-destruction. Under competitive economic conditions the dominant contradictions between rationality and irrationality cannot be eliminated. Every successive promise for an acceptable goal is undermined by agents of the economic process that operate in isolation as a con-

sequence of the specific “productivity” dynamic for the production of exchange values in competitive capitalism and the rationality standards for high profitability of enterprises. “The irrational prerequisites constitute precisely the ideological conditions for the rationalization of the partial area” (Koffler 1967, 176).

Without a critique of political economy and a sociological analysis of the real constellation of interests, the ecological problem is simply not understandable. The lack of understanding of the self-destructive dynamic of the capitalist world system is also displayed by the individual authors writing of the subject and by groups such as the Club of Rome. “They hope to end the power of the objective laws of development by humanist appeals to the rulers in the developed as well as in the poor countries” (Kalt 1993, 49).

It is illusory to hope that under the conditions of worldwide domination by capital even a beginning to the solution of the problems pressing humanity is possible. The impoverishment of the peripheral exploitation zones is expanding, and the green-motivated reforms merely postpone ecological collapse. There are indications that the “solidarity” forcefully derived from the East-West conflict will break up in the not-too-distant future and new lines of confrontation will arise that will also include the military option. Actions are necessary against the crassest forms of environmental destruction just as “every struggle for even limited improvement, for more social justice, for the human right of all people to live on this earth without hunger is necessary. However, as was the case previously, the effect of the drive for the expansion of capital is stronger than the counterforces” (Kalt 1993, 48).

The reactions of the green policy on the elementary ecosocial dangers and system-associated “risks” are helpless and contradictory. The cures are of the symptoms, without a struggle against the cause of the sickness or even its diagnosis. Of course, while instruction about environmental behavior and “enlightenment, specialized education, changes in human behavior patterns ‘from the inside’ are absolutely necessary, they must be expressed in substance so that practice naturally follows”

(Collmer 1994, 60). While the ecological propagandists direct attention toward varieties of packaging and compost heaps, capitalism has entered into a new phase of destroying natural and human resources. The struggle for the share of the market and advantageous positions in sharpened competition ends in “a battle for materials” of tremendous proportions. The ecological benefits of wind-power installations and bicycle paths are tiny compared with the releasing of ever-new destructive forces induced by competition. Tremendous capacities are invested as before in developing superfluous products—technical and aesthetic commodity modifications serving only to improve the chances on the market. Two examples among innumerable others illustrate the incessant waste of creative fantasy, human labor power, and natural resources: “In 1991 alone, the incessant search of the consumer-goods industry for ever new products resulted in 1367 new varieties of drinks on the U.S. market. The U.S. consumer found 9000 various articles in 1976 on the shelves of the average supermarket. Today the U.S. consumer can choose from 30,000” (*Der Spiegel*, no. 25 [1992], 150). One must not underestimate the ecological effects of the struggles of capital for global position and redistribution that accompany the crisis today. The means of production are increasingly rapidly modernized, driven by the accelerating pressure of competition and “replaced” without a noticeable advance in socially beneficial use value.

### ***Critique of “technological rationality”***

That the administrative imposition of the general interest to establish a united and nature-friendly communal structure is not adequate has been shown by the experience of the countries of state socialism. Individual motivations and social interest can be directed toward one another only by a social self-acting control mechanism. Only by structurally anchoring the “social imperative” are the citizens of the society motivated to be responsible for the results of their actions. “Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist

in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly" (Engels 1977, 461). The problems of human global existence can only be solved by a social form of reproduction that guarantees that the "general need . . . arises from the individual needs themselves" (Marx 1986–1987, 28:250). Proper ecological behavior and human solidarity do not exist as independent postulates, but are derived from practical life.

Historical development has confirmed that the destructive tendencies of modern technology are not eliminated by nationalization alone. World political constellations were responsible to a considerable degree for the failure of the socialist countries to carry out the task of reestablishing the balance between the needs of nature to restore itself and industrial society. Because of their underdevelopment they had to first create the material foundations for further development by means of traditional technology. Further, the constant external threat to their existence additionally restricted their room for humanization of technology and prevented the socialist block from breaking out of the "repressive continuum" (Marcuse). Despite these adverse conditions, possibilities for an alternative development existed, but political shortsightedness prevented their utilization. The people were pressured into passivity, and in the interests of short-term political gain, the development of the productive forces was made into a fetish.

Since technological progress in the state-socialist countries remained on the traditional track that bowed to the power of capitalist competitiveness, the impression arose that technology had a system-neutral rationality. In apparent unconcern about differences in the social frameworks, the socialist countries ignored the potential accumulation of industrial hazards and the growing irreversible destruction of nature. Within the borders of the system, the destructive inner dynamic of industrialism seemed to be uncontrollable and forced the people into a dependence that they tried to deal with though the application of technology.

Although a socialist alternative model to capitalist catastrophic development has not yet emerged, the future does not lie, as the [left publication] *Das Argument* asserts in a search for an ecological compromise, “beyond the old worldview,” but in a radicalization of the human demand for self-realization and the actualization of the principles of historical reason.

### ***Labor and emancipation***

Recognition of nature as the prerequisite for human existence is an indispensable element of materialist thinking. “Man *lives* on nature—means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die” (Marx 1975, 276). In this way Marxist thought liberates materialism from the traditional conception of a linear causality between nature and society. Fundamental to the historical dialectic is the elaboration of a qualitatively new law-governedness by the “integration” of nature into the structures of social labor: humans develop communal forms to “overcome” nature, which lays the basis for their own (social) form of causality and represents the constituent factor of the historical process (cf. Seppmann 1993).

Human labor activity remains inseparably tied to the objective forms of movement of nature. Precisely its objective regularity enables people to make it correspond to their own purpose, to integrate natural laws in the context of their own needs. For this reason human labor is characterized as “free activity” by Marx. “Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being” (Marx 1975, 276).

In Marxist thought, therefore, nature does not express itself in the form of an abstract, universal, law-governed process. Marxist materialism seeks an understanding of life practices as an exchange process between socially “transformed” nature and the social natural essence of the human being. “It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*” (277). Change-oriented human activities lead people to overcoming their mechanical dependence on nature, which is the precondition for their existence. As

a result of this process man establishes himself “in a world that he has created” (277). Through labor, one generates for oneself a new form of sensuous consciousness. For human beings, the world becomes “real” to the extent that they have “elaborated it.” From a factor determining historical development, the nature of human beings becomes the object of their expression of life. By the transformation effected by labor the human being has become an integral part of the socialization process and its specific dynamic. The natural historic development process is transformed by the concrete forms of cooperation into an integral and contextually neutral factor of humanized history. “History itself is a *real* part of *natural history*—of nature developing into man” (304).

In the context of understanding Marxism as a concrete theory of social practice, the concept of productive forces loses its reified flavor. Marx included in the productive forces all factors which contribute to pushing back the limits of nature and thereby lead to a historical perspective on human emancipation. In a more precise analysis, it becomes clear that, for Marx, social progress does not automatically result from accumulated technical apparatus (as has been maintained by a short-circuited Marxist interpretation of Marxism). Moreover, the development of the forces of production does not necessarily lead to the destruction of the natural basis of life. If it is possible to establish a system of circulation of matter “as a regulating law of social production under a form appropriate to the full development of the human race” (Marx 1967, 1:506), the productive potential can be effective in an entirely different way. “For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals” (Marx 1986–1987, 29:94). A similar formulation by Marx in the *Theories of Surplus Value* states: “What is really accumulated, but not as a dead mass, rather as living, is the skill of the worker, the developmental level of labor” (1956–1990, 26.3:289).

### ***The dialectic of liberation***

Accommodating humanity with an imaginary “naturalness” cannot therefore be the maxim of an up-to-date relationship of

developed societies to nature, but rather only a rationalist-reasonable grasping of all productive potential. Technology, however, remains marked by its contradiction with its corresponding production relations: creative possibilities and tremendous potential for damage are too closely interwoven to leave technological progress in the hands of the accumulation needs of capital.

From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. There are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and like *boni patres familias* [good fathers of the family] they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition (Marx 1967, 3:776).

Only under a genuinely democratic form of social intercourse can ecological reason and humanization of humanity's existence mutually condition each other. The socially compatible future way of dealing with nature and the all-sided development of humanity will become allied through cooperative forms of socialization and rational activities guided by reason. If the social sense of humanity is emancipated, then the "reconciliation of mankind with nature and with itself" (Engels 1975, 424) is coordinated and marks the conclusion of "nature developing into man" (Marx 1975, 1:304).

Once the exploitation of capital is ended and human needs no longer ignored and once the process of democratic management is organized into a form in which all members of society are fully represented, then society's bonds with nature surface in radicalized form. "Matter surrounded by a sensuous, poetic glamour seems to attract man's whole entity by winning smiles" (Marx and Engels 1975, 128).

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**Collapse of “Existing Socialism” in  
Eastern Europe: Democratic  
Revolution or Restoration?**

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***1. Recolonization of the Third World and  
the rehabilitation of colonialism***

In today’s dominant ideological and political climate the question that provides the title for this article may seem scandalous, since rejoicing about the collapse of “totalitarianism” and the arrival of an era of peace and democracy under the standard of the New World Order seems almost universal. Nevertheless, the immediate consequences of these events are increasingly calling the initial euphoria into question: wars continue but are disguised as international police actions; terrorist bombings in the crowded capitals of the planet’s South are taking on the frequency and banality of the advertising sent over the airwaves to increase the popularity of this or that “Western” politician. It is clear that we are now witnessing linked processes of the recolonization of the Third World and an explicit rehabilitation of colonialism. In the parlance of the more or less official ideology of the “open society” and of the West, “We have freed these states [the former colonies] too hurriedly and too simplistically,” as if “to leave a

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kindergarten to manage its own affairs” (Losurdo 1993a, 270–71). In his bold historiographic “revisionism,” Karl Popper is certainly not alone; “Finally colonialism is returning, what was is,” triumphantly announced Paul Johnson in the *New York Times*. Why wonder then that, as was often reported in the press, the Italian parachutists destined for Somalia loved to chant “Little Black face.”

In a recent issue of the journal *Limes*, a docent of Luiss, who is also a general of the Alpine troops, explicitly connects “the new world order with the present tendency toward recolonization . . . in fact such a tendency finds its limits only in the inconvenience of the West in implicating itself in a crisis where carrying it out would be too costly and not bring any concrete benefit” (Jean 1993).

Recolonization implies the relegitimation of war. Jean has the merit of expressing himself with soldierly frankness: “The international police action or operation of peace-keeping, peace-making, and peace-enforcing” is the new name for war. Far from having some significant critical meaning, such an observation lays the foundation for the request for a change in the constitution that would allow our nation to participate actively in the increasingly frequent “international police actions, which are in fact undeclared wars” and the objective of which is, as we now know, the redistribution of colonies. When conducted as an international police action “war is no longer declared.”

Jean’s last observation is not completely exact, in the sense that such actions do not arise from something altogether new; the history of colonialism is characterized by undeclared wars, because of the tendency of Europeans—denounced by Lenin in 1917—not to consider as wars those that were waged outside of Europe, but which nevertheless involved massacres against unarmed peoples or in any case were conducted under conditions of the enemy’s total military inferiority (Lenin 1955, 24:412).

Naturally, the neocolonial plunder of the Third World has not waited for the rehabilitation of colonialism to manifest itself in action. Indeed, several years ago the great agronomist René Dumont denounced the serious deterioration of the terms of exchange so unfavorable to the Third World, with a resulting

drop or collapse of the standard of living “in proportions frightening for the poorer strata” while “Doctor IMF is preoccupied more with preserving the excellent health of the creditors, international usurers, than with healing the maladies of the debtors for whom the former are responsible.” What is new is the brutality with which the West proclaims its right to put to fire and sword those nations of the Third World that had dared to have the foolish aspiration of raising the price of their raw materials or of questioning the current terms of exchange of international commerce. In deciding “to punish Saddam Hussein,” wrote Eugenio Scalfari some time ago, “all the industrial powers” were firmly determined to keep the price of petroleum low, “shattering the possibility of another petroleum crisis that would have put the brakes to the expansive impetus of western capital” (*La Repubblica*, 26 January 1992). And that punishment was administered without subtlety, as we note that the United States did not hesitate “to exterminate the Iraqis already fleeing and disarmed” (R. Bocca *La Repubblica*, 6 February 1992). The editor and illustrious columnist of a daily that assumes a progressive and liberal stance did not even question the morality of such actions; it would be an effort to which it is not worth the trouble of exposing oneself in times of the triumphant rehabilitation of colonialism.

Here we can assess the magnitude and the gravity of the degeneration, of the real and distinctive counterrevolution that has occurred at the level of international relations. The historic cycle that was opened with the call to break the chains of colonial slavery has been closed with a reversion from October to the “barbarians.” At the time when the Bolshevik revolution broke out, the entire planet was the property of a few great powers having such unlimited economic and political power that they could use their subject populations as cannon fodder. This occurred in a particularly blatant fashion on the occasion of the first world conflict: “About 50 million Africans and 250 million Indians were involved [by England] without being consulted in a war about which they knew nothing” (Taylor 1975, 4). Here is a fact to reflect on: the gigantic process of decolonization that began in the twentieth century was clearly being abandoned as a subject of discussion at the very moment in which the state born on the

wave of the October Revolution was dissolved. When Fidel Castro declared that “the disappearance of the Soviet Union is a tragedy for the Third World,” he expressed a perception that is very widespread among the nations constrained to undergo the arrogance of the great powers, which is once again being exercised without dissimulation. If the recolonization of the Third World (by means of colonial wars camouflaged as international police actions) constitutes the negation of democracy in international relations, the rehabilitation of colonialism is coming to mean, even at the theoretical level, the cancellation of any supposition of democracy in the relations among states and among peoples.

## ***2. Rehabilitation of colonialism and a new wave of racism***

All of this is proceeding at the same time as renewed virulence of racist agitation in the capitalist metropolises. To make the close connection between these phenomena clear, it is necessary to look at the history of our century and to observe the new elements related to this issue introduced by the October Revolution. The twentieth century opened with the joint expedition of the great powers for the repression of the Boxer Rebellion in China. It was a star-spangled colonial enterprise of massacres, and it was nevertheless extolled; Lenin denounced the deed as the realization of the “dream of idealist politicians, the United States of the civilized world” (1955, 24:654). As in the rhetoric around today’s New World Order, racist themes were invoked, such as the “yellow peril,” which, according to the alarm raised especially by Wilhelm II, constituted a mortal threat to the “most sacred values” of Europe and the West (Gollwitzer 1962, 217–18).

Such themes were not limited to Germany alone. Herbert Hoover, later president of the United States, who was then engaged in the exploitation of Chinese mines and participated in the campaign against the Boxers, spoke without qualms of those who were not white as “inferior races.” That was the opinion as well of some other U.S. presidents of the twentieth century, Harding and Coolidge. Moreover, these were the years in which within the United States the “inferior races” were deprived not

only of their political rights but of their most elementary civil rights as well, subjected to apartheid and servile conditions of labor, even to what U.S. historians define as a “new enslavement.” Compelled to labor for starvation wages imposed not by market forces but by the brutal force of white masters (Franklin, 1983, 392–93), Blacks often fell victim to pogroms and lynchings. In such a world, the call by the October Revolution to the slaves of the colonies and to the “barbarians” in the capitalist metropolis itself could not appear to be other than a terrible threat to the white race, to the West, and to civilization as it existed (those three concepts tended to coincide). And look how that same Bolshevik revolution came to be interpreted in racial and racist terms: “The Russian revolution is of racial, not political origin,” declared Henry Ford, the automobile industry magnate, in those years fanatically occupied in warning against “the Jewish-Bolshevik plot” (Losurdo, 1993b, chap. 5, 3). At other times, blame was placed on other peoples, who were accused of being hostile to the West.

According to Spengler, the nation that departed really victorious from World War I, that fratricidal conflict within the West, was Russia, which with the October Revolution had thrown away the “‘white’ mask” to become “again a great Asiatic power, ‘Mongolian,’” animated by a “burning hatred against Europe.” As demonstrated by its appeals for the uprising of colonial peoples and nations, Russia was already an integral part of “the world’s entire population of color that the Bolsheviks had infused with the idea of common resistance” and struggle against “white humanity” (see Losurdo, 1991, chap. 3, 1 and Losurdo, 1993b, chap. 5, 3). The identical opinion, which came to enjoy great popularity, was expressed in those same years by a U.S. author, Lothrop Stoddard (translated into French as well). According to Stoddard, the first world conflict was to be considered as the “‘whites’ war of secession”: an unfortunate war, which weakened the white race and made possible the cataclysm of the October Revolution. The latter occurred either on account of the inferior Asiatic races, “who have always shown an instinctive hostility to civilization,” or on account of white renegades. In this way, “Bolshevism is the renegade, the traitor within our camp who is

ready to sell the citadel, to degrade the very fiber of our being, and, finally, to cause a world, which has once again become barbarous, and an impoverished race to plunge to the deepest and irremediable bastardization.” In any case, it is a question of a political movement that is “a mortal enemy of civilization and of the race” (Stoddard 1925, 7–8, 94; Gosset 1965, 395).

Again like Spengler, Stoddard denounced “the intrigues of Bolshevism in league with the world of color,” now beginning to move itself and to contest the supremacy of the white and Nordic race. “The Bolshevist propaganda is not ineffectual”; Stoddard observed that its “results are manifest in the most diverse corners of the world and are menacing for the future.” They (the results) are to be found, unfortunately, even in “the Black regions of the United States” (1925, 194). In effect, with the October Revolution a new factor was present in the history of the oppression of Blacks in the United States. They became conscious of their rights and no longer considered their situation as something more or less natural; they ceased to suffer more or less passively; they instead gave evidence of “a decision for self-defense even to the sacrifice of their own lives.” They were naturally accused of Bolshevism, but look how a militant Black journal responded: “If fighting for one’s own rights means to be a Bolshevist, then we are Bolshevists and the people ought to put their minds at ease” (Franklin 1983, 397–99).

The popular racist cited above could count two quite illustrious admirers as readers: one was the U.S. president Harding, who declared: “Whoever will take the time to read Lothrop Stoddard’s book *The Rising Tide of Color* will understand that the problem of the races in the United States is but one aspect of the conflict of races with which the entire world must contend” (Gosset 1965, 404–5). The second illustrious reader and admirer was the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, who, while referring to Lothrop Stoddard and another U.S. “scholar” of the same kind, Madison Grant, expressed his admiration for the United States. “This splendid country of the future,” which had had the merit of formulating the felicitous “new idea of a racial state,” an ideal that was being considered to be put into practice “with youthful force” through expulsions and deportations of “Negroes and yellows”

(Rosenberg 1937, 673). Polemicizing against this publicist and in particular against Grant and his thesis, according to which “the moral and intellectual progress of humanity was . . . due to the Nordics,” was Antonio Gramsci, who observed from prison: “This type of thinking is not individual: it reflects a considerable and predominant current of opinion in the United States” (1975, 199).

We are making the point that on the eve of October, and in the years immediately following, colonial arrogance and racial prejudice was an undoubted part of the dominant ideology on both sides of the Atlantic. It should be kept in mind that only in the thirties did the neologism “racism,” with its negative connotations, come into use. It was then understood that the Bolshevik Revolution and the movements of anticolonial liberation were customarily subsumed under the category—to use the title of the book dear to President Harding—of “a rising tide of peoples of color against the world supremacy of the whites.” This vision was brought to a state of crisis by the gigantic process of emancipation that began with the October Revolution, and then continued after the defeat of fascism into the post–World War II period of anticolonial and national-liberation movements. In our day it is attended by a process of reaction.

Naturally, it would be ingenuous to expect the resurrection of this view in the pure and simple categories and terminology of the twenties; instead of the white or Nordic race, today it is “the West” that is celebrated. The authors cited above (Spengler, Stoddard, and Grant) also spoke of the West, of the white or often the Nordic race, or of humanity without distinction, and they warned without distinction against the “decline of the West” or against “the decline of the great race.” Some themes, however, have remained unchanged: Stoddard did not tire of calling for vigilance against the mortal menace coming from Islam (1925, 57ff.). This motif, today so banal and widespread, is being promoted by the leader of the [Italian] North League, Umberto Bossi, who, in keeping with such a presupposition, justifies the bombardment of Mogadishu or of Baghdad as a contribution by the United States to the cause of containing Muslim and African barbarity.

One thing is certain: there is a connection between the characterization—so dear to Popper—of the formerly colonial countries as a “kindergarten” or worse, as a hodgepodge of barbarians outside of the “civilized world,” and the racist agitation that is being developed in the capitalist metropolises, that considers the outsiders unworthy of those rights that pertain to other humans, and that sometimes attacks them with punitive expeditions that reproduce in miniature those organized expeditions of the nations seemingly entitled to the “power of international police.”

Traditionally, the ideology of the “mission” or rather of “the white man’s burden,” was accompanied by the great powers’ policy of the gun barrel and lynchings promoted by the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups against Blacks or Orientals (Losurdo 1993a, 275). And today there is a movement very similar to the Ku Klux Klan, the skinheads. In contrast, we have seen Stoddard accuse the Bolsheviks of inciting people of color and Blacks living in the United States against the West. He did not have any way of comprehending the new wave of racism arising from the current process of recolonization of the Third World and rehabilitation of colonialism. When, for example, Albert Arbasino writes in reference to the “expeditions” of liberal and fascist Italy “in Eritrea, Somalia, Libya, Ethiopia” that we, “especially Italians, have wrongly received such heavy censure” (*La Repubblica*, 4 August 1993), he certainly is proceeding toward a rehabilitation of colonialism, as well as to a racist removal of accusations for crimes against the “natives” committed by the Italian colonists: spreading asphyxiating gas in Ethiopia, putting to fire and sword the Libyan villagers who did not want to be “civilized.” Or, when in his inaugural address in claiming a world-wide civilizing “mission” for his country, Clinton extolled the United States as “the oldest democracy in the world,” it is evident that he in racist fashion considers the Blacks held in slavery even up to 1865 as a negligible entity (not to speak of the Indians who had been removed from the face of the earth). By calling attention to the barbaric and arrogantly racist characteristics of colonial expansion and domination, the October Revolution had stimulated self-criticism in the West, a self-criticism that is now giving

way to a rehabilitation of colonialism and a recrudescence of racism in both open and concealed forms.

Events in Eastern Europe have been revealing. One Russian observer has emphasized that in his country “a definite racism” is now widespread, consisting of “exclusion of the non-Western civilizations from ‘civilization’” and of the tendency to proclaim a crusade against Islam (Berelowitch 1993, 41). With such a picture it is easy to understand the particular virulence of the racist agitation in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR): those who were the last to come over, the poor relations of the West, those who still continue to be viewed with suspicion as “Easterners,” have to give proof of a particular zeal in defending the purity of the civilization by which they hope to be accepted. They are somewhat reminiscent of the poor whites who during the U.S. Civil War and succeeding decades showed themselves to be particularly ferocious in confrontations with Blacks, with whom in no way did they wish to be confused.

In extreme cases the process of reaction currently taking place produces forms of historiographic “revisionism” that go well beyond the rehabilitation of colonialism. Two emblematic items appeared in the *Corriere della Sera* (19 January 1992): one stated that Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* “was selling like hot cakes in Poland, . . . particularly in the regions inhabited by the population of German origin”; the other mentioned a book by President Tudjman of Croatia (protagonist of a secession conducted in the name of the necessity for joining Europe and the West) that pledged to vindicate anti-Semitism and to reassess the Nazi genocide. But this is not the main point. In respect to the period between the two wars, elements of novelty were certainly not lacking: today Israel is being celebrated as the bulwark of civilization in the Middle East, but with arguments that bear the stench of the very essence of racism. The violent anti-Semitism that was developed as a reaction to the October Revolution had an assumption: the characterization of the Jews as a strange race hostile to the West. We have seen the position of Henry Ford, which was shared by Lothrop, Stoddard, and Grant, who even more explicitly spoke of the Jews as an Asiatic people or as in some way strange not only to the Nordic race but to the

“European races” on the whole, including the inferior (Stoddard 1925, 147; Grant 1917, 16).

Similar ideas were also expressed by Nazi leaders such as Rosenberg and Goebbels, who railed against the danger represented by the “Semitic-Hebrew headquarters of the Near East” or against the “Jewish terror” identified as the heart of “Eastern Bolshevism” (Losurdo 1993c, 77). Today, on the other hand, Israel is being subsumed under the category of Western and anti-Semitism is being manifested primarily against the Arabs, who are treated as “barbarians.” The sickness of the West remains firmly in place. If in the twenties the Bolsheviks were subjected to the disdain of the entire white race as “renegades,” today, those who are opposed to the periodic punitive expeditions against the South of the planet are branded as scoundrelly Third Worlders.

To comprehend the course of reaction in respect to the movement since the October Revolution of emancipation from colonialism and racism, we may consider the previous history of the dialectic developed with the French Revolution. During the phase of massive radicalization under the pressure of the revolt of the Black slaves in Santo Domingo, the Jacobean Convention decreed in 1794 the abolition of slavery in the colonies. This measure, of unheard-of radicalism, was subsequently revoked by Napoleon. In the French colonies slavery would ultimately be abolished as a consequence of the Revolution of 1848 and in the United States in 1865 thanks to the Civil War, which ended by taking on the characteristics of a revolution. But in confirmation of the length and complexity of this historical process, it is necessary to keep in mind on the one hand that forms of slave or semislave labor still continued to exist for a long time in the United States, but on the other that they had their maximum expansion in the colonies of the West proper in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The October Revolution not only called to the slaves of the colonies and their brothers and sisters located in the ambit of the capitalist metropolis, but also declared war on racial prejudice in any form by proclaiming the equality of the “civilized” and the “barbarians” and the right of colonial populations to liberate themselves from oppression and from the wardship of the great

powers of the West. In a certain sense, even in this case, we are dealing with a measure that was ahead of its time and made possible by extraordinary circumstances: the horror aroused by the first world war, during which the Allies were constrained to resort to colored troops, Germany was compelled to make an appeal to Islam and to the Ottoman Empire, and both sides found it necessary in polemics with each other to pose as champions of the cause of emancipation of oppressed peoples. But at the opportune moment these extraordinary circumstances were quickly diminished in the discussions of the great powers.

### ***3. Collapse of “existing socialism” and the dismantling of economic and social rights***

The results of the involution that has taken place in international relations as well as among “races” and diverse ethnic groups are evident and grave. Let us consider now the ongoing economic and social processes in the former socialist countries. Putting aside the initial euphoria, a U.S. scholar suddenly interjected: “During the transition phase, average incomes will be much lower than they were under communism”; in Poland in 1990, they were 40% lower in comparison with the highest level attained under the Communist system, and the predictions for the future offer nothing good (Thurow 1992, 87). In Russia, “over half of the population [is now] below the poverty threshold” (A. Bonanni, *Corriere della Sera*, 1 December 1992). We have seen that on occasion there is mention of “phases of transition,” but clearly we are then dealing with a conciliatory ideology. Meanwhile, the situation continues to get worse: in Russia, in the first half of 1993, “the gross domestic production was 14% lower than that of the first months of 1992” (C. Martinetti, *La Stampa*, 29 July 1993). Even that same U.S. author who speaks of “phases of transition” declared that a part of the former socialist countries is nevertheless destined to end up in the Third World, the real per capita income of which is undergoing a constant process of diminution (Thurow 1992, 15, 17).

In the Third World, Albania has already been finished off; its misery and desperate mass hunger are often cited as a definitive demonstration of the disastrous failure, even on the economic

level, of every attempt at construction of a noncapitalist society. But what were the conditions in that country prior to the upsets that took place in Eastern Europe? Let us hear from a West German weekly that has been severely critical of that “police state” in the Balkans and from a journalist who was writing in September of 1988, when the illusions about the fate of “existing socialism” had already disappeared or were rapidly disappearing. Indeed, at the very time that Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and company had more or less fallen under the irresistible spell of the West, *Die Zeit* was opining as follows:

[Albania] had overcome its almost traditional backwardness and was freed from misery with its own resources and its own money: the gigantic malarial swamps were dried up and electrification and industrialization were advanced significantly; the average life expectancy doubled from 1945 and had attained 70 years. . . . Communist Albania is justly proud of its attainments made after the end of the fascist Italian and German occupations. . . . Only socialist Albania succeeded in eliminating food shortages after 1946. (U. van Steen, *Die Zeit*, 30 September 1988)

Finally, this 1988 article emphasized that in spite of the disruption caused by the broadcasts of Italian television, which were for the most part not jammed, the level of consensus in support of the regime was remarkable, as was demonstrated by the “ardent patriotism especially of the young Albanians.” Obviously, it is possible to express some doubts about the reliability of such a picture published in a journal in unsuspecting times. What is intellectually inadmissible is the pretense (advanced even by Norberto Bobbio during a polemic with the writer hosted by *Liberazione*) of silencing anyone who still dares to be described as a communist by flaunting the terrible conditions in today’s Albania without ever posing the problem of the relationship that may exist between these conditions and the end of Comecon and Eastern European “existing socialism.” Indeed, the position of the Turin philosopher was quite well balanced when in the 50s he acknowledged the merit of the ruling Communist parties having introduced “a new phase of civil progress in politically backward

nations,” and even went so far as to declare that it was then only a question of transplanting the formal guarantees and established civil procedures “in the socialist state,” and then called for pouring “a drop of oil” on the machine of the already completed revolution, the achievements of which were accordingly considered to be irreversible (Losurdo 1993, 245–46). It could be said that, along with the Berlin Wall, the critical intelligence of many intellectuals was destroyed, that is, those same intellectuals who would be able to read in the bourgeois press that in contemporary Eastern Europe “a probably unbridled process of degradation” was taking place.

Let us read the dramatic testimony from Russia, which now knows even those tragedies typical of the Third World: the *bezprizorniki*, abandoned children, are

at least two hundred thousand in all of Russia, according to the experts. As many as there were in Russia in 1925 after the Civil War. . . . They are the first victims of a country that is sacrificing everything to the god money, that has abandoned the old scale of values without substituting new ones, and which had put in motion a process of almost unbridled degradation. Ten years ago in the totalitarian and Brezhnevian USSR, there were practically no *bezprizorniki*. The orphanages were terrible places, often indecent from the logistical point of view and even more often devoid of human warmth. But they guaranteed a roof, a table, a school, and later a job. In ten years everything has changed. The funds for maintaining boarding schools and reform schools are constantly decreasing, and those institutions that have existed at state expense are now being closed, one after the other. (Cucurnia, *La Repubblica*, 5 May 1993)

Cucurnia adds that the abandoned boys are destined for delinquency, and “for the young women there is only one profession: prostitution.”

Rather than dwelling further on the tragic picture that is emerging from those same organs of information that celebrated 1989 as the Year of the Lord, we pause for a moment on the

theoretical counterrevolution that is also in process. We are now witnessing a leap backwards, and not only in respect to 1917. In the course of the French Revolution, Robespierre had spoken of the right to life as first among the “inalienable rights of man.” Under the influence of the gigantic process of emancipation that had been given impetus by the Bolshevik Revolution and was further developed by the defeat of Nazi fascism, the United Nations declaration of 10 December 1948 explicitly included among “human rights” also “the economic, social, and cultural” (article 22). But these rights are being effectively canceled not only in practice but also on a theoretical level through the action of new directing groups and their ideologues in Russia and in other formerly socialist countries. These often rely upon the lessons of Hayek, that patriarch of neoliberalism who, not by chance, holds the influence of “the Marxist Russian Revolution,” which he considered to be ruinous, accountable for the theorization of economic and social rights (Losurdo 1993b, 1).

It is only fitting also, since the West loves to pose as the privileged interpreter of human rights, to take a quick look at those that its triumphant victory is canceling in Eastern Europe. “Every individual has the right to social security” (art. 22): it is clear that the negation of these rights could not be more total today. “Every individual has a right to an education” (art. 26): all recognize that this right had been realized to a remarkable degree in the socialist countries (Thurow 1992, 67). But now, as the phenomenon of abandoned children in Russia shows, it is water under the bridge, as is “the right to a job” (art. 23). “The East Germans, who before the reunification had never needed to deal with questions of this type, now find themselves with an unemployment rate of 15% of the work force” (*La Repubblica*, 7 August 1993). In Poland, after having reached 11%, unemployment may reach up to a record level of 20%, so high that in World Bank circles it is described as “an economic and social crisis that recalls the drama of the 30s” (P. Benetazzo, *La Repubblica*, 7 February 1992). “The right to rest and recreation” (art. 24) has undergone a fate no better than the right to a job: in Russia, “the new rich,” who have emerged with “privatization,” show an “aggressive opulence” at tourist locations from which the workers, who in the past had the right to

a free or partially free vacation, now emerge as bandits (E. Franceschini, *La Repubblica*, 18–19 August 1991).

What then can be said of the right “to housing and to medical care and to necessary social services” (art. 25)? After observing that “many necessities that must be purchased in capitalistic societies were provided free or almost free under communism,” Thurow adduces the example of the house for which a Russian spent on the average only 1% of his family income (1992, 96, 870). Now, a house has become a luxury just as medical assistance has: according to a report of the International Red Cross, the survival of a million and a half persons has been put in doubt by the “lack of food and medicine in the entire USSR (sic)” (E. Franceschini, *La Repubblica*, 17 October 1991). As far as the “necessary social services” are concerned, we have seen what tragic results their dismantling has brought for Russian children. But also the consequences for women are powerfully negative, as is shown by the case of the former GDR, where these services had been particularly well developed.

Not only are women the first to be driven from employment in production, but a further loss of jobs held predominantly by women has taken place with the destruction of the network of state services that guaranteed free access to child care, health, and education: the shelters, “polyclinics” or local health centers. It was imagined that a feminine replacement would emerge for these destroyed services—namely, the maternal. The result seems to be exactly the opposite; women have renounced motherhood (Compagnano, *Il Manifesto*, 8 February 1992). This choice has not been confined to the East Germans: “In 1992, for the first time in the postwar period births in Russia have become fewer than deaths” (F. Cucurnia, *La Repubblica*, 5 May 1993).

The dismantling of the social services has further theoretical consequences: they had been instituted from the very beginning with the recognition that social and economic rights should be guaranteed outside of the market to each individual. Instead, now, O. Bogomolov, the well-known head of the Russian “reform” economists, who assumes the West is the model for society, also identified it with “normal society” to such a degree that on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, in an effort to unleash the

battle against the very concept of economic and social rights, he stated: "In a normal society this sphere [of the market] includes everything. . . . But instead, with us sanitary services and education are not market categories." And another exponent of the new course wrote in support: "We need a normal medicine based on [individual] insurance. Free medicine is a fraud." Finally, let us hear from an author who has always been engaged in polemics against the heritage of "existing socialism," which he considers ruinous and who appeals to the model of the West that he has mythically transfigured and deformed, when he goes so far as to affirm: "In many normal countries the doctor who assists at birth has the right to cause a handicapped baby to die at the moment of birth" (Berelowitch 1993, 37).

Here, even the dividing line between neoliberalism and social Darwinism becomes tenuous. The myth of the market produces a commercialization that seems to know no bounds; the press tells about a "trade in children for adoption from Poland to Italy": the money spent by the Italian families serves "to recompense the natural families disposed to renounce their parental authority in order to get dollars and marks and to diminish the number of mouths to feed." It is a market that is acquiring, so it seems, the "beautiful Poles" (Special, *La Repubblica*, 29 July 1993). Finally, a bit of news from the newborn state of Ingushetia [autonomous republic in Russia—Ed.]: the president has decreed the abolition of two articles of the penal code that "prohibit polygamy and prosecute with criminal penalties the sale of women." The journalist who reported this news was constrained to comment: "At one time the Soviet rulers loved to boast that, if nothing else, socialism had liberated women. That is, of course, not true, but it had at least instituted a certain difference between women and camels. . . . It is a case of history repeating itself. Forward with all our strength . . . to the past." (G. Chiesa, *La Stampa*, 27 August 1993)

#### ***4. The problem of civil and political rights***

Certainly we cannot fail to place on the other side of the balance the liberation from a suffocating regime founded on the violation of individual liberties and of established civil

procedures, or “rules of the game.” Nevertheless, the problem of civil and political rights is complex. I shall not dwell on the legislative measures promulgated in some Eastern European countries at the expense of the Communists, nor even on the fact that the same new ruling groups have not only reserved for themselves the right to declare a state of emergency when they consider it advisable but have often theorized openly on the necessity of passing through a phase of dictatorship in order to be able to introduce more easily (without having to take popular protests into account) the marvels of the free market. I should like to emphasize another point: while Marx may have underestimated the problem of the rules of the game and formal liberties, on the other hand he did make clear once and for all that the condition of civil rights cannot really be understood while limiting one’s attention to the sphere of circulation. When we read of the women workers of the GDR who have had themselves sterilized in order to be able to obtain employment, we can understand that in the capitalist factory there still continues to exist something of the proprietorial dispositions denounced in the *Communist Manifesto*. Moreover, the intensification of the rhythms of labor in the factory, the pressure exerted by the new mass unemployment, and the possibility for the new owners of the means of production to have at their disposal an imposing industrial reserve army, all render very problematic any exercise of the rights of liberty at work places.

In this same context, we may consider this note from Moscow: In anticipation of the sharpening of social conflict, “trusted persons” have been placed “in key positions of the militia and the KGB” (M. Villari, *L’Unita*, 13 October 1991). What is their entrusted task? Victor Ivanenko, head of the “democratized” KGB, clarifies this for us: “We have reliable information that in the large businesses some strike committees, some workers committees, are being created in a spontaneous fashion. I believe that by this winter they will already be well on their way to being organized” (*La Repubblica*, 6 November 1991). The correspondent, A. Flores d’Arco, continues as follows: “Ivanenko underscored on this theme how the security services are not only gathering information to transmit to the republican government,

but are also seeking to ‘dialogue,’” allowing us “to understand that the limits of these ‘discussions’ with the honorable and proper ‘interrogators’ could be expanded in the future.” It is a report that should make us aware of two things: 1) police control in factories and places of production is clearly not being relaxed; 2) the transition from the paternalistic “discussion” to the police “interrogation” is left to the arbitrary decisions of the KGB; at the workplace the rules of the game are not worth much.

In any case, even focusing attention exclusively on internal changes in Eastern Europe, and regarding the new rulers as spotless champions of the democratic rules of the game, one can speak in unequivocal terms of democratic revolution only on the condition that economic and social rights are expunged from the catalogue of rights, only on the condition that there is a retreat to the positions of neoliberalism and Hayek. One could object that in any case “negative freedom” is the first priority, but this is still just another instance of the point of view of neoliberalism: it is enough to reflect on the fact that even a “liberal” such as Rawls demands the subordination of equality to liberty, but imposes the important limiting proviso that this principle be held valid only “above a minimum level of income” (Rawls 1982, 441).

It is necessary to emphasize, however, that a correct evaluation of the historic change begun with the October Revolution presupposes an analysis that goes well beyond the picture of “existing socialism.” It can be useful here to consider the methodological direction furnished by Edgar Quinet in regard to the French Revolution. “The people who made it were not the ones who profited most” (Quinet 1984, 249). Moreover, the configuration taken concretely by “existing socialism” cannot be comprehended if it is considered separately from the role of the great capitalist powers and from the activities they initiated, beginning with the war of aggression and the counterrevolutionary intervention with which they responded to the victory of the Bolsheviks.

Here emerges the obvious hypocrisy of the West, which on the one hand, in the name of democracy proclaims a crusade against the nations that seek to pursue a noncapitalist path of development, but on the other does everything it can to impede in

these same nations the passage from the state of exception to normalcy. The case of Cuba is illustrative: for decades now it has found itself in a state of exception caused primarily by the U.S. administration, which already attempted an invasion once in the past, which threatened the island again militarily, and which continues to attempt to strangle the Cuban economy through an embargo, (actually an act of total war, striking primarily the civilian population). In such a situation, the campaign unleashed by the U.S. administration against the “despotism” of Fidel Castro reminds one of the hangman who, after proceeding with the hanging, cries out in disgust at the ashen and cadaverous color of his victim. One can add that in situations of emergency and, for example, on the occasion of two world conflicts the United States without being exposed to any danger of invasion did not hesitate to promulgate measures much more drastic than those for which it reproaches Cuba and Vietnam: after Pearl Harbor an executive order of President Roosevelt interned U.S. citizens of Japanese origin.

Naturally, the inability of “existing socialism” on the whole to emerge from the state of exception depended as well on internal causes (for example, on the tendency to produce the image of an enlightened elite, who pretend to be leading the childlike multitude by the hand); and while it may well be that the collapse of these regimes was accompanied by a widespread feeling of liberation, among the rejoicers, nevertheless, were those powers that had profited personally and those forces that on the whole had created the obstacles to the passage to normalcy.

##### ***5. Restoration in the East and involution in the West***

From the complex picture that I have traced so far, indeed in spite of contradictory tendencies, it follows that the principal aspect of the political change that took place in Eastern Europe and in the world consisted of Restoration. But does having recourse to this category mean that we must proceed to a relegitimation of discredited regimes whose collapse was hailed almost unanimously by world public opinion? A sort of political blackmail has virtually paralyzed many on the Left, who are justly branded as nostalgic for Brezhnev and the gulag. However,

the historical process is more complex. Consider the events beginning with the French Revolution: at the moment of what all historians define as the Restoration, the failure of the hopes of 1789 seemed beyond question, after which followed the Terror, the unbridled corruption of the years subsequent to the Thermidor, the military dictatorship, and then the Empire, with an emperor-soldier of fortune who conquered immense territories and distributed them to relatives and friends according to a patrimonial conception of the state. Not only was every principle of democracy trampled underfoot, the ancient regime seemed to be reproduced in its worst aspects. There is more: by destroying the monarchical absolutism and feudalism, the French revolutionaries had sought to ensure the uprooting of the very roots of war in order to establish perpetual peace. Instead, to quote Engels, "With the Napoleonic despotism . . . the perpetual peace that had been promised was transformed into a war of conquests without end" (Marx and Engels 1956, 20:239). Accordingly, in 1814, the programs and hopes of 1789 were completely unrecognizable; the return of the Bourbons created a regime undoubtedly more liberal than the terror, than the military dictatorship, than the warlike and expansionist Empire that had followed the revolutionary enthusiasms. The fact remains that this return represented a moment of Restoration. An analogy can be made, for example, to the first English revolution, which unfolded during Cromwell's military dictatorship, but which was tied to the exceptional personality of its founder and was incapable of surviving at his disappearance.

In spite of all this, it is right and proper to apply the category of Restoration to the return of the Bourbons and of the Stuarts, who sought to suffocate the view that was laboriously emerging among trials, errors, blind alleys, contradictions, regressions, and deformations of every kind. There is no reason to regard the recent events in Eastern Europe in any other light, in spite of the pitiful interpretation that can and ought to be made of the history of the recently collapsed regimes. Recourse to the category of Restoration becomes all the more convincing if it is kept in mind that in the capitalist West itself, first the crisis and then the collapse of "existing socialism" have stimulated some serious phenomena of involution. In order to understand this point it is

necessary to keep in mind that the October Revolution and the challenge coming from it have had a profound influence on the evolution and configuration of today's Western democracies. As we have seen, even Hayek himself has the theorization of social and economic rights (culminating in the UN Declaration) descending from the "Marxist Russian revolution." Moreover, these very social and democratic conquests realized in the West cannot be explained without the decisive contribution of the October Revolution. In our day, to the weakening and diminution of the challenge constituted by that revolution, to the crisis and collapse of "existing socialism," there corresponds also in the West an involution, a de-emancipation leading to the expunging of the charter of economic and social rights.

This is the meaning of the neoliberalism that is raging in the West as well as in the East. It is nevertheless necessary to state precisely that "neoliberalism" is an ideological term. This ideology wants us to believe in a complete separation (that has never been and that the dominant classes today have no intention of introducing) between the economic and political, with the abandonment of state support of every economic subject in order to cause the pure laws of the market to reign undisturbed. To such a myth there corresponds the reality of massive state support to big capitalist enterprises, a support that even in the United States seems destined to grow rather than to diminish (Thurow 1992, 19). The same savage ongoing or planned privatizations, in the East and in the West, entail the sale of the public patrimony and indeed provide a form of support to the corporations that assimilate it. (The affair of Alpha Romeo and its passage into the Fiat group is an example.) The real meaning of today's neoliberalism is very different from what is officially proclaimed: it is the attempt to purge parliamentary and representative government of the greatest possible number of the attainments of political and social democracy resulting from the labor movement's struggle and the challenge of the October Revolution.

#### ***6. Spontaneous collapse of the East or an energetic push?***

But in what way was the Restoration able to triumph in Eastern Europe? The dominant ideology speaks of a spontaneous

collapse of “existing socialism” as a demonstration of the internal and insuperable absurdity and misery that is involved from the very beginning in every attempt at construction of a noncapitalist society. President Bush, however, shortly after the collapse of the USSR, celebrated that event as a momentous U.S. victory in the Cold War. As often happens, the politicians are more realistic than the ingenuous and exalted ideologues in their service. The U.S. president at that time was well aware of the fact that the convulsions in the East were also the result of an active initiative of the “free world.” The well-known U.S. journalist Carl Bernstein “revealed in *Time* magazine that the Pope and Reagan secretly drew up a ‘Holy Alliance’ to keep Solidarnosc alive, to overthrow the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe, and to isolate and deliver an economic ‘knockout punch’ to the Kremlin. And through their loyal servants-priests playing at 007, agents of the CIA, and trade unionists in the role of spies they achieved a bloodless coup without precedent in history.”

This was not simply a matter of assisting Lech Walesa, but rather of sweeping away the “evil empire” through a whole series of measures: “Massive rearming of the United States in order to force the USSR to bleed itself dry with a parallel rearmament, clandestine operations in support of various revolutionary movements, especially Solidarnosc. . . . Total technological and financial isolation of Moscow. Increase in anti-Communist propaganda through media such as the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and so forth.”

In their meeting on 7 June 1982, “in the secrecy of the Vatican Library,” Reagan and John Paul II then launched “Operation End of Communism” with gigantic financing that included branches of capital apparently connected with Banco Ambrosiano (E. Caretto, *La Repubblica*, 18 February 1992). The Vatican’s contributions were not merely ideological but above all logistical and organizational: one thinks first of all about the “network of priests” who were indispensable for the capillary diffusion of clandestine material:

The Polish resistance obtained the most modern means of telecommunication: once it succeeded, during a break in a television broadcast of a soccer match, in putting on the

screen the message, “Solidarity lives. Resist.” In 1985, U.S. trade unions ascertained that in Poland there were at least 400 clandestine anti-Communist periodicals, some of which with a circulation of over 30 thousand copies; thousands of library books for children that told fables about the “evil” Jaruzelski and about the “good” Lech Welesa; videocassettes from the USA and the Vatican; and tons of faxes, telephones, computers, recorders, and radios. “The American embassy at Warsaw,” Bernstein wrote, “became the principal center of the CIA in the Communist world, and the most efficient.” (E. Caretto, *La Repubblica*, 19 February 1992)

There is no reason to believe that the forces amassed by the German Federal Republic against the German Democratic Republic were any less massive than those employed by the United States against distant Poland; it would require an entire chapter to elucidate the material pertaining to the role played in the final phase of the convulsions in Eastern Europe, in nations such as Romania and the German Democratic Republic, by the secret services of the USSR, whose directors were already completely won over to the cause of the West, from whom they begged for political and financial support to save themselves.

What turned out to be quite revealing were the official notes published under the editorship of G. Chiesa of confidential colloquies on the occasion of the summit of the Club of Seven held in July 1991, in the last of which Gorbachev participated (a month before the strange “coup” occurred in Moscow). In publishing this document, *La Stampa* (13 June 1993) gave it a significant title, which effectively synthesizes the now apparent ultimatum of the great capitalist powers: “Capitalism in the USSR: Total and Right Now.” At this meeting, Gorbachev appeared in the garb of an accused who is forced to respond to his judges in the most exhaustive and obsequious manner possible. We read: “Bush: ‘We want a democratic USSR with a market economy integrated into the Western economy.’ . . . Gorbachev: ‘The process is going forward.’” But this assurance was not enough. Now watch how the Japanese pursue hot on his heels: “You say that private property is the necessary component of the market economy and

at the same time you speak of the parity among all the forms of property. What is meant by mixed economy?" The Canadian Mulrooney is still more persistent. "You say: 70% of the prices will not be controlled by the state. Why not a hundred? Why not tomorrow?" And now behold the Soviet leader proceeding to the quick assurance ("We want to get economic freedoms") and in addition resorting to a gentle ideological expression in describing the process of savage privatization and dismantling of the social state, which in the USSR was already condemning millions of people to hunger and desperation.

But the Club of Seven were not content with the restoration of capitalism in just one, even though gigantic, country. It is now the turn of Helmut Kohl, who has already pocketed the "reunification" and is now opening a new front: "It is necessary to realize that none of us has landed on a chest full of money. . . . We see your efforts in the field of disarmament, but in order to affirm the West's support to your efforts, it is important to know if the USSR will continue to give support to certain countries, for example to Cuba." And Gorbachev: "The character of our relations with Cuba and Vietnam has changed radically. Aid to Vietnam has been reduced by three times and to Cuba by two. From Cuba we get a third of the sugar that we consume and fruit. There are some indications that Cuba will also be inserted into the world economy."

The Soviet leader expressed no word in favor of the national sovereignty of the two victims of U.S. aggression that were now being subjected to the inhuman embargo imposed by their aggressors (those indefatigable singers of the wonders of the free market). Above all, the stylistic finesse is interesting: if Bush wants the insertion of the USSR "into the Western economy," Gorbachev seeks to assuage his interlocutors with the prospect of a final insertion of Cuba into what he modestly prefers to call the "world economy."

The intervention of the West in the affairs of the USSR and Eastern Europe spanned a wide range of areas. Even before the summit just described, "five American electoral consultants assisted Boris Yeltsin in winning the Russian presidential elections of 12 June last; they were paid," states *La Repubblica* of

13–14 October 1991, “from anonymous funds in the United States.” Did the superpower that contributed significantly to the electoral success of Boris Yeltsin subsequently play no role in the days of the coup, which saw the consecration of the Russian president as a hero of liberty? In reality, during those days correspondents of the U.S. sponsored Radio Liberty “were present in the palace of the Russian Soviet (the ‘White House’) alongside Boris Yeltsin and the other organizers of the resistance, for whom they became the principal spokespersons” (G. Bensi, *Avvenire*, 6 August 1993). And again: after the assassination of a CIA agent in Tblisi, it was revealed that “American advisers were sent to Georgia with the task of training the bodyguards of President Shevardnadze, the former foreign minister of the Soviet Union ‘who in the past had had the closest ties with the USA’” (*Il Manifesto*, 11 August 1993; P. Passerini, *La Stampa*, 11 August 1993). How far back do these ties go?

Perhaps the whole story of the collapse of the USSR has yet to be written. On the very eve of the August “coup,” authoritative exponents of the new course were shouting about the menace presented by the “conservatives.” Just look at the headline and summary with which *La Repubblica* of 18/19 August 1991 presented a report from Moscow by F. Cucurnia: “‘There is a plot against Gorbachev.’ Yakovlev denounces new intrigues. To the ‘godfather of perestroika’ the strategy of the hard-liners is clear as an open book. ‘They want to take control during the next congress.’” It is worth noting that the “plot” was already being denounced, because those “plotters” wanted to resist politically the introduction of the market and the savage liberalization, also because they wanted to give battle to the aim of the announced 29th Congress of the CPSU, which was being pinpointed as the obstacle to overcome in order to get the better of the “plotters.” This obstacle was overthrown: not only was there no longer a congress of the CPSU, but, a few days after that announcement, the party that would have had to conduct it was outlawed. As it turned out, the August coup, which was so providential for the new Russian leaders, contributed powerfully to the resulting outcome. Are we dealing here simply with a matter of pure chance, or were old hierarchs and obtuse bureaucrats secretly encouraged

and led on to a maneuver and a show of force that was greater than themselves and of which the beneficiaries were destined, even from the beginning, to be their adversaries? Every suspicion is legitimate, all the more so when we consider that in the days of the coup the media gave us an image of a Yeltsin who seemed quite delighted rather than distressed. Moreover, *L'Espresso* of 1 September 1991 titled its editorial "The real coup that Yeltsin made, or rather, Bush."

It would seem that to speak of the West as the protagonist in a "coup" in the USSR or in a "bloodless coup" in Poland is to take the same line as the bourgeois press. It may be more accurate to say that the leaders of the United States and NATO put into practice the aphorism of old Nietzsche: "Whoever is about to fall, give him a push." The push was given, and a powerful one, prolonged and multiform, a push that was the continuation, along with other means, of the armed intervention with which the West has always responded to the challenge represented by any nation that seeks to follow a noncapitalist path of development. The myth of the spontaneous collapse of "existing socialism" cannot stand up under serious analysis. We should make clear, however, that we are not attempting to attribute the collapse that took place in Eastern Europe solely to an external initiative; on the contrary, Communists ought to concentrate on the internal causes of the event. At another tragic moment in the history of the working-class movement, when members of the Second International supported the genocidal first world war (and not just the "state of siege" and other "liberticidal" measures connected with the war and total mobilization), Rosa Luxemburg issued a warning that applies even today: "Socialism may be destroyed if the international proletariat refuses to measure the profundity of this failure and to learn something from it" (1968, 21, 23, 31).

### ***7. Economy and ideology in the defeat of "existing socialism"***

We need, then, to concentrate on the internal causes of the collapse of "existing socialism." But what are they? The exponents of the theory of "collapse" insist above all on the economic dimension of the presumed collapse. In order to determine the validity of that thesis, let us take a quick look at the economic

history of the more important of the countries of Eastern Europe, recounting it with the guidance of two U.S. authors, neither of whom can be suspected of communist sympathies. The years between the two world wars saw “Stalin’s Russia rapidly transforming itself into an economic superpower” (Kennedy 1989, 24–25). Therefore, despite the territorial amputation of Brest-Litovsk and the terrible devastation brought about by World War I as well as the Civil War and the intervention of the Allied Powers, the state born of the October Revolution succeeded where the Czarist empire had failed: it confronted and defeated that Germany which at the moment of Operation Barbarossa was in fact able to count on the productive potential of an entire Europe unified under the aegis of the Third Reich. Certainly, at the moment of peace an enormous effort was made for reconstruction, since “once again because of war the Russian economy was set back about ten years” and lo and behold there took place “a ‘little economic miracle’” in regard to heavy industry with almost a doubling of production between 1945 and 1950” (Kennedy 1989, 499).

But now let us look at the further developments: “In the 1950s, the Soviet Union was growing faster than the United States. If economic trends were projected forward, the Soviet gross national product (GNP) would pass that of the United States in 1984” (Thurow 1992, 11). It is true that in the succeeding decades things went decidedly less well for the Soviet Union, but there was nothing to suggest a catastrophe: when Gorbachev came to power the CIA calculated that the economy of the USSR was developing at an annual rate of 2.1% from 1975 to 1985 as compared to 2.9% realized by the United States. “In the mid-1980s the USSR was doing even better. In 1983 a 3.3% growth rate was recorded, and in 1986 an even better performance, 4.1%, was achieved. There were no signs of collapse—quite the contrary; this was the period when plans for President Reagan’s Star Wars program topped the U.S. political agenda.

Therefore, “the sudden disappearance of Communism is no less mysterious” than the withdrawal of Genghis Khan 770 years earlier (Thurow 1992, 12–13). Let us leave aside the legendary Mongol commander, who also invaded Russia and whom,

therefore, it is ridiculous to compare with the Russian or Soviet leaders: it remains well established that the theory of economic collapse is not capable of explaining much.

Naturally, one can counterpoise to the statistical data on economic development of the Soviet Union the frightful disequilibrium between heavy industry (military) and light industry (consumer goods). This is explained by noting the state of siege imposed by the capitalist world on the USSR throughout practically all the years of its existence, but also by the hegemonic tendencies that it practiced within the "socialist camp." Accordingly, the disequilibrium was more a political problem than an economic one. If we reflect on the catastrophic consequences of the changes that occurred in Eastern Europe, which are now leading some of these nations in the direction of the Third World, we must realize that the economy cannot be the key to the explanation of the collapse of "existing socialism."

We must look elsewhere for an explanation, observing from the very outset of our analysis one methodological consideration: in attempting to reconstruct a story of a failure, we must be careful not to reduce everything to its final outcome. Even in the 50s the USSR enjoyed a large basis of consensus internally and exercised a notable force of attraction outside of its borders as well. These are the years in which Sakharov had not yet become an unshakable "dissident" and in which the English Laborite couple, the Webbs, were speaking of "Soviet Communism" as a "new civilization." These were the years in which Harold J. Lasky, also an authoritative exponent of a Laborite world, expressed his admiration for the gigantic process of scholarization and education as well as the extraordinary social mobility characteristic of the Soviet Union, concerning which Bobbio formulated his already familiar favorable judgment. The demonstrated inability of the USSR and the "fraternal countries" to pass from the state of exception to normality, and to advance on the road to democratization, formalization, and respect for the rules of the game has contributed to making hollow the prestige, internal and international, of the nation born of the October Revolution. The *coup de grâce* may possibly have come from the increasing evidence of the arrogance of a great power and the hegemonic ambitions of "big brother." It is no accident that the

concerted operations of Reagan and John Paul took aim first at Poland, the nation that perhaps more painfully than others felt the weight of the oppression and national humiliation inflicted by the USSR. As with the revolution, so also did the counterrevolution triumph by breaking the chain at its weakest link, where the national contradiction, along with many others, was exacerbated (Losurdo 1993b, chap. 7).

There is, however, a need to add to the political reasons that I have given here and elsewhere another of a more properly ideological character, one that I believe has not been taken into consideration. In the 50s (which we have already seen were characterized by rhythms of development quite promising for the USSR), Krushchev proclaimed at the same time the objectives of communism *and* the fate of the United States: at that moment “existing socialism” was ideologically on the offensive to the extent that, on the plane of history and the philosophy of history, the fate of capitalism had already been sealed. Succeeding decades demonstrated the unrealistic character of such a vision. Constrained to reevaluate drastically its own ambitions, the Soviet Union proved to be incapable of marking out a balance between its own history and a profound rethinking of its own ideology. Its leaders continued to repeat the assurance that it was rapidly advancing toward the realization of a communism conceived in the fantastic mode that often characterized the definition described by Marx and Engels. We read in *The German Ideology* that:

in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (Marx and Engels 1976a, 47)

If we accept that definition, then communism presupposes a prodigious development of the forces of production by eliminating the problems and conflicts in regard to the distribution of social

riches and therefore in regard to labor, and to the measurement and control of labor necessary for production. Indeed, envisioned in this way communism seems to presuppose the disappearance of the division of labor, as well as of the state, and, in reality, of labor itself, and in the final analysis the fading away of every form of power and obligation. Moreover, the transition to communism was regarded by Marx and Engels as a brief period, or even very brief, and relatively painless.

Decades of rich historical experience would be necessary for stimulating a global rethinking of such themes and problems: in reality they do not differ significantly from Lenin's efforts to reformulate the theory of revolution and to take notice in some way of the length and complexity of the transition, a radical rethinking (for which there was an absolute need) of the theory of socialism and communism, of the postcapitalist society in its complexity.

But the more the attainment of communism faded away into an increasingly remote and improbable future, the more "existing socialism" tended to be deprived of every possible legitimation. As that part of the philosophy of history that made reference to the advent of a perfectly conciliated society would decline, a *nomenklatura* that was becoming increasingly autocratic, rotten, and corrupt certainly could not be called back to that principle of legitimation now universal in our time that makes reference to democracy and popular sovereignty. Furthermore, by its very accomplishments "existing socialism" was undermining the bases of its own existence: the concentration-camp universe was becoming more and more intolerable for a civil society that was growing thanks to the education of the masses and to the diffusion of culture and not just to the attainment of a minimum of social security. If a collapse took place in Eastern Europe, it was ideological more than economic.

At the very moment that internal difficulties were becoming more evident in the "socialist camp," the rhythms of economic development were undergoing a slowdown and the thesis of the philosophy of history pertaining to the inevitable (and imminent) crisis of capitalism became increasingly untenable. At the very moment in which the basis of consensus was being reduced and

the powerful apparatus of repression was being viewed with growing impatience, the Soviet leaders were still repeating their weary effusions concerning the future of communism, conceived in the fantastic manner that we have already seen. Such effusions had a rather negative effect on the economy: the delays and the disequilibria then evident necessitated energetic efforts to stimulate the productivity of labor, certainly not facilitated by the notion that they were advancing toward a communism understood as general leisure, or by an ideological climate in which every attempt to rationalize the process of production was labeled the "restoration of capitalism."

In a certain sense "existing socialism" was shown to be incapable of passing from the ideological offensive to the defensive. Indeed, it was not in a position to put up any ideology in opposition or to erect any lines of resistance to the ever-increasing offensive from the West. Declarations about the future of a society without a state, without a division and control of labor, and yet able to guarantee the satisfaction of every need no longer had a minimum of credibility; the initial utopia had been transformed into a theology of state, in which not even the priest-official charged with proclaiming and getting respect for it retained any faith. This must be understood as the conversion en bloc to the West, and especially to neoliberalism, of cadre and leading Communist groups, motivated by the desire to consolidate their own privilege and to attain the wealth and felicity of capitalism according to the mythically transfigured image of that system transmitted by Western mass media.

We have seen the profound influence that the October Revolution had on the West itself. But what happened then? The capitalist system, strengthened by the absorption of elements borrowed from the ideal and political baggage of the workers' and Communist movement as well as from the very reality of the social system developed at the outset by the Bolshevik Revolution, knew in its turn how to exercise a very powerful, and even irresistible, attraction for the peoples of Eastern Europe. But beyond the lack of any effective resistance from "existing socialism" there was yet another reason: in those countries the Revolution had really wrenched the still-backward masses from

their traditional somnolence and passivity by communicating to them hopes that until then they had not even dared to nourish and which the new societies proved unable to satisfy, not only because of serious errors but also because of the backwardness that weighed on them. Overcoming this backwardness became still more difficult—first on account of the open military aggression, and then as a result of technological quarantine as well as other political initiatives and military undertakings on the part of the capitalist countries. The result of all this was an uncritical acceptance by the masses of a flattering and mythically transfigured image of capitalism. One amused U.S. scholar was able to observe that “the greater part of the people here (in Eastern Europe) think that the free market means that the stores are full and the work lighter. They have no idea of what it really involves.” They did not realize that the bland rhythms of labor in “existing socialism” had to be replaced by other more hurried ones; they did not understand that “many essential goods and services” guaranteed by the previous regime were destined to become problematic (Thurow 1992, 87, 96, 97). They did not envision the dismantling of their economic and social rights. They were brought around to accept the myth of the West that had been expanded on the background of victories won by workers’ movements and by the challenge of the October Revolution.

The impact of reality has rapidly provoked a bitter disappointment: in Poland “nostalgia for the past has become popular”; “the majority thinks that Walesa should leave, that Jaruzelski would be by far better a guide for the country and guard over the armed forces—the authors of the 1981 coup—as if resorting to a more solid and reassuring point of reference” (Benetazzo, *La Repubblica*, 7 February 1992). Accordingly, a rethinking is going on even in the nation that had signaled the beginning of the end of “existing socialism” with its rebellions and national protests. If this rethinking is not successfully articulated in a politically viable fashion, it is because Communists are still not succeeding in redefining their own identity, an identity based on a philosophy of history that overthrows the thesis widely diffused in the immediate postwar period proclaiming the insuperability of capitalism and indeed the inevitability of its triumph in the whole world.

### **8. Socialism and state capitalism**

Not only does the dominant ideology dispute the thesis of Restoration advanced here, but also a Left that is totally engaged in demonstrating that the events begun in Russia with the conquest of political power by the Bolsheviks are nothing more than a chapter, although one certainly with totally unique characteristics, in the history of capitalism, since, they maintain, there never was established in that country a really different social system and the much-acclaimed socialism represented only a monopolistic state capitalism. In spite of the apparent radicalism with which it is clothed, this is actually a fundamentally neo-Menshevik reading of history, one that deduces from the backwardness and the immaturity of objective conditions in Russia the inevitable capitalistic outcome of a revolution animated by totally diverse ambitions and ideals. Such a reading does, however, avoid some fundamental political and theoretical problems. What was the task of the Russian workers' movement and of a large party appealing to Marxism and socialism after February 1917? It certainly could not have been to continue participation in the imperialist war and in the massacre that was denounced as genocide by both Lenin and Luxemburg. To demand the conquest of power was the same as the struggle for peace, and among the merits of the October Revolution is that it stimulated a year later the November revolution in Germany and in this way hastened the end of an interminable conflict.

But what was to be done with the power that had been won? Already in March 1918 Lenin called attention to the fact that the socialist revolution differed radically from the bourgeois. The latter "was born from feudalism" in the sense that, even before the attainment of power by the bourgeoisie, "in the bosom of the old regime there were being progressively created new economic formations that were gradually transforming all aspects of the feudal society." Thus, the victorious bourgeoisie had "before it only one task: to shatter, to throw away, to destroy, all the chains of the old society" by means of further stimulating "the development of capitalism." But the socialist revolution found itself in a totally different situation; "it did not inherit [new social] relations

already prepared” and, consequently only after attaining the political victory was it able to confront the problem of “passing from the old capitalist relations to socialist relations” (1965, 1063–64). From this point of view the socialist revolution was never able to count on the maturity of objective conditions in the same way that the bourgeois revolution could.

The date on which the Bolshevik leader made this observation is important: the October Revolution had taken place a few months before and hopes were still alive for the spread of the revolutionary flame in the West and in the more advanced capitalist countries. Nevertheless Lenin had to underline the peculiarities and the special difficulties for the socialist revolution in attempting to introduce new social relations, laboriously and progressively, in an ambit completely strange to them. This means that through a whole historical phase, the duration of which at this moment is not clear, totally heterogeneous forms of property and economy coexist. If this is the case, it is understandable that some might believe that they can interpret these events as only a particular chapter in the history of capitalism by simply attempting to enumerate all that was nonsocialist in the USSR. In reality, however, according to the conception that Marx presented, socialism was already presented as somewhat of a hybrid, in the sense that, in spite of the conquest of political power by a working class determined to make communism a reality, in its ambit there continued to flourish the “bourgeois right” that ruled the division and compensation of labor (Marx 1989, 86–87). Accordingly, even in the particularly favorable, and also unrealistic conditions presupposed by the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (immediate collectivization of the means of production in the principal capitalist countries, safety from any external pressure and international conflict), there was no place for the “purity” of socialism. It is hardly necessary to add that “the more backward the nation in which by virtue of the zigzag of history the socialist revolution had to begin” (Lenin 1965b, 1063–64) and the more unfavorable and traumatic the international context in which it had to operate, the more difficult and tortuous the transition to socialism would be.

Fully aware of the hybrid character of the social relations

peculiar to the phase of socialist transition, Lenin enumerated in May 1918 the “various socio-economic structures” present in Soviet Russia: “1) patriarchal, i.e., to a considerable extent natural, peasant farming; 2) small commodity production (this includes the majority of those peasants who sell their grain [and which constituted the dominant element]; 3) private capitalism; 4) state capitalism; 5) socialism” (1965a, 335–36).

But this was no reason for distress to the Bolshevik leader, who emphasized that the category of “transition” means, to be precise, the coexistence of “elements, particles, fragments of capitalism and socialism” (1971, 138–39) and, in reality, even precapitalist social relations. Six years later, in December 1925, Zinovyev considered Lenin’s statement about the existence of five economic formations in our republic “to be accepted at that time by the entire Bolshevik leadership.” Clearly, with respect to Marx, a rethinking about the times and manners of the “transition” was maturing.

An observation analogous to Lenin’s was made by Mao Zedong with respect to a similar time in China, when, five years after the conquest of power, in presenting the draft of the constitution of the People’s Republic of China, he emphasized:

Article 5 says for example that in the PRC there now exist four types of ownership of the means of production, but in areas inhabited by our national minorities other types of ownership now exist. Does there still exist the primitive communal society? It probably does still exist among some of the national minorities. In China the systems of slave property as well as of feudal property still exist. (1975, 166)

From the primitive community to socialism, through the slave and feudal society, the entire history of humanity seems to be epitomized in the passage from one region to another of this immense country in which the Communists attained power. Without attempting to pursue the goal of the ideal society all at one time, they relied, rather, on the impetus of a concrete and determined struggle conducted with the awareness of the protracted nature and complexity of the period of transition.

This theoretical attainment is tranquilly ignored by those who interpret the succession of events begun with the October Revolution as a particular chapter in the history of capitalism. Recourse to the category of state capitalism is here less an explanation than a negation of the concrete historical process, in the sense that those very diverse political realities and bitter conflicts are all leveled and eliminated in one night in which all crows are black (and all cats gray). A turning point in modern history is represented by an overcoming of the patrimonial conception of the state (capable of being transmitted by inheritance and divided according to the wish of the proprietor in the manner of any other private property). But what should we think of a scholar who, after taking as a starting point the continuation and even the strengthening of the state in modern times, and also accepting the fact that the individual continues to be exposed to and submerged in an overwhelming apparatus of power, has formulated the thesis according to which no innovation is acknowledged even with the end of feudal society and of the patrimonial conception of the state? In reality, such endings imply enormous changes. If on the one hand the specter of the Leviathan is evoked (causing the emergence of a new danger of a political power endowed with a force and a capacity for control unknown until now), on the other hand the modern conception is affirmed of the individual as the rightful possessor of rights desirous of a role in the shaping of political reality. Whoever does not wish to cling to an absolute belief in "nothing new under the sun" is obligated to investigate the changes, the new dangers (the further expansion of the Leviathan), and the new possibilities of emancipation that are implied by affirming a presumptive state monopoly capitalism. Even if it were necessary to leave intact all power relations within the factory, the overcoming of the private ownership of the means of production would make it more difficult for the bourgeoisie to reproduce themselves as a social class, inasmuch as pressure would be brought to bear on the danger represented by a political power that had been granted the right and task of controlling the means of production.

So far I have spoken of state monopoly capitalism in general, but the problem under discussion ought to be made more specific.

Are these new contradictions and new possibilities of emancipation opened up by a state capitalism subject to a nonbourgeois political power and guided by a party animated by Communist ideals? Here is the difficulty to which Lenin had already called attention before October but which was so diligently avoided by the admirers of “purity.” Even in a state that is not controlled by a Communist party but by one that is “democratic and revolutionary” in the sense that it “would destroy all the privileges and would not shrink from establishing the most complete democracy in a revolutionary manner,” even in such a state “state monopoly capitalism . . . means inevitably and unfailingly a step, and even more than a step, toward socialism” (1955, 25:340). And this provides a major rationale for a state controlled by a Communist party; it emphasizes that, after the attainment of power, the Bolshevik leader, in polemic against those (the Mensheviks and even more the “left Communists”) who stirred up “the bugaboo of ‘state capitalism’” in order to reinforce, in the final analysis, the purposelessness of the October Revolution (Lenin 1971, 147, 137).

Contrary to what the modern “purists” believe, the theory proposed by them is hardly new and does not have particularly revolutionary origins. The same objection can be made to today’s neo-Mensheviks as had already been made by a theoretician of liberal socialism. Carlo Rosselli polemicized against those who breathlessly busied themselves with demonstrating “with a marvelous abundance of citations that the Russian Revolution was in flagrant contradiction with the expectations of Marxism” and with “communism” and the ideals of Marx, given that it produced a system totally pervaded by “a new capitalistic spirit.” He observed in 1923 that “in regard to the reformist judgment and attitude about the Russian revolution, too strict adherence to the Marxist formulas led to its being condemned aprioristically almost as soon as it was born [although] it is something that contained and still contains within itself marvelous seeds of life and renewal” (1988, 67–68).

On the side opposite the reformist and Menshevik, both Lenin and Mao (at least prior to the Cultural Revolution) characterized state capitalism (or a sector of public economy more or less

ample according to the circumstances) as being controlled by a workers' party, presumably a Communist one, or an element dedicated to the process of the construction of socialism. In 1953, Mao declared: "The transformation of capitalism into socialism is accomplished through state capitalism." A few years later he wrote, "By paying a little money we are buying this class, the national bourgeoisie, those whose means of production became public property, but who received a fixed interest on capital and property and who continued to play a role in the process of production" (1975, 215, 475).

This incongruity and contradiction between the economic and the political is being taken as a pretext by the Left and Right to assert that, in spite of the revolution that took place, capitalism still continues to exist along with the bourgeoisie. But these people show that they do not comprehend the characteristics of that transitional phase, of which Gramsci was well aware when he noted in 1926 an occurrence "never seen in history": "A politically dominant class" finds itself "on the whole in a condition of life inferior to certain elements and strata of the dominated and subjected class." Nevertheless, this was unavoidable because the proletariat was not able to win power for itself and would not be able to maintain itself if it were not capable of sacrificing its particular and immediate interests to the "general and long-term interests of the class" (1971, 129–30).

In a certain sense the present Chinese leaders have applied on a much larger scale the political line enunciated by Mao in the 50s (with the problems and contradictions that it entails). Naturally, the transition to socialism with a large sector of the public economy controlled by a Communist party can undergo an interruption or a more or less drastic regression (and in this context, apart from the economy, eminent relevant political factors, such as the level of democratic participation, the composition and ideological formation of the leading group and its relations with the masses, as well as other factors all play a role). It should not be forgotten that, as the collapse that occurred in Eastern Europe has demonstrated and, as Mao Zedong had understood very well, the process of transition is always reversible. But it is senseless to hope, as the "purists" do, to transform that unstable equilibrium,

which is characteristic of the transitional phase, into a stable socioeconomic formation—state monopoly capitalism—and consider it a subtype of capitalism without any relation to socialism.

In any case, the theory that likens the events begun with October to a chapter in the history of capitalism does not succeed in explaining any of the history and the real contradictions of the twentieth century. Marx set for himself the problem of why, in spite of their valor and passionate revolutionary dedication—evidenced even by the terror to which they had recourse—the Jacobins did not succeed in realizing their coveted revival of the ancient *polis*. He explained this lack of success by citing the unreal and utopian character of Robespierre's political program. The left liquidators of the history of "existing socialism" as a whole do not even seek the reasons why the Communists, contrary to their intentions, would have ended up producing state monopoly capitalism in the various countries. They do not even confront the problem of the eventually unrealistic and utopian character of the ideal of socialism as presented in the classics and subsequently inherited by the Bolsheviks and other protagonists of the revolutions carried out under the banner of Marxism and communism. Without confronting this problem, the devotees of the theory of state monopoly capitalism end up in fact with taking for granted the explanation according to which, in the whole area of "existing socialism" and, in practice, the entire historical curve of its development, entire leading Communist groups would have unfailingly either misinterpreted or betrayed Marx's teaching. It is difficult to imagine an explanation more contrary to historical materialism and, at the same time, more alluring for those who by advancing it proclaim themselves to be the sole interpreters and the only incorruptibles of a kind of sacred doctrine. But the theory of state capitalism does not even succeed in explaining the collapse of a system flourishing until a short time ago in Eastern Europe. Why now do the new leaders feel themselves obligated to a process of privatization of the economy, which runs the risk of provoking dangerous popular protests, and to a liberalism so savage that it makes specific reference to Hayek? The fact is that the public ownership of the means of production together with the proclamation of the right to work and of the other social and

economic rights made impossible or powerfully impeded the formation of a reserve army of labor, the “free” availability of the labor force and the “free” intensification of the rhythms of labor for which the new bourgeoisie feels an absolute need.

### **9. For a redefinition of communism**

We have seen the extreme complexity of the process of transition. But transition to what? In a departure from their Marxist convictions, the protagonists of the socialist revolutions of this century have found themselves in reality to be confronted with the problem of a dual transition: from capitalism (and often even from precapitalistic social relations) to socialism and from socialism to communism. And if, on the basis of historical experience, they knew how to rethink in a more or less profound manner the first transition (described by Marx and Engels as a brief period, painless and irreversible), they have not known how to carry out the self-same operation as regards the second transition; they have not known how to unify the two transitions into a single process. Moreover, the end of this second transition process (communism) has continued to be conceived in terms so utopian as to hinder seriously the construction of the postcapitalist society and its correct reflection in the consciousness of the people. With their dogmatic approach to an acritical utopia, the supporters of the theory of monopoly state capitalism offer as a remedy to the collapse experienced in the East what has constituted one of its decisive causes.

Certainly, if we measure post-1917 events against the definition of communism present in the *German Ideology* (“to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon . . .”) then everything appears light years away not only from communism but also from the brief socialist phase that should lead to communism and that should even emerge already pregnant in some way with those totally new social relations that it was called upon to realize. But then an acritical use is being made of the utopia in the sense that it reduces the present and what is really possible to a formless mass and deprives it of any merit. As in Christian doctrine all human beings are sinners because all are infinitely distant from

the absolute moral perfection of God, likewise a definition of communism so emphatically utopian that everything appears as irremediable misery (putting “existing socialism” on a par with bourgeois democracy or even fascism), has no way at all to distinguish among the various phases and diverse aspects of the events begun with the October Revolution. This interpretation presents the problem of laying out the balance of the advances and retreats, of the errors, horrors, and conquests that it has articulated.

In fact, scarcely a page after the aforementioned citation, the *German Ideology* gives a quite different definition of communism, one that is difficult to reconcile with the first: “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the now existing premise” (Marx and Engels 1976a, 49). Here it should be asked if, with all the errors and horrors, the events begun with the October Revolution, the experience of “existing socialism,” emerge as subsumable under the real movement of emancipation of which communism consists. And here it should be asked as well if the attempts, the experiments, the struggles of China, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam (not to speak of Laos, Cambodia, or Mongolia) can today be subsumed under that definition. It can be maintained that these nations are destined to come to the same end as East Europe and perhaps at rapid tempos. Nevertheless, like it or not, for now the history of “existing socialism” (with all the lacerating contradictions and dramatic problems characteristic of the political-social form of government), is not yet concluded; even if it has entered into a completely new phase. To continue to read the historic events begun by the Revolution of October in the light of the theory of state monopoly capitalism, or other similar theories, means to consider as irrelevant or even desirable the triumph of a Chinese Yeltsin or the coming of a follower or lackey of “democratic” Bill Clinton to the office of the “totalitarian” Fidel Castro; it means to invite the leaders of China, Korea, and Vietnam to surrender. In the dramatic conditions of total siege under which Cuba has found itself after the collapse in Eastern

Europe, it is constrained in this changed situation to make concessions to international capitalism. Through another change it has needed to appeal to the spirit of sacrifice and has renewed the productive forces and imposed a more rigorous discipline on the labor of its citizens; all this consists, from the point of view of the "purists," of the definitive demonstration that even the government established on the island after the overthrow of Batista and of the dominance of North American companies does not represent anything new under the sun!

To such "Marxism," at the same time dogmatic and capitulatory (and incurably economist), it is useful to contrast the definition of communism as "real movement." This is not at all a matter of taking up the formula (the movement is everything, the end is nothing) so dear to Bernstein, who declined to discuss the essentials: that is, the political power of the bourgeoisie and the imperialistic arrogance of the great powers (the benevolence with which the German social democratic leader regarded the "civilizing" mission of colonialism). The end that Bernstein would have wished to cancel (thus perpetuating the existing politico-social relations at the national and international levels) continues to exist in reality: we are talking of constructing a postcapitalist and postimperialist society, a society, however, that cannot and must not be imagined any more with the colors of an insipid and acritical utopia. And it is the measure of the distance from utopia to establish the meaning at the basis of the definition of communism as a "real movement." The declaration of the *Communist Manifesto* has this same meaning when it states: "The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes" (Marx and Engels 1976b, 498). The utopian and dogmatic configuration of the postcapitalist and postimperialist future encourages the evasion of the politically concrete and historically determined struggles; it does not help, but on the contrary seriously hinders the "historical movement," the "real movement" of emancipation. It is a conclusion that is all the more necessary after the

experience of the events begun with the Revolution of October. Without the assimilation of this lesson from decades of history it will not be possible to resist the gigantic wave of reaction operating today, nor will it be possible to establish the premises for the reconstruction and revival of the Communist movement in the world and for a decisive revolutionary transformation of reality.

This article originally appeared as “Il crollo del ‘socialismo reale’ nell’Est europeo: rivoluzione democratica o restaurazione?” in *Marxismo Oggi*, n.s., 4, no. 2 (Oct. 1993): 107–44. Except for Lenin 1965a, Marx 1989, and Marx and Engels 1976a and 1976b, all quotations have been translated into English from the Italian of the original article.

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## Commemoration in Germany and Cuba of the Centennial of the Death of Frederick Engels

Frederick Engels was born in the industrial city of Wuppertal in 1820, into one of the wealthiest bourgeois families in Germany at that time, its wealth deriving from the textile mill established by his grandfather. Ever since its founding in 1970 by German Communists and Social Democrats, the Marx-Engels Foundation in Wuppertal has been a center for research in working-class history and Marxist philosophy and political economy. Four to six conferences are held annually, bringing together Marxists from eastern and western Germany. The largest such gathering since 1989 was held 29 September–1 October 1995 to mark the centennial of the death of Engels, with one hundred twenty participants, including one each from France, Iran, Italy, and the United States.

Papers presented covered such diverse subjects as Engels's first literary work, his first investigations of political economy, his involvement in the natural sciences, and his contributions to the theory and practice of scientific socialism. Heinz Jung (Frankfurt) examined the importance of Engels's 1844 "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" as the precursor of Marxist political economy and of Marx and Engels's theory of socialism and communism. Other papers pointed to the need for a fresh look at Engels's unique contributions to Marxist theory and for the "de-dogmatizing" of his biography. Wolfgang Eichhorn (Berlin) evoked considerable discussion when he asked for the meaning of Engels's phrase "to make history consciously." Eichhorn argued that it became a dogmatized formula in the *Nature,*

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socialist countries, which, among other things, reduced the concept of socialism to nationalization of the means of production, leading to a vision of total regulation of all social relationships. Robert Steigerwald (Frankfurt) focused on the connection between the abandonment of materialism in the natural and social sciences and the failure to recognize the central role of the working class in effecting social transformation.

The Engels centennial was also commemorated 19–22 September in Havana at a conference sponsored by the Cuban Institute of Philosophy and the Cuban Society of Philosophical Research. Some one hundred thirty Cuban scholars were joined by ten from other countries (Australia, Canada, France, Great Britain, Mexico, and the United States). Participation from abroad was severely limited by new U.S. Treasury Department regulations requiring travelers to Cuba (U.S. residents or not) to obtain individual licenses from the Treasury Department before dealing with a U.S. travel agency or air carrier. Since processing of the license applications required two to three months, only those flying from Canada, Mexico, or Europe succeeded in reaching Havana in time for the conference.

Sessions concentrated largely on the relationship between the work of Engels and problems of socialist construction in Cuba under the difficult economic conditions arising from the U.S. blockade and the collapse of the USSR and the European socialist countries. Several papers dealt with more general theoretical topics, including responses to postmodernist theories in various fields. The optimistic tone of the theoretical discussions was obviously stimulated by the first concrete signs of recovery from Cuba's economic difficulties, with gross output increasing 0.5 percent in 1994 and by an expected two percent in 1995.

The new importance that the Cuban political leadership attaches to theoretical understanding of problems of social transformation was evidenced by the participation in the conference of the minister of culture, the minister of technology, science, and environment, and the Cuban vice president (who is also a member of the Political Bureau).

Angela Davis, in Cuba to deliver humanitarian aid, received a standing ovation when she appeared at the closing session.

## Book Reviews

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*New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism.* Edited by Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten, and George Snedeker. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993, 330 pages, cloth \$38.00, paper \$18.00.

In 1977, Herbert Aptheker challenged younger radical historians interested in the U.S. Communist movement to “capture the blood and guts of the thirties” (“Questions for the Thirties,” solicited by Paul Buhle, *Radical History Review* 4, nos. 2-3 [spring-summer 1977]: 121). Published nearly fifteen years later, *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* collects a sampling of work by intellectuals who have answered that call. The volume contains papers presented at a 1989 conference hosted by the Research Group on Socialism and Democracy at the CUNY Graduate Center to mark the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party USA.

These “new historians” refuse their orthodox predecessors’ dismissal of the CPUSA as merely an appendage of Soviet Power. But in no way do the authors evade the atrocities of Stalinism; instead they open up this history for discussion, avoiding the invidious and blinding moralism characteristic of older anti-Communist histories written by disenchanting revolutionaries like Theodore Draper and Harvey Klehr. This anti-Communism is rejected out of hand not because it interferes with a sentimental whitewash of the thirties, but because, as leftist cultural critic Alan Wald suggests in his essay “Culture and Commitment: U.S. Communist Writers Reconsidered,” the older historians’ “‘anti-communism’ . . . has little to do with genuine opposition to the brutal and authoritarian policies of the Stalin and post-Stalin

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regimes. It is more often a means of discrediting the entire effort of the left." In "The History of the History of U.S. Communism," Michael E. Brown considers these "new histories" as partially reflective of a generational difference. Distanced from the prejudices of the Cold War, this generation's perspective was shaped by the social movements growing out of the sixties and responding to imperialism, racism, and sexism. Their studies seek to tease out the lessons useful to a much altered Left's efforts to address these continually relevant issues. According to Roger Kieran ("The Communist Influence on American Labor"), it is the CPUSA's grassroots engagement with issues such as poverty and racism that interests the majority of these authors.

These scholars do little rehashing of this debate with the orthodox and jettison polemics for scholarship that demonstrates the richness of the history. As Gerald Horne points out in passing in his examination of CP approaches to race relations ("The Red and the Black: The Communist Party and African Americans in Historical Perspective"), orthodox historians' tendency to see the CPUSA as a puppet casts those to whom it appealed as passive and incapable of having chosen their politics rationally. "In this case," he notes, "the attractiveness of the party to African Americans becomes extremely problematic." In addition to restoring agency to the thousands of African Americans who joined the CP, Horne's study acknowledges indigenous influences on Party politics by putting the CP position on the "Negro national question" into a specific context. Rather than draw a generalized picture of the Party's position, he offers us a view of one pattern of convergence of the Red and the Black—in Ben Davis's 1943 victorious election campaign for a Harlem seat on the city council.

Despite the attempted recuperation of the thirties Left, theirs is not an unambiguous endorsement of Popular Front strategy. Sidled up next to Mark Naison's celebration of the Popular Front's successes in "remaking America" is John Gerassi's informed condemnation of United Front strategy, "The Comintern, The Fronts, and the CPUSA." Gerassi evaluates U.S. strategy in an international frame, focusing on Comintern dictates as borne out in the Chinese, French, and German CPs.

Behind the United Front Against Fascism Gerassi finds a cynical and opportunistic Stalinist retrenchment. In his view the Popular Front served as the international arm of Stalin's policy of defending Communism in one country. The cynicism of Stalin's call for antifascist cooperation is most tragically evident in his forces' slaughter of anarchist allies in the fight against Franco, an example which Gerassi conveniently and typically omits. Gerassi lapses into a widely shared kind of CP nostalgia in which the CP participation in the Spanish Civil War stands untarnished as an emblem of passionate Communist commitment.

In Gerassi's estimation, the Popular Front was a suicidal strategy for international Communism. The compromises required for cooperation with liberal forces destroyed the passion and logic that drove the movement. He blames the chameleon-like activity of the Party during the New Deal for both the CP's vulnerability in the McCarthy era and its later increasing dogmatism and authoritarianism. (Two other essays, "Purging the Profs: The Rapp Coudert Committee in New York, 1940–1942" by Stephen Lieberstein and "McCarthyism and the Decline of American Communism, 1945–1960" by Ellen Schrecker, address the history of McCarthyism more thoroughly.) Perhaps even more tragically, Gerassi finds in his national review that the fronts were ineffective as a strategy of fighting fascism. Communist Parties around the world backed away from a radical analysis of inequality, aligning themselves with liberal democracies and allowing inequality and capitalist domination to fester within these regimes and their policies of imperialist exploitation. In Gerassi's words, "Fronts demand too many compromises to be able to stop uncompromising imperialists." Gerassi's article is provocative, but not characteristic of the collection.

The approach of these studies is characteristic of a post-1960s manner of writing history, exhibiting what Brown identifies as the contemporary historians' more "sociological" approach to their sources. In the case of organizational history, this entails focusing on "participation" in the Party. As Peggy Dennis remarks in the *Radical History Review* article cited above, "How the individual understands and responds to the

analysis, policy and tactic, and translates it in their own personal activity is the substance of which struggle and history is made.”

The inclusion of a frank 1992 interview with Gil Green, a former top Party official who sat out the McCarthy era in Leavenworth, provides the reader with a reflective slice of such substance and reveals the ideological struggle and dissent behind the bureaucratic monolith the Party presents. We are thus allowed access to the whys that influenced and motivated participants. Without this focus on the personal dimension of Communist activity, orthodox historians such as Draper are at a loss to explain even their own participation.

Some of the pieces are more successful than others in adapting this approach to their subject matter. Rosalynn Baxandall's article, "The Question Seldom Asked: Women and the CPUSA," focuses on the vagaries, contradictions, and changes over time in the official treatment of the question at the expense of a more participant-oriented approach. Baxandall only points to this manner of asking the woman question when she suggests that while the CP "was not feminist," it opened up horizons for women and enriched their lives. While Baxandall's piece is useful as a point of reference and review, it is through the examples of these women's lives, writings, and activity that answers to the woman question should be sought.

Considering Communism as primarily a movement has the added advantage of revealing the cultural apparatus that served to sustain its members. In its heyday and beyond, the CP was a way of life whose forms ran the gamut of cultural expression. Annette Rubinstein's charismatic piece conveys the feel of the CP's cultural world with the zeal and insight only a participant could have. She preserves the ephemeral but tremendous history of the left theater not only through documentation but analysis and engagement of debates in Marxist aesthetics. Alan Wald shares his immense knowledge and studied comprehension of U.S. Communist writers in an overview that includes an extensive section on agendas for further research.

Wald's generosity and commitment as a left cultural worker fly in the face of Draper's accusation that new historians "have no political footing in the present" ("The Life of the Party," *New*

*York Review of Books*, 13 January 1994, 51). While the sympathies of the writers are relatively clear, informed by a general interest in socialism and democracy, Michael Brown advises that most of the contributors are independent, politically unaffiliated scholars. Draper's weakness is that he can only understand commitment or activity as affiliation, and affiliation only as alignment with a political party or tendency. Perhaps Brown's blind spot is that he does not count academic tenure as affiliation. Except for Wald's manifesto-like call for left cultural workers to represent their own history and literature, never is the issue of intellectuals' relationship to social movements discussed. Enlisting this leftist cultural work of historians, cultural critics and others in a reconstructive project of the U.S. Left is the task now at hand. Publishing this collection with Monthly Review Press instead of a university press might be a step in the right direction.

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*The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*, by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. New York: Free Press, 1994, 845 pages, cloth \$30.00.

When it comes to bad science, past and present studies linking race and intelligence have one thing in common: IQ plays a crucial role in all of them. In 1989, for example, J. Phillippe Rushton, a psychologist at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada, sparked a media storm when he claimed that Asiatics, whites, and Blacks could be ranked in that order when it came to decreasing cranial capacity, decreasing intelligence, and less orderly behavior.

Perhaps Rushton thought that by enthroning Asiatics at the

high end of his scale he might avoid the controversy raised in 1968 by another psychologist, Arthur Jensen, of the University of California at Berkeley. In that year Jensen published a paper claiming that whites were more intelligent than Blacks and that, moreover, the trait was inherited. Jensen concluded that special training programs for Blacks were useless.

Rushton, who just last summer published a book called *Race, Evolution, and Behavior* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers), has recently been joined by two like-minded colleagues, Charles Murray, a fellow of the American Enterprise Institute, and Richard J. Herrnstein, a psychologist, late of Harvard. The Murray and Herrnstein book is cast in the Jensen-Rushton mold: Whites are smarter than Blacks and the difference is inherited.

As in previous controversies, media articles and stories responding to these recent books continue to miss the point. Setting aside politically correct posturing and minor scientific quibbles for the moment, we can ask whether anyone has truly “belled the cat.” The real problem appears to be IQ, the so-called “intelligence quotient.” For most of this century the concept of IQ has gripped the popular imagination to the point where most people think it measures something called “intelligence.” Without a large sample of IQ test scores, not to mention a pseudoscientific literature on the subject, none of these authors would have been able to make a case for his racial contentions. In a nutshell, junk science (IQ) just leads to more junk science (race and IQ).

By “junk science” we do not necessarily mean science that produces wrong conclusions, but science that does not follow the scientific process. Of course, wrong methods often produce wrong results. But no one will know what the right results are, scientifically speaking, until someone does the right research. In the meantime, we are left with a practice, IQ testing, that has no accompanying theory to speak of and many indications that the results, as such, are wrong. Here is what happened on the road to our present mess.

The notion that one could test a person for his or her “intelligence” began innocently enough in the late nineteenth

century when the French psychologist Alfred Binet developed a test of scholastic potential for school children. Binet simply made up a large number of questions that took the form of an examination but which reflected things that normal people (grown-ups) might be expected to know. Not surprisingly, Binet discovered that students who were already doing well in school scored high marks on his test. He unknowingly set the stage for later abuse, however, when he imagined that his test somehow determined a quality that he called “mental age” or “mental level.”

The idea that human intelligence might be revealed in a relatively simple test soon took root in America. An educator of “feeble-minded” children, H. H. Goddard, adapted the test as a way of detecting very low intelligence. He applied it in 1913 (with the approval of the U.S. government) to immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. Large numbers of European immigrants were found to be “feeble-minded” and turned away. By 1917, the American pioneer of IQ testing, Lewis H. Terman, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, developed the now-famous Stanford-Binet test. In devising his test, Terman simply made up the questions. There was no underlying theory, no definition of intelligence, not a shred of genuine scientific research to guide him in formulating them. He did not even question whether a written test was the proper way to proceed. No one really knew what (if anything) “intelligence” was. IQ tests then, as now, were simply made up of whole cloth.

When the scientific method goes wrong from the very start, it may become extremely difficult to repair later. Too many people make their living this way. Too many other people believe the results. Thus the small proportion of the psychological community that still supports the IQ concept has erected a rampart of pseudoscientific theory to bolster its position. As the chemist and Nobel laureate Irving Langmuir pointed out in 1953, one of the earmarks of junk science is the development of contorted theories to support an inherently faulty concept or discovery. Owing perhaps to the complete absence of theoretical foundations, the IQ field took on a curious circularity. On being asked what “intelligence” was, for example, the Harvard psychologist

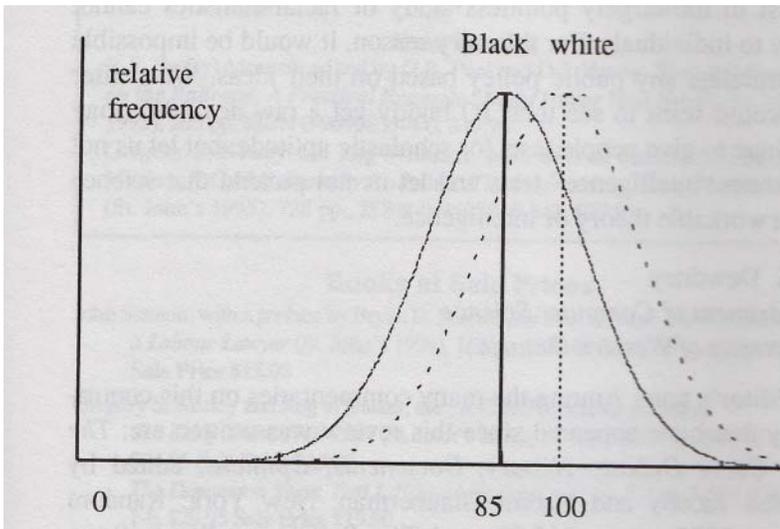
Edmund Boring remarked, "Intelligence as a measurable capacity must at the start be defined as the capacity to do well in an intelligence test." It gets worse.

IQ testers and theorists defend their ground by claiming, for starters, that IQ tests must measure something natural because the distribution of IQ scores follows the famed normal distribution. This is the famous bell-shaped curve that many natural measurements seem to follow: The central hump of the curve reflects a large number of individuals clustered around the average, the tails of the curve reflect the smaller number of individuals that measure much larger or smaller than average. But those who frame IQ tests anticipate the bell-shaped curve by the painstaking elimination of questions that lead to non-normal distributions. IQ-test results follow the normal distribution because they're made that way! It's obviously much easier to make a quack than a duck.

Another circularity enters when testers "validate" their tests by comparing score distributions of different tests or by comparing test scores with the academic achievement of those tested. Who would be surprised to discover that the correlations are relatively high?

Over most of this century, a plethora of IQ tests has developed, and the notion of IQ as an innate quality, not to say a heritable one, has permeated our culture. Someone who does well in an ordinary test has earned a high grade but someone who does well in an IQ test has got a high IQ. Very few people realize, however, that IQ scores are very plastic. They have been raised by 20 or 30 points for Black inner-city children, for example, by training them in the ways of the white-oriented educational system. Throughout their checkered history, IQ tests have been used not only by educators anxious to measure academic potential but by those who would establish critical differences between races. Thoroughgoing, negative analyses by the renowned geneticist R. C. Lewontin, the biologist Stephen Jay Gould, and many other knowledgeable scientists have only drawn the IQ wagons into a tighter circle. The favorite defense of all four authors is a rather arcane statistical method known as factor analysis. Jensen and the others claim that a factor called *g*,

short for general intelligence, emerges from the analysis when applied to large numbers of IQ scores. But to point out that emergent factors depend very heavily on some arbitrary decisions made at the start of the analysis seems to do little good. The racial analysts simply forge ahead with grinding statistical analyses that impress psychologists far more than they impress scientists.



Although IQ is a scientifically meaningless measure, those who still worry about the implications of differing average scores for races may take some comfort in the bell-shaped curve itself. When scientists talk about within-group differences versus between-group differences, they refer to two overlapping bell-shaped curves. Consider for a moment two such curves that reflect the distribution of test scores for a large group of Blacks and a large group of whites (see figure). According to Rushton, the Black bell (solid curve) centers on 85 while the white bell (dotted curve) centers on 100. Forgetting for the moment the well-known cultural biases of IQ tests, note that the two bell curves overlap almost completely. Although the white curve is higher on the right and the Black curve is higher on the left, you

can construct a kind of “IQ buddy” system. The vast majority of whites, for example, could each be assigned a Black “buddy” who has exactly the same measured IQ. At the low end of the scale a white may have two or more Black IQ buddies. At the high end of the scale a Black may have two or more white buddies.

This simple observation carries an important message. The work of Jensen, Rushton, Murray, Herrnstein, and others who persist in the largely pointless study of racial statistics cannot apply to individuals. For this very reason, it would be impossible to formulate any public policy based on their ideas. Who, after all, would want to see their IQ buddy get a raw deal? We may continue to give people tests for scholastic aptitude, but let us not call them “intelligence” tests and let us not pretend that science has a workable theory of intelligence.

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Editor’s note: Among the many commentaries on this controversy that have appeared since this review was written are: *The Bell Curve Debate: History, Documents, Opinions*, edited by Russell Jacoby and Naomi Glauberman, New York: Random House, 1995, paper \$15.00; and *The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence and the Future of America*, edited by Steven Fraser, New York: Basic Books, 1995, paper \$10.00.

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## ABSTRACTS OF ARTICLES

**András Gedo**~”~, “**The Irrevocable Presence of Marxist Philosophy in Contemporary Thought**”—While Marxism in general and Marxist philosophy in particular did not suffer an intellectual defeat, Marxists are now confronting a dramatic situation. Nevertheless, the irrevocable presence of Marxism is a fundamental trait of contemporary philosophical thought and is proving to be a counterforce to deepening intellectual darkness. Work on the philosophy of Marxism today is in a phase of recommencement, both in the sense of resuming the thought continuity of materialist dialectics while insisting on its systematic whole and in the sense of reflecting critically on its own history and preparing a new beginning after the failure of the first wave of socialism.

**Leonard Goldstein**, “**Patriarchalism in Historical Context: Milton and His Feminist Critics. Part Two**”—This second part of a two-part article examines the Puritan ideological response to the changing position of women as capitalist relations of production became established in early seventeenth-century England. This response involved new conceptions of love, the family, and divorce. Feminist critics have not always understood that Milton’s contradictory views on sex and marriage are those of a class that won a revolution, then compromised with its former class enemy against its former allies who threatened property rights.

**Werner Seppmann**, “**Nature and Emancipation**”—A dogmatic concept of Marxism that saw nature as a simple material object to be manipulated for satisfaction of human needs opened the path to the criticism of traditional Marxism as being incomplete and outdated. Ecologically destructive practices were not only forced upon the socialist countries by external economic pressures, but were also products of such dogmatic concepts.

*Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1994)

The writings of Marx and Engels stressed the dialectical interaction between society and nature and the fact that human society is an intrinsic part of nature. They pointed critically to the technological rationality driving capitalism's development of the productive forces as the source of its inability to avoid environmental destruction. By failing to confront the technological rationality rooted in the system of capitalist production itself, the environmental movements generally put forth reform programs that merely postpone ecological collapse rather than eliminate the source of the danger.

***Domenico Losurdo, "The Collapse of 'Existing Socialism' in Eastern Europe: Democratic Revolution or Restoration?"***—

In the controversies about the causes of the collapse of existing socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, simplistic explanations have often been proffered, and the significance of the October Revolution and its aftermath is often considered to have been negated by the collapse. The author stresses that the socialist revolution has had a profoundly positive effect on world history as a counterpoise to an increasingly racist and exploitative West. The reasons for the collapse are manifold, but the most important single factor was ideological, a misinterpretation of Marx that Lenin strove to correct. There are lessons that must be learned and applied in the future development of socialism and communism.

## ABREGES D'ARTICLES

***András Gedo* ~ ~, «La Présence irrévocable du Marxisme dans la pensée contemporaine»**—

Tandis que le marxisme en général et la philosophie marxiste en particulier ne subissent pas de défaite intellectuelle, les marxistes font face actuellement à une situation dramatique. Néanmoins, la présence irrévocable du marxisme est un caractère fondamental de la pensée philosophique contemporaine et s'affirme comme une force qui va à l'encontre de l'obscurité intellectuelle qui s'approfondit. Le travail sur la philosophie marxiste se situe aujourd'hui dans une phase de

recommencement. Il tente de résumer la continuité de pensée des dialectiques matérialistes tout en insistant sur son intégrité systématique, et de réfléchir de façon critique sur sa propre histoire et de préparer un nouveau commencement après la faillite de la première onde du socialisme.

**Leonard Goldstein, «Le Patriarcalisme dans son contexte historique: Milton et ses critiques féministes. Deuxième partie»**—La situation des femmes changeait pendant l'établissement des rapports de production capitalistes en Angleterre au dix-septième siècle. Cette deuxième partie d'un article en compte deux examine la réponse idéologique puritaine à ces conditions avec de nouveaux concepts sur l'amour, la famille, et le divorce. Les critiques féministes ne comprennent pas toujours que les vues contradictoires de Milton à propos du sexe et du mariage sont celles d'une classe qui gagna une révolution, puis se compromit avec son ancien ennemi de classe afin de vaincre ses anciens alliés qui menacèrent les droits de propriété.

**Werner Seppmann, «La Nature et l'émancipation»**—Un marxisme dogmatique qui voyait la nature comme un objet matériel simple qui se manipulait pour satisfaire aux besoins humains, expose le marxisme traditionnel à la critique d'être incomplet et démodé. Des pratiques écologiques destructrices étaient non seulement forcées aux pays socialistes par les pressions économiques externes, mais elles étaient aussi produites des concepts dogmatiques. Les oeuvres de Marx et Engels soulignent l'interaction dialectique entre la société et la nature, et le fait que la société humaine est une partie intrinsèque celle-ci. Elles montrent de façon critique la rationalité technologique qui fait marcher le développement des forces productives du capitalisme la source de son incapacité à éviter la destruction de l'environnement. En négligeant de confronter la rationalité technologique enracinée dans le système de la production capitaliste, les mouvements environnementaux avancent généralement des programmes de réforme qui ne font que retarder l'effondrement écologique plutôt qu'éliminer la source du danger.

**Domenico Losurdo, «L'Effondrement du «socialisme réel» en Europe de l'Est: La révolution démocratique ou la restauration?»**—Dans les controverses à propos des causes de l'effondrement du socialisme existant dans l'Union Soviétique et l'Europe de l'Est, on offre souvent des explications simplistes; on considère souvent que la signification de la Révolution d'octobre et ce qui suivit se nia dans l'effondrement. L'auteur insiste sur le fait que la révolution socialiste eut un effet profondément positif sur l'histoire du monde comme contrepoids à un Occident qui devient de plus en plus raciste et exploitatif. Les raisons de l'effondrement sont multiples mais l'aspect le plus important était idéologique: une interprétation erronée de Marx que Lénine s'efforça à corriger. Il y a des leçons à apprendre et à appliquer au développement futur du socialisme et du communisme.